

16

Cultural services

Bringing people and places together

10 Finance settlement
Increase in spending power, but significant challenges remain

13 Fire safety failures
Help for councils with enforcing high-rise safety work

18 Pride in leadership
Learning support and networking opportunities for LGBTQ+ members

21 Housing ombudsman
Zero tolerance approach to damp and mould in homes

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CONTENTS



Finances and fire safety

I hope you had a peaceful Christmas and have a prosperous new year.

We now have some certainty about local government finances in the coming financial year, following the publication before Christmas of the provisional finance settlement for 2023/24 (p10).

However, while baseline funding levels and the revenue support grant are increasing, councils still face significant challenges in setting their budgets and trying to protect services.

Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, offers his take on the settlement and sets out his support for localism (p22).

Elsewhere in this month's **first** we look at the final report from our independent Commission on Culture and Local Government, which sets out how we can get the most out of local government's £1.1 billion investment in culture (p16).

The LGA's second LGBTQ+ Weekender event, providing leadership development and networking opportunities, takes place next month (p18). We also look at the support available to councils trying to enforce post-Grenfell safety work on high-rise buildings (p13), and hear from the Housing Ombudsman on how social landlords can improve their approach to complaints about mould and damp in light of the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak (p21).

Cllr James Jamieson
is LGA Chairman



FEATURES

10 Finance settlement

Certainty for planning council budgets

13 Fire safety failures

Help with enforcing high-rise safety work

14 Graduate trainees

Fast-track recruitment for future leaders

15 Next generation

Local Government Challenge is back!

16 Culture commission

Developing inclusive, resilient, place-led approaches to culture

18 LGBTQ+ members

Leadership training and network support

20 Modern slavery

New guidance on tackling crime

COMMENT

21 Social housing

'Common' failures on mould and damp

22 Municipal virtues

Gove on finances and levelling up

26 Democracy week

Building opportunities for real dialogue

26 Grow for the future

Allotments for urban children

27 Not just buildings

Regeneration is about people and community

28 Ordinary people

Marking Holocaust Memorial Day

29 Overseeing bailiffs

New board setting enforcement standards

REGULARS

04 News

09 Parliament – levelling up

24 LGA chairman and group leaders

31 Local by-elections



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Local
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Funding to rise but ‘challenges remain’

Government proposals to increase local government core spending power by 9.2 per cent in 2023/24 will help councils manage inflationary and other cost pressures, the LGA has said.

However, shire district councils will see a lower increase than other authorities, while “underlying and existing pressures” remain and many councils still face “significant challenges” in setting budgets, it warned.

The increase is set out in the provisional local government finance settlement, which is out for consultation until 16 January.

The Government’s forecasts assume that councils will raise their council tax by the maximum permitted without a referendum. Those thresholds were raised to 3 per cent plus a 2 per cent social care

tariff in November’s Autumn Statement.

The LGA has long argued that council tax rises are not a solution to the long-term pressures faced by councils, particularly in respect of adult social care, and could place a significant burden on households during the current cost-of-living crisis.

In its initial response to the provisional settlement, the LGA also called for: publication of the public health grant; clarity on the future of the New Homes Bonus beyond 2023/24; and reforms to address pressure on councils’ high needs budgets for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The Government has also published a ‘Local government policy statement for

2023-24 to 2024-25’, its two-year ‘blueprint’ for council finances.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: “The increase in local government core spending power next year will help councils deal with the inflationary and other cost pressures they face. Underlying and existing pressures remain for councils and many still face significant challenges when setting their budgets and trying to protect services from cutbacks.

“Shire district councils – which provide vital services such as planning and waste and recycling collections – will also see a lower core spending power increase next year, which is something the Government should address in the final settlement.

“Councils want to work with government on a long-term plan to fund local services and a turbo-charging of wider devolution, where local leaders have sustainable funding and greater freedom to take decisions on how to provide vital services in their communities.”

● See p10, p22, p24

£650m support for refugees

A new support package for refugees, announced last month, includes increased ‘thank you’ payments for longer-term hosts of Ukrainian arrivals and a £500 million fund for councils to acquire housing stock for those fleeing conflict.

Homes for Ukraine hosts

will now receive £500 a month for ongoing support after the first year of sponsorship, and an additional £150 million was announced for local authorities to help support guests moving into their own homes.

However, council funding for new arrivals will reduce.

LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson said: “While we are keen to see further detail on how the schemes will work in practice, we are pleased that the Government has been working with the LGA and councils on funding to help families move to their own homes, reduce homelessness

risks, and help local partners acquire more housing.

“We are also pleased to see the extension of thank you payments to generous hosts offering up their homes for more than a year, and support for new sponsors to step forward as the crisis in Ukraine continues.

“The need for ongoing funding to integrate arrivals into their new communities, build their independence and keep them safe is crucial. We are therefore pleased that this funding is to continue, though we have concerns that the amount is to be reduced.”

He added: “There is a real crisis in the refugee and asylum system, which is compounded by a housing crisis.

“It is good the Government is starting to take action around a joined-up approach to challenges across all programmes, including for asylum seekers.

“We look forward to continuing to work with them to identify and implement further solutions to accommodation challenges.”



Safeguarding concerns in out-of-school settings

The LGA is calling for tougher powers for councils to oversee and regulate 'out-of-school' settings, including being able to shut down illegal schools.

It follows an independent report, commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE), which revealed major safeguarding concerns about such settings.

They include sports and leisure clubs, tutoring, supplementary schools, faith-based organisations, 'uniformed' organisations (such as Brownies, Cubs and Scouts) and arts clubs attended by millions of children and young people.

The DfE funded a pilot, in 16 council areas over an 18-month period, into the oversight of out-of-school settings (OOSS), examining safeguarding risks and existing legal powers available to councils.

The pilot identified multiple safeguarding risks, including physical chastisement and corporal punishment, grooming and sexual abuse, child exploitation, extremism and radicalisation.

It also found current legal powers to act are not widely understood, making it difficult for councils to intervene.

The LGA is calling on the DfE to act on the

report's findings and give councils tougher powers to ensure children's safety, while making sure they are adequately funded and resourced to do so.

Currently, OOSS are not required to notify councils about their provision or to allow access to it, while many parents assume they are regulated in a similar way to schools or childcare providers.

CLlr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Most out-of-school settings will provide safe, positive and enjoyable environments for children, and have a key role to play in furthering their learning and development.

"However, parents and carers sending their children to an OOSS will rightly expect that they are subject to the appropriate regulation, as seen in schools or childcare providers."



'Protect' duty expected in spring

A new 'Protect Duty' aimed at protecting against terrorism in public places is to be introduced across the UK.

The Government has said it will bring forward new legislation this spring requiring public venues to take steps to improve public safety, with measures dependent on the size of the venue and the activity taking place.

The duty will be known as 'Martyn's Law' in tribute to Martyn Hett, who was killed alongside 21 others in the Manchester Arena terrorist attack in 2017. His mother, Figen Murray, campaigned for the change.

CLlr Nesil Caliskan, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "Councils working with their partners already carry out considerable work to protect and keep communities safe.

"The Government must now ensure that funding is made available to respond to the significant resource and capacity requirements needed to successfully implement Martyn's Law.

"There should also be sufficient lead-in time, and guidance provided ahead of the legislation coming into force, so that councils and others understand their new obligations and can prepare accordingly.

"In addition, government should provide clarity around how the new duty will be enforced.

"It is vital that measures to increase security continue to sit alongside investment in prevention programmes that aim to stop people carrying out attacks, tackle extremism, and build community cohesion and resilience."

Housebuilding targets 'no longer compulsory'

Nationally set housebuilding targets will no longer be mandatory, following changes to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill currently before Parliament.

Last month, the Government delayed the Bill to bring it back to the Commons with a series of new clauses.

The amendments aim to strengthen the Government's commitment to building enough of the right homes in the right places, with the right infrastructure.

Housebuilding targets are now recognised as a starting point, but with new flexibilities to reflect local circumstances, as well as new penalties proposed for slow developers failing to build already-approved homes.

CLlr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "Councils are committed to working with government and developers to build the housing the country needs.

"It is good that the Government has recognised that algorithms and formulas can never be a substitute for local knowledge and decision-making by those who know their areas best.

"We have been clear that councils and communities are best placed to decide how to build the right homes in the right places in their local areas, with the right infrastructure, and these proposed changes will help to ensure this can happen."

He added: "Councils have long called for more powers to tackle developers who do not build homes in a timely manner and we are pleased the Government is acting on our call for action.

"By penalising those who sit on planning permissions for longer than necessary, more homes can be provided in a speedy manner for those who really need them the most."

● See p9



For services to local government

The Mayor of North Tyneside and the LGA's Deputy Chief Executive were among those from across local government to be recognised in the New Year Honours List 2023.

Mayor Norma Redfearn CBE (Lab) was made a dame for her work in political and public service, while the LGA's Sarah Pickup OBE was made a CBE for services to social care.

Elsewhere, Cllr Susan Fajana-Thomas (Lab), Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Regulatory Services at Hackney Council, was made an OBE for services to local government and gender equality.

Another OBE recipient – for services to the transgender community – was Cllr Helen Belcher (Lib Dem, Wiltshire), who wrote about her experiences as a trans councillor in **first** 668.

Cllr Roger Atterwill, Leader of the Independent Group on Breckland District Council and Chair of Swanton Morley Parish Council, was made an OBE for services to local government and the community in Norfolk.

There was also an MBE for Stephen Curran (Lab), former Leader of Hounslow Council, for services to local government and the local community in Hounslow.

Council officers recognised in the King's first new year honours included Patricia Johnson, Locality Officer, Cheshire West and Chester (OBE), with others across the country receiving MBEs and other honours – see www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-year-honours-list-2023-cabinet-office.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "Congratulations to everyone in local government who was recognised in the New Year Honours List 2023.

"The number of local government colleagues honoured is a reflection of the brilliant and vital work being done by councils to make a positive difference to our communities."



Cllr Helen Belcher was made an OBE

'120,000 children homeless over Christmas'

More than 4,500 primary school classes worth of homeless children spent Christmas in temporary accommodation, amid concerns of a national homelessness crisis.

Latest figures for England show there were 120,710 dependent homeless children living in temporary accommodation in December, highlighting the urgent need to build more affordable homes to rent and make sure the private rented sector is affordable for people claiming housing-related benefits.

With the number of Section 21 'no fault' evictions increasing, more Ukrainian arrivals presenting as homeless, depleting social housing stock, and an unaffordable and overly competitive private rented market, councils are growing increasingly concerned, the LGA has warned.

Councils are keen to get on with building homes, with land for more than 2.6 million homes allocated in local plans and nine in 10 planning applications approved.

But the right powers must be provided to incentivise developers to get building, including being able to charge full council tax for every unbuilt development from the point the original planning permission expires.

Cllr David Renard, LGA Housing Spokesperson, said: "Suitable housing must be found for those already homeless, but we must also ensure everything possible is being done to combat the rising cost of living and prevent more people from becoming homeless.

"The best way to improve housing security is to address the unaffordability of housing by giving councils the right powers and investment to build 100,000 new social rent homes a year, reform the Right to Buy scheme so that it is more sustainable, and urgently review local housing allowance rates to ensure that at least a third of the market is affordable for people claiming housing-related benefits."



Local growth plans approved

Vital investment plans to boost business, support communities and regenerate high streets have been approved by the Government, following an LGA warning that projects were at risk because of continual delays.

The £2.6 billion UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which replaces the seven-year European Structural and Investment Fund, is to be used by councils and combined authorities to create jobs, support small and medium-sized enterprises, and improve pride in place across the country.

The Government had previously committed to approving the plans by October and, with time running out for councils to deliver their first year fund allocations, the LGA called for urgent clarity on when these would be received.

Inflation and rising costs have also made

councils' ambitious plans to level up their communities more difficult to achieve.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said: "This vital funding and approval of investment plans is important recognition of local leadership in driving regeneration and transforming local places. The Government must now work with councils and combined authorities to overcome any additional local challenges caused by the delay and make the introduction of the fund a success.

"This includes the need for assurances from government that there will be flexibility between years to spend the allocations.

"We look forward to government working closely with local government to ensure these plans are successfully realised and fulfil our shared longer-term, local ambitions for levelling up."

Cultural services 'key to recovery'

Local culture can be used to support mental wellbeing, provide educational opportunity and create jobs as part of the recovery from the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, according to a new LGA report.

The LGA's Independent Commission on Culture and Local Government found that greater collaborative work between councils and cultural partners, combined with streamlined place-based funding from government, is crucial to supporting one of the fastest-growing parts of the economy.

Local government invests £1.1 billion directly in cultural services each year in England, with the creative industries contributing £115.9 billion to the UK economy and accounting for 2.2 million jobs in 2019.

But this funding is under strain, given the pressure on public services and wider challenges facing councils.

In its final report, the commission, led by Baroness Lola Young, sets out how to secure the future of what it calls "this vital

community infrastructure". It identifies four key 'cornerstones' essential to a healthy local cultural ecosystem – capacity, leadership, funding and evidence – and sets out detailed recommendations for securing the future of local, publicly funded culture.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "Culture is so important to our country, from wellbeing and a sense of place in our communities, to economic and education benefits.

"Local government is the biggest public funder of culture, able to target money at the activities and places that need it most.

"Our report, concluding the excellent work of our independent commission, rightly highlights the need to prioritise this sector and provide a sustainable, multi-year funding settlement to local government, along with streamlining the multiple small funding pots made available for cultural projects."

● See p16



Children's services 'improving' – Ofsted

Council-run children's services have improved significantly, despite workforce shortages compounding difficulties in education and social care, according to Ofsted.

Its annual report, published last month, shows that 56 per cent of the 150 inspected councils in England were graded good or outstanding overall. This had increased from just more than a third (36 per cent) after each council's first inspection under the previous inspection framework.

The 2021/22 annual report describes the extent to which education and children's social care have recovered since the pandemic.

It found that, while there is much to be commended, ensuring this generation of children and young people get the education, training, care and opportunities they need remains "a work in progress".

Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "It is positive that this report recognises significant improvements from councils in providing children's services, despite the many challenges they face in the education, early years and children's social care sectors.

"This will, however, be extremely difficult to maintain without government action."

She called for adequate funding and for worsening workforce shortages in children's social care to be addressed, and for early years entitlements to be fully funded.

The Government should also publish its responses to the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) Green Paper and the Independent Review of Children's Social care, in light of the increasing demand for council-run SEND support, Gittins added.

More than 473,000 children and young people had an education, health and care plan in England last year, up 10 per cent on the previous 12 months.

Councils report increase in child safeguarding

Many councils are seeing an overall increase in safeguarding activity in response to the "multi-faceted challenges" children and families face, according to a new report by the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS).

ADCS's Safeguarding Pressures research draws on evidence from 125 councils, covering 84 per cent of England's child population, and covers the first two years of the pandemic period. It found that, while most councils experienced a reduction in demand

for their services during the first few months of the pandemic, safeguarding activity had now increased.

Among the findings, the report revealed that there were 2.77 million initial contacts received by children's social care in 2021/22, an increase of 10 per cent in the past two years.

An estimated 282,320 early help assessments were completed in 2021/22, a 16 per cent increase in the past two years, while there were 650,270 referrals made to children's social care in 2021/22, an increase of 21 per

cent since 2007/08, when this research began.

Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "These figures highlight the increasing numbers of vulnerable children in need of vital support and the huge pressures on council services.

"It is absolutely critical that the Government ensures that children's services are adequately funded, so councils can meet this rising demand and ensure children and their families get the support they need, as soon as they need it."

Adult social care 'invisible'

The continued "invisibility" of the adult social care sector is "increasingly damaging" to those who draw on care and those who provide unpaid care at a time of increasing need, rising costs and a shrinking workforce.

So says a recent report from the House of Lords Adult Social Care Committee, which calls for a more positive and resilient approach to adult social care based on greater visibility of the whole sector, as well as greater choice and control for disabled adults and older people, and a better deal for unpaid carers.

'A gloriously ordinary life: spotlight on adult social care' also calls for: realistic, predictable and long-term funding; a properly resourced workforce plan; a Commissioner for Care and Support to strengthen the sector's voice and identity; full implementation of the Care Act 2014; and for social care to be heard within integrated care systems.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "This excellent report could be a blueprint for the way forward for adult social care."

"The positive framing of social care and the core focus on people who draw on care and support is particularly welcome."

"It brings to light the importance of greater choice and control for disabled adults and older people, and ensuring that those who draw on care are centred throughout all decision-making processes."

"We support the recommendations of the report, particularly that the Government must deliver realistic, predictable and long-term funding for the sector to allow it to thrive, alongside a properly resourced plan for supporting the workforce."



Cost-of-living crisis 'could increase fire risk'

Households looking for alternative and cheaper ways of lighting and heating their homes because of the cost-of-living crisis could be increasing the risk of fire, the LGA has warned.

In 2021, 181 people died in house fires, and people trying to cut costs because of soaring energy bills may be putting themselves more at risk.

Recent examples that suggest people may not be aware of the potential dangers include:

- a candle too close to combustible items that caused a flat fire in Uxbridge, London
- a flat fire in Harwich, Essex, started by an unattended candle
- a blaze in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, caused by a tumble dryer being used overnight to save money.

In respect of the latter, West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service issued a warning that, while leaving electrical products on at night can be cheaper, it can also be dangerous

Last month, Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service also raised concerns that the cost-of-living crisis was causing more people to take risks to heat their homes, with a rise in property fires.



Cllr Frank Biederman, Chair of the Fire Services Management Committee at the LGA, said: "Many people are understandably seeking ways to reduce costs and save money as we try to manage soaring energy bills and the impact of inflation."

"However, it is vital that this is not at the expense of staying safe."

"We want to raise awareness of the dangers of cutting corners when it comes to lighting and heating our homes."

"This is why we are urging people to prevent a tragedy by following a few simple safety steps, including making sure you have working smoke alarms in your home and test them regularly, which could save your or a loved one's life."

Funding for housing experts announced

Twenty-one councils have been successful in their applications to the LGA's 2022/23 Housing Advisers Programme (HAP), an innovative scheme to help councils overcome housing challenges in their local areas.

The programme funds the provision of independent expertise for councils undertaking specific projects to tackle the effects of the affordable housing crisis, with more than 150 projects supported by the LGA in the previous five years.

This year, up to £20,000 has been awarded to each project for expert advice to drive forward locally led solutions to housing challenges.

The projects include innovative approaches to support green retrofit, exploration of the potential of modern methods of construction to provide

temporary accommodation, work with disabled people to improve the accessibility and inclusivity of new developments, and support to help councils deliver more local homes in challenging times.

Following the programme, the knowledge and expertise developed will be shared with other councils and become part of the LGA's sector-led improvement offer.

Cllr David Renard, LGA Housing Spokesperson, said: "HAP has delivered huge benefits to councils since it was first launched, helping local areas address the challenges of the housing crisis."

"It has proven an excellent source of knowledge and expertise for councils, sharing innovative ideas and ways to improve, whether it's building new homes, tackling homelessness, or planning thriving and flourishing places and economies."

PARLIAMENT

Housebuilding targets and planning reforms

Developers who sit on planning permissions will be penalised

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, which includes a range of proposals impacting local government, completed its remaining stages in the Commons in December.

The LGA has been monitoring, briefing, and supporting the tabling of amendments to the Bill as it has progressed.

The Bill acts upon long-running asks from councils and the LGA for further devolution in England.

It also covers other areas affecting councils of all sizes, including council tax, second homes and holiday lets, risk-mitigation measures, pavement licensing, and conditions when changing street names.

A significant part of the Bill includes reforms to the planning system.

We have been broadly supportive of the guiding principles of the reforms; however, some detail is needed to ensure these guiding principles can be applied in practice.

The Government delayed the last day of the Bill's remaining stages, in order to bring it back to the Commons with a series of new clauses that effectively mean housebuilding targets will no longer be mandatory.

The LGA said it was good ministers had recognised that national, top-down algorithms and formulas can never be a substitute for local knowledge and decision-making by those who know their areas best, and that these changes would ensure the right homes are built in the right places, with the right infrastructure.

The Government also brought forward new clauses that would penalise developers who sit on planning permissions longer than necessary – something for which the LGA has long been calling.

This will mean more homes can be provided in a speedy manner to those who need them the most. As the LGA

has repeatedly highlighted, land for more than 2.6 million homes has been allocated in councils' local plans, and nine in 10 planning applications are approved.

In addition, the Government tabled a new clause that makes regulations requiring or permitting the registration of specified "short-term rental properties".

It confirmed it will be consulting on this issue, and hopes to bring in legislation as a result. This change to the Bill is welcome, as LGA and member councils have submitted evidence outlining the impact that unregulated lets are having on local areas

As the Bill enters the Lords this month, we are continuing to seek changes to it relating to the levelling-up missions, risk-mitigation measures, pavement licensing, 'street' votes on housing developments, and, of course, the planning reforms.



Parliamentary reception

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill was just one of the many council priorities discussed at the LGA's annual parliamentary reception, which returned for the first time in three years last month.

The event was a fantastic celebration of councils' achievements, and it was great to see so many councillors, senior council officers, ministers and parliamentarians all gathering to support local communities.

Speakers – including Lee Rowley MP, the Minister of State for Local Government and Building Safety; Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman; Florence Eshalomi MP, LGA Vice-President; and Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, LGA President – all praised the work of councils.

Baroness Grey-Thompson voiced her support for the LGA's Debate not Hate campaign. It was good to see so many parliamentarians and councillors engage with the campaign, including Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary Michael Gove (pictured), who also stopped by the event.

i For the LGA's latest briefing on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament. See first 678 and www.local.gov.uk/debate-not-hate for more on the LGA's Debate not Hate campaign against abuse and intimidation of councillors

Future funding

Initial spending plans for councils in England are out for consultation

The provisional local government finance settlement – the annual determination of funding to local from central government in England – was published just before Christmas.

The figures indicate that councils' core spending power will rise by an average 9.2 per cent in 2023/24.

This will help with inflationary and other cost pressures, but many councils will still struggle to set budgets and protect services, the LGA has warned.

District councils will see a lower increase, and the LGA has called on the Government to address this in the final settlement, expected in late January or early February.

Moreover, the increase is based on the assumption that councils will raise their council tax by the maximum permitted without a referendum.

This leaves councils facing the tough choice about whether to increase council tax bills to bring in desperately needed funding, at a time when they are acutely aware of the significant burden that could place on some households during a cost-of-living crisis.

The LGA is pleased that the Government will provide extra funding for adult social care and has accepted our ask for funding allocated towards reforms to still be available to address inflationary pressures for both councils and social care providers.

Councils have always supported the principle of adult social care reforms and want to deliver them effectively, but have warned that underfunded reforms would have exacerbated significant ongoing financial and workforce pressures.

There is also additional funding

to help tackle the most immediate budget pressures in children's social care, but it is not sufficient to invest in the preventative and early help services that children and families need, nor in the children's workforce or the additional homes we need for children in care.

The Government's forthcoming response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care will need to provide clarity over how children's social care services will be sufficiently funded going forward, to enable all children to receive the care and support they need, when they need it.

We also require an urgent response to the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) Green Paper, setting out policy reforms that will reduce pressure on councils' 'high needs' budgets, and increase levels of mainstream inclusion.

The New Homes Bonus (NHB) makes up a considerable part of funding for some councils, particularly shire district authorities, and we welcome the confirmation of the provisional amount for 2023/24.

Councils need clarity on the future of the NHB to be able to plan their budgets beyond next year and into the medium term. Any changes should come with transitional funding to ensure that local authority services that residents rely on are not put at risk.

There are other areas on which local government awaits further clarity, such as the public health grant – which needs to be published as soon as possible – and future finance reforms.

Councils will also be aware that this is the fifth one-year settlement in a row and this continues to hamper financial planning and sustainability.

Only with adequate long-term resources, certainty and freedoms can councils deliver world-class local services for our communities, tackle the climate emergency, and level up all parts of the country.



Public health

- No information about the national total, or individual council allocations, of the public health grant.

The LGA says: *"The delay to the announcement is making it extremely difficult to plan effectively at a time when public health services are vital to help mitigate pressures on the NHS and social care."*

Fire

- Fire and rescue authorities council tax precept up by up to £5.

The LGA says: *"Fire and rescue services need to be funded to take account of the full range of risks, demands and cost pressures they face."*



This is a summary of the LGA's on-the-day briefing on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2023 to 2024. See www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses for the full version. **Consultations on the settlement close on 16 January.** You can help shape the LGA's submission by emailing your views to lgfinance@local.gov.uk. **Please also email us about your representations to the Treasury** on the Spring Budget, which will be announced on 15 March



□ Council tax is not the solution for meeting long-term pressures facing high-demand national services □

Council tax

- Referendum limit for basic council tax rises to 3 per cent, or \$5 in districts, if higher.
- Adult social care precept increases from 1 to 2 per cent.

The LGA says: "Council tax is not the solution for meeting long-term pressures facing high-demand national services such as adult social care."

Education, SEND and early years

- Additional \$1.9 billion for schools, including \$400 million for 'high needs' funding, equating to 3.4 per cent increase in mainstream per pupil funding.
- Additional \$20 million for early years to address National Living Wage increases.

The LGA says: "The Government must urgently publish the response to the SEND Green Paper, setting out policy reforms that will reduce pressure on high needs budgets."

Business rates

- Business rates revaluation to take place in 2023.
- Business rates multiplier will be frozen for 2023/24, with local authorities compensated for loss of income.

The LGA says: "Freezing the multiplier reduces buoyancy in the business rates system, and without alternative means of funding, or compensation, means council income would reduce in the medium term."

Social care

- Social Care Grant of \$3.852 billion in 2023/24 includes \$1.265 billion from delaying the rollout of charging reforms.
- Unchanged \$2.14 billion through the Improved Better Care Fund.
- New \$300 million Adult Social Care Discharge Grant.
- \$562 million in Adult Social Care Market Sustainability and Improvement Funding, including new funding of \$400 million for discharge delays etc.

The LGA says: "The additional funding to adult social care falls significantly short of the \$13 billion we have called for to address the severity of the pressures facing the service."

New Homes Bonus

- Provisional \$291 million for New Homes Bonus.

The LGA says: "Councils need clarity on the future of the New Homes Bonus to be able to plan their budgets beyond next year and into the medium term."

Funding guarantee

- All councils will see at least a 3 per cent increase in their core spending power before any decisions about efficiencies, using reserves or council tax levels.

The LGA says: "The protection this guarantee offers is positive, although this is well below the level of CPI inflation, which is currently 10.7 per cent."

Rural Services Funding

- This year's \$85 million Rural Services Delivery Grant allocations will be rolled forward.

The LGA says: "Councils in rural areas will welcome the continuation of this funding, albeit that it is reduced in real terms."

Finance reforms

- The Fair Funding Review and the business rates reset will not be implemented in this Spending Review period.

The LGA says: "The Government needs to ensure that overall local government funding is sufficient to ensure no council sees its funding reduce as a result of the review."

Reserves

- Councils encouraged to consider how they can "use reserves to maintain services in the face of immediate inflationary pressures".

The LGA says: "Reserves can only be spent once, and using reserves is not a solution to the long-term financial pressures that councils face."

Blueprint for **success**

Cross-border project to unlock sustainable and inclusive growth opportunities for local authorities

BLUEPRINT to a Circular Economy is an innovative, cross-border project led by Essex County Council. The project aims to help local authorities initiate new policies, strategies and approaches to unlock sustainable and inclusive growth opportunities through the transition to a circular economy.

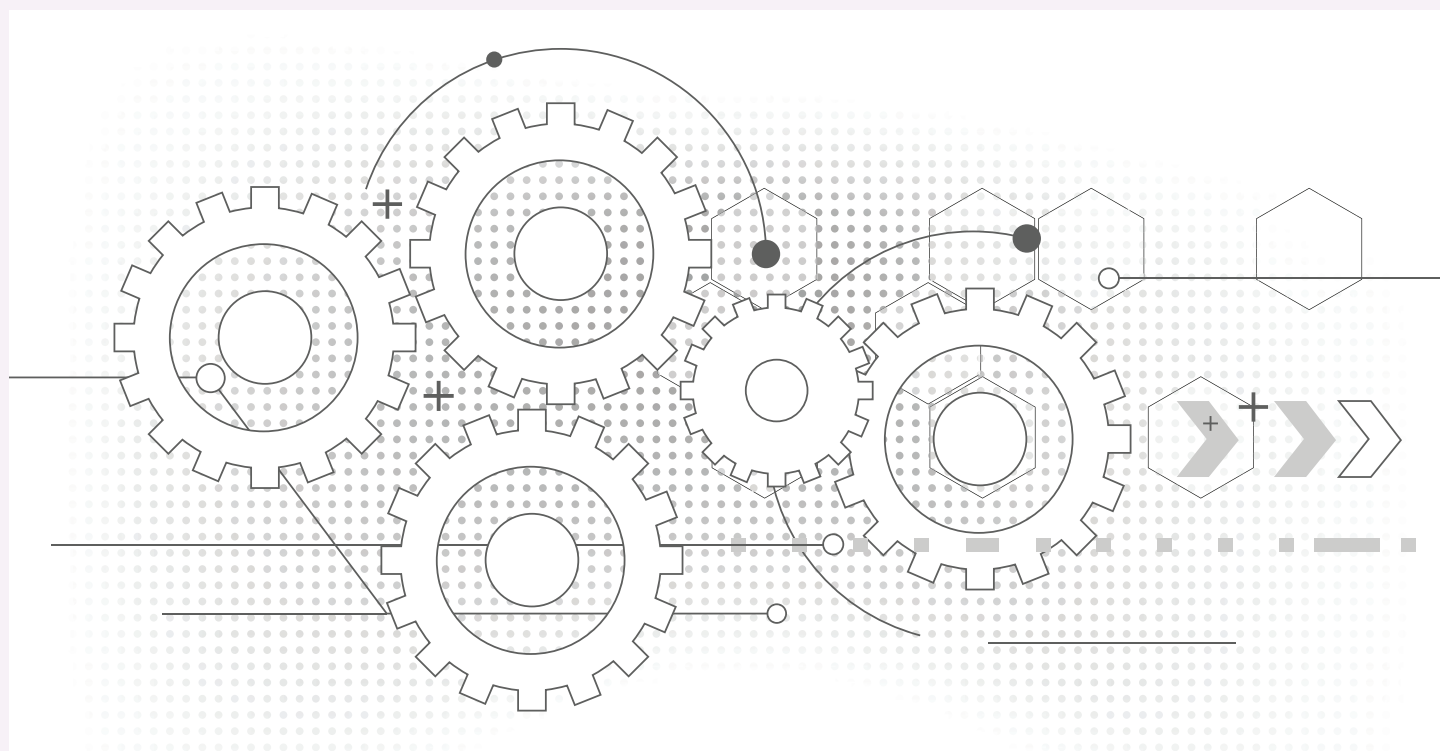
Launched in April 2020, the BLUEPRINT Project is an ERDF, Interreg-funded project, with a budget of €5.5m, and will conclude in March 2023. The project consists of 10 partners across the UK and France, including local authorities, universities, an environmental charity and a private business. All have contributed their professional expertise to ensure the project outputs are a success.

The main output of the BLUEPRINT Project is to develop the BLUEPRINT to a Circular Economy Model (BLUEPRINT Model). The BLUEPRINT Model aims to support senior managers, decision-makers and officers, at local authorities across England and France, to implement the right policies, strategies and plans to move towards a circular economy. It pulls together learning and expertise from across the BLUEPRINT Project, building on the existing foundation of industry best practice, to make the transition to a more circular economy as easy as possible.

The BLUEPRINT Model focuses on four key areas: procurement, waste management, training and job opportunities, and changing behaviours. If your local authority is looking

for ways to adapt and take advantage of new circular opportunities, has sustainability targets to meet or sustainable action plans linked to government guidance, the BLUEPRINT Model is a freely accessible resource to support you on your journey.

i The BLUEPRINT Model is launching in January 2023. If you would like to take advantage of this free resource or find out about the four training sessions available at the start of the year, please email blueprint.project@essex.gov.uk or visit projectblueprint.eu to find out more. The BLUEPRINT Model resources will remain live on the website after the project closes in March 2023.





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

Fire safety failures

Help is available for councils trying to enforce safety work on high-rise buildings

More than five years after the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower killed 72 people, many building owners are still failing to address serious fire safety failures.

Recent reforms mean leaseholders are no longer liable for most remediation costs and, understandably, many people assume that, once a building owner has applied for government funding to remediate their building via the Building Safety Fund, the matter is being dealt with.

Unfortunately, this is not always the case, and the Government has made clear its growing frustration with landlords who are dragging their feet.

In December, Building Safety Minister Lee Rowley announced \$8 million for enforcement by the 59 councils with the most high-rise buildings, and said he was looking forward to working with councils to make them "better equipped to make the most of the powers they have to hold freeholders to account".

The Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) is expected to contact councils shortly about the buildings that give the greatest cause for concern – those that have failed to make progress despite qualifying for funding, and those with interim fire safety measures that have yet to apply for it.

Under the Housing Act 2004, councils have a duty to inspect residential premises when they suspect a 'category one hazard' exists (the highest category under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, HHSRS)



– and a duty to act if they find one. Given the length of time since Grenfell, landlords' failure to act could leave councils exposed to criticism if they wrongly assume the landlord is taking the matter seriously.

The LGA's Joint Inspection Team (JIT), funded by DLUHC, provides a vital resource to support councils' housing enforcement teams in dealing with landlords who refuse to put residents' safety first.

DLUHC expects any council affected by high-rise buildings with unsafe cladding to be in touch with the JIT.

Councils often have limited experience in using the HHSRS on high-rise buildings; that is where the JIT comes in.

Councillor Meric Apak, Cabinet Member for Better Homes at Camden Council, told us: "The help the council received from the JIT has been invaluable.

"The additional expertise of the fire engineer and building control officer identified issues to council officers, and

gave them confidence that they fully understood the risks and identified the correct remedial action.

"There was a real sense of partnership, and the council has continued to draw on the lessons learned in other inspections."

DLUHC figures show that local authorities have taken enforcement action against 162 buildings with dangerous cladding – 37 with support from the JIT.

In Newham, a joint inspection by the council and JIT resulted in a Housing Act 2004 Improvement Notice being served on a building owner, requiring the removal of aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding.

The building owner then proceeded to identify and remove ACM from 10 other buildings within their portfolio.

Several councils have used the JIT to inspect multiple blocks, saving enormous amounts of officer time and council funds. However, there is concern that some councils are unaware that help is available.

The Government has been so pleased with the JIT's record that it has funded a three-fold expansion in capacity, and the team is eagerly seeking new commissions from councils.



To find out more, please contact Brian Castle, JIT Team Leader, at brian.castle@local.gov.uk and visit www.local.gov.uk/joint-inspection-team-jit

Fast-track recruitment

The LGA's flagship graduate programme can help you find your future leaders

The National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) is the LGA's flagship graduate scheme, developing new talent in local government for more than 20 years.

Every year, thousands of bright, motivated graduates apply to the NGDP to fast-track their career in local government. The LGA runs a subsidised, rigorous, national recruitment process to place high-calibre graduates in councils across the country.

The NGDP offers councils an opportunity to develop a pipeline of future leaders, building capacity in the workforce and the sector as a whole.

Councils have access to a national pool of talented graduates, and the LGA manages the whole recruitment process, so only the highest-calibre candidates are selected for interview with councils.

Our national management trainees (NMTs) work on high-level strategic projects from day one, providing a valuable resource to your council.

The majority of graduates on the programme go on to secure permanent roles in their councils at the end of the two years, including Sydney Alexander (see right), a Policy and Innovation Officer at the London Borough of Islington.

i If you would like to find out how the NGDP could help your council to build capacity and develop future workforce leaders, please get in touch for an informal chat with the team by emailing ngdp@local.gov.uk. Councils have until **31 March** to sign up to the NGDP and you can find out more on our website at www.local.gov.uk/ngdp-councils

Making a difference to local people's lives

Sydney Alexander is a Policy and Innovation Officer at the London Borough of Islington

From the very start of my time on the NGDP, I had the opportunity I was looking for to make a tangible difference to local people's lives, and to develop the valuable skills, knowledge and experience I would need to begin building a career in local government.

In my first six months, I led on developing and launching the council's Challenging Inequality

Strategy to tackle inequality, racism and injustice.

I jumped in to working with senior leaders from across the council to establish our strategic direction, develop actions and define measures of success for this critical mission in our borough.

The rest of my first year was spent as a Project Support Officer, focusing on the delivery of the summer holiday activities and food programme.

This included leading on the coordination, grant funding, relationship management and quality assurance of activities delivered by local voluntary and community sector organisations, as well as our data reporting and communications.

After a busy five months setting up the programme, getting the chance to carry out site visits and see all the fantastic, vital provision happening to support children across the borough was definitely a highlight.

The chance to work on high-profile, cross-cutting and complex projects that make meaningful change in the organisation and borough only continued from there, as I picked up work in strategy, project management and design in community safety and children's and adults' strategic programmes.

After two years, I'm more passionate than ever about being part of creating a more equal future for local people where everyone can thrive.

Now, it's been a privilege to get stuck into a permanent role as a Policy and Innovation Officer. I'll be using and building on my experience to lead on cross-council policy and strategy to tackle the complex challenges we face.



Sydney Alexander in the council chamber

Next generation

The LGA is relaunching its annual challenge to find the sector's top executive talent



The Local Government Challenge is an annual competition that tests the leadership skills of the next generation of top executives and celebrates the amazing talent in the sector.

Over six months, 10 local government officers undertake five real-life challenges at councils, culminating in a final event at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth (4-5 July, see [local.gov.uk/events](https://www.local.gov.uk/events)), in which four finalists pitch their own project proposals to delegates and a judging panel.

The winner takes away the prestigious Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship, worth up to £10,000, to realise their proposal back at their home council.

Our current cohort began the competition at the start of 2020, completing two of the five challenges.

The first challenge took place in February, at Surrey County Council, where the contestants developed a business case to help mitigate the effects of climate change through land use and consumer habits, as part of Surrey's ambition to be carbon neutral by 2050.

In March, we set off to Pembrokeshire County Council for our second challenge and the first ever in Wales. The contestants developed a plan to support post-16 learners to ensure that "every learner achieves more than they thought possible".

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic,

we had to pause the programme. We're now excited to announce that we will be restarting the programme, with five new challenges beginning in February 2023.

After a recent recruitment campaign, members of our existing cohort who have been able to remain on Local Government Challenge have been joined by two new officers (see panel below for all the participants).

Our 2023 cast of talented officers covers regions including the East of England, Greater London, North West, South East, West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humber.

The programme celebrates and showcases the talent we have in local government, and encourages applications from officers who will share their diverse range of capabilities and expertise in the challenges and with the wider sector.

So, it's not just officers who get something out of the Local Government Challenge; our host councils receive valuable consultancy by developing a challenge specific to a real-life local issue, drawing on the expertise of 10 council officers who work together on innovative solutions and offer fresh perspectives.

The Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship has kindly been supported by Essex and Kent County Councils since the inception of the Local Government Challenge in 2009, in memory of Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, a former Leader of Kent County Council and a former Chairman of the LGA.

Top talent

The 2023 challengers are:

- **Sydney Alexander**, Policy and Innovation Officer at the London Borough of Islington
- **Leanda Cable**, Lead Specialist Prosperity at Maldon District Council
- **Hannah Futter**, Assistant Chief Executive at the London Borough of Waltham Forest
- **Zoe Galvin**, Programme Officer Kent Communities Programme and Co-Chair of Aspire at Kent County Council
- **Rose Hampton**, Senior Marketing and Communications Officer at Staffordshire County Council
- **Jack Kennedy**, Head of Economy and Growth at Surrey County Council
- **Joe Kinsella**, Project Manager at Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
- **Felicity Lynch**, Watch Manager at Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service
- **Hani Milburn-Cox**, Programme Manager – Local Government Reorganisation at Cumbria County Council
- **Lewis Sheldrake**, Lead Commissioner – Innovation and Personalisation at the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.



To find out more about the Local Government Challenge, please visit www.local.gov.uk/lg-challenge

Cornerstones of culture

An independent LGA commission on councils and culture has delivered its final report



Baroness Lola Young
is Chair of the LGA's
Commission on Culture
and Local Government

The Commission on Culture and Local Government was set up in early 2022 to investigate the role of local, publicly funded culture in supporting our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The context in which we are publishing is very different, and with so many serious challenges facing communities it might be easy to ask why we are focused on culture.

As we move towards recovery, we face a whole new set of challenges: a growing cost-of-living crisis and recession; pressure on public services;

rising inequalities exacerbated by the experience of the past two years; climate change; and global instability.

Under these circumstances, it would be tempting to dismiss investment in cultural services as a luxury we can't afford.

But, for the same reasons, these services have never been more important.

Cultural services, organisations and practitioners bring people together at times of crisis and celebration; they provide support and social connection, create jobs, develop new adaptive skills and underpin empathy and critical thinking.

In many cases, they act as a trusted source of information at a time when the concept of truth is under question.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of council spending on the arts.

It is right that we celebrate the role councils play in binding together culture,

Unlike many other council services, cultural services are largely unconstrained by national regulations and requirements

communities and place, and discuss what publicly funded culture needs in the next 75 years.

Our report sets out the issues and our ambitions for more resilient, diverse, inclusive and place-led approaches to culture, to help our communities and economies thrive.

We tested four propositions about how local culture – including libraries and archives, museums and heritage, the arts, creative industries, parks, and the wider historic environment – could contribute to recovery from the pandemic.

These were:

- **Resilient places** – local, publicly funded culture can promote civic pride and change perceptions about a place, contributing to improvements in wider social and economic outcomes.
- **An inclusive economic recovery** – local, publicly funded culture is essential to our national economic recovery, particularly in relation to the growth of the wider commercial creative economy and in levelling up economic inequalities between regions.
- **Social mobility** – local, publicly funded culture can help address educational and skills inequalities, and challenges around social mobility.
- **Health inequalities** – local, publicly funded culture can challenge health

Cultural councils

Estuary 2021, an arts festival celebrating the lives, landscapes and histories of the Thames Estuary, attracted 208,800 in-person visitors and created 30 immediate new jobs, with a total economic impact of \$6.5 million, helped by leadership and investment from Medway Council and Kent County Council. See www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/role-international-arts-festival-place-making

Portsmouth City Council has led or supported cultural investment over two decades to transform closed naval sites into a major visitor, leisure, retail and employment hub, supporting 250 jobs and bringing two million new visitors spending \$51 million each year. See www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/portsmouth-cultural-infrastructure

Culture Liverpool's new community programme is designed to slowly reintroduce culture to clinically extremely vulnerable people, and those who have experienced mental health challenges, bereavement, or financial hardship. See www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/cultural-partnerships-covid-19-recovery

North Somerset Council has put culture at the heart of its approach to place shaping in Weston-super-Mare, working with Historic England and Arts Council England on an arts programme as part of their High Street Heritage Action Zone, and developing a wider strategy for culture to address some of the challenges faced by seaside towns. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAHXPUMfe9k



inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Between March and July we gathered evidence from a wide range of sources and engaged with councils and stakeholders across the country. More than 50 case studies were received as written evidence.

The commissioners heard oral evidence from 18 organisations over the course of four roundtable discussions, and more than 80 organisations were involved in wider focus groups and interviews.

We found that a vibrant cultural ecosystem creates jobs, supports health and wellbeing, enhances learning, and opens up opportunities for young people. It draws people to the high street, underpins the visitor and night-time economies, supports the growing creative industries, and helps to make places unique.

The pandemic was a powerful reminder that people reach for culture in times of crisis, as well of those of joy and celebration.

Access to culture and creativity provides hope and inspiration, and enriches people's lives. That access must be fair for all.

Councils are a vital player in delivering this. You are the biggest public funders of culture, spending more than £1 billion a year in England alone. When spend on parks and physical activity is included, the figure is £2.4 billion annually, besides the important role you play in place making, engaging with communities and convening local partnerships.

Virtually no other service area allows councils to demonstrate leadership of place like cultural services, which – unlike many other council services – are largely unconstrained by national regulations and requirements.

This gives them considerable agency and scope to work with cultural partners and residents to shape an offer that truly meets local need and aspirations.

But we also know that councils and communities are under huge pressure, with significant challenges for council budgets in the years ahead.

In our report, we highlighted a number of barriers to our cultural services delivering everything they can and identified four 'cornerstones of cultural placemaking' that underpin a healthy cultural offer in place.

These are:

- **Capacity and resilience in place** – a levelling up of capacity for culture within place, targeting regional inequalities and enabling councils

to develop and deliver meaningful place-led strategies for culture.

- **Leadership and power** – a power shift towards place-led approaches that enable a greater diversity of communities, cultural providers and practitioners to shape local decision-making.
- **Funding** – a coherent and transparent approach to funding culture in a place that supports the delivery of place-led strategies and addresses the immediate financial fragility of the sector triggered by the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.
- **Evidence** – a coordinated approach to developing an effective evidence base for culture and place in order to measure value and shape future investment.

Our final report and recommendations set out an overview of this evidence, which was really brought to life by all the inspirational case studies we received.

You can browse these examples as part of the case study resource accompanying the commission's report on the LGA website.

I'd like to thank all of the 16 commissioners who gave up their time and considerable expertise to make this project so rewarding, as well as all those who gave evidence and appeared before the commission.

The publication of this report is not the end of the story.

I hope our findings and recommendations will help councils, regional bodies, cultural arms-length bodies and national government work together with cultural organisations and communities to weather this storm and secure the future of this vital community infrastructure.



'Cornerstones of culture' and its associated council case studies can be read in full at www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport/cornerstones-culture. You can also watch our short films featuring some of the examples of how culture supports economic recovery, social mobility, resilient places and better health and wellbeing by clicking on the box marked commission 'themes' via the above link

£1.1 billion

The amount local government invests directly in cultural services each year in England



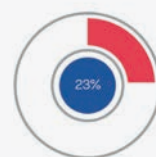
700

The number of creative industry micro clusters across the country



£115.9 billion

Contribution of the creative industries to the UK in 2019



The additional turnover supported in the wider economy for every £1 of turnover in arts and culture

£1.23



Pride in leadership

The LGA provides a unique learning and support event for LGBTQ+ councillors

The LGA's LGBTQ+ Councillors' Weekender event is back next month, after its highly successful inaugural year in 2022.

This Focus on Leadership event, especially aimed at lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer-plus councillors, is timed to recognise LGBT+ History Month.

The event will provide LGBTQ+ councillors with a safe space to explore the challenges of being a LGBTQ+ elected member, as well as offer sessions on building support networks, personal resilience, and developing personal leadership styles.

It will be a fantastic opportunity for councillors from across the country to network and share

'Effecting positive change for the LGBT+ community'



Councillor **James-J Walsh** (Lab) is Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure (job share) at the London Borough of Lewisham

In 2022, I was lucky enough to be an attendee at the inaugural LGA LGBTQ+ Councillors' Weekender, which took place during the historic 50th anniversary year of the Pride movement in the UK.

The event provided an incredibly useful space to be able to talk about how local government can effect positive change for the LGBT+ community locally and nationally.

It helped attendees to use the often-unrealised potential and support available within our authorities by not

only offering practical tools and support to attendees to develop action plans, but also preparing them to be leaders in their authority by building their skills, knowledge, and confidence.

Many attendees have since gone back to their councils, applied what they learned, and been recognised by their authority and group for the positive impact they have had.

The course also uniquely offers councillors the space to discuss challenges we may face from being out LGBT+ public office holders, whether in our communities, political groups or authorities.

The coming out process for most never ends and, by being a councillor, you have to navigate, additionally, a

very specific – and quite often public – journey. Being able to talk this through with others who have similar experiences was invaluable.

The cross-party, but still politically grounded, nature of the cohort really offered a significant difference from other LGBT+ training and development spaces that I have been in, which have often been single party or apolitical in nature.

The event in 2022 was richly peppered with inspirational thought leaders, facilitators who were able to give pragmatic advice and tools to effect change, and the opportunity to network with an amazing range of diverse councillors from across the political spectrum and country – both in the conference centre and socially.

experiences and stories with each other.

The 2022 programme was co-facilitated by Cllr Simon Bound, Leader of Basingstoke and Deane Council, and Grace Collins MBE, LGA Leadership Adviser.

Cllr Bound, Cllr Bev Craig, Leader of Manchester City Council, and Cllr James-J Walsh, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure at Lewisham Council, offer some reflections on the benefits of the programme (see below and right).

i **The LGA's second LGBTQ+ Councillors' Weekender takes place on 4-5 February in Coventry.** To find out more and book your place, please visit bit.ly/3Fvt7ou or email grace.collins@local.gov.uk

'Spaces to support each other'



Councillor **Bev Craig** (Lab) is Leader of Manchester City Council

First elected to Manchester City Council in 2011, I've held a range of roles across the council over the past decade.

My first was as the lead councillor for LGBTQ+ women, before chairing a scrutiny committee, followed by Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing, and Deputy Leader.

In December 2021, I had the great honour of becoming Leader of Manchester City Council and running one of the UK's most exciting cities.

Since my election, much press attention has focused on me being the first woman – and first

openly gay – leader of the city, one of all too few out LGBTQ+ women local government leaders.

Growing up gay on a council estate outside Belfast, I always worried that my identity would hold me back.

But after the hard fight for equality and social change, we have made considerable progress. While the media coverage was mostly positive, the fact that this remains 'news' demonstrates that we still have some way to go.

That's why it is important that, as councillors, we have spaces where we can support each other, develop ourselves and improve our councils – and, in turn, help them improve the lives of LGBTQ+ people in our communities.

The LGA's LGBTQ+ Councillors' Weekender is a great example of how we can do that, and I would encourage councillors at any stage of their journey to get involved.

'The importance of role modelling'



Councillor **Simon Bound** (Con) is Leader of Basingstoke and Deane Council

Attendees at the 2022 weekender were able to share their experience of what it is like to be a LGBTQ+ elected member, the issues they have encountered – and, in some cases, the abuse they have received – and, to varying degrees, the amount of participation they have in championing and campaigning on LGBTQ+ issues.

All delegates described the importance of holding the weekender, and the continuing significance of LGBTQ+ History Month, Pride events and other very visual ways of supporting the community and educating others about what still needs to be done to prevent marginalisation.

Some of the main issues that LGBTQ+ councillors faced and that were highlighted by delegates in 2022 were:

- abuse on social media
- still feeling uncomfortable in being their true self in their authority
- unsure about how to support LGBTQ+ issues without acquiring a label
- acceptance of who they are by colleagues and officers
- the importance of visibility and role modelling.

Internal culture in some local authorities, and the lack of language and experience in both LGBTQ+ and other marginalised communities, was highlighted on several occasions.

This was an area where everyone thought the LGA could provide help, with lots of offers to assist from those attending the weekend.

Councillors who attend next month's 2023 weekender at the Warwick Conferences venue, Coventry, are guaranteed to be a part of this ongoing conversation, and will be joined by inspiring and memorable guest speakers – so don't miss your chance to book a space.

A heinous crime

The LGA has produced new guidance on tackling modern slavery



Councillor **Nesil Caliskan** is Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board



Modern slavery is a heinous crime that blights our communities and exploits some of the most vulnerable people in society.

Tackling modern slavery is a key area of focus for the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, which I chair, and in my own authority, Enfield London Borough Council, where we have set up a dedicated modern slavery team to focus on the issue.

The LGA has recently published an updated 'Council guide to tackling modern slavery' (see www.local.gov.uk/publications). This replaces the original LGA and Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner council guide from 2018, and is supported by a 'maturity matrix', a framework for councils to assess their current progress and plan future activity on modern slavery.

These documents are fully accessible and supplement our 2019 'Councillor guide to tackling modern slavery'.

As well as general sections on

There is a need for clarity on support victims are entitled to

modern slavery, the guide is split into targeted sections for officers working in different council services, including children's services, adult social care, housing, community and regulatory services, and procurement.

The 'maturity matrix' identifies four progress levels: basic first steps; early progress; substantial progress; and mature practice.

The first two sections focus on the leadership, resources and capacity needed to manage modern slavery work across a council effectively. Subsequent sections focus on the three broad themes of council activity highlighted in the LGA guidance: identifying, referring and supporting victims; disruption and prevention; and mitigating the risk of modern slavery in council supply chains.

I am sure these will be helpful documents for all councils, and I

would encourage you to share them with the relevant teams within your council. The maturity matrix may also be a useful benchmark for your own council's work on this issue.

This year, we are expecting significant developments in the Government's work to tackle modern slavery.

In last May's Queen's Speech, the Government announced that it would bring forward a Modern Slavery Bill. This has not been published yet, but when it is, it will be a priority piece of legislation for the LGA and we will ensure we engage with it as it progresses through Parliament.

It is expected to bring councils within the scope of the existing requirement to produce a 'transparency in supply chains' statement, which sets out the measures organisations have taken to tackle modern slavery risks in their supply chains.

The Bill is also expected to clarify in domestic law the support to which victims of modern slavery are entitled, something in which the LGA will take a close interest.

There is a need for clarity, and therefore consistency, on what support victims are entitled to. However, we are aware that councils have never received dedicated funding to support victims of modern slavery, and we will continue to make the point to Government that there are real challenges for under-pressure services supporting victims of modern slavery without additional capacity for this.

Alongside the Bill, we are expecting an updated modern slavery strategy from the Government.

We anticipate that this will outline the Government's expectations of modern slavery partnerships, and the LGA has been working with the Government on what councils would like to see in the strategy.



For 'Council guide to tackling modern slavery' and 'Councillor guide to tackling modern slavery', please visit www.local.gov.uk/publications

Social housing: 'common' failures on mould and damp



Richard Blakeway
is the Housing
Ombudsman

I gave evidence at the inquest into Awaab Ishak's appalling and preventable death.

The two-year-old died from a respiratory condition caused by exposure to mould in his family's Rochdale home, a coroner ruled.

Before I gave evidence, I listened to Awaab's father, Faisal Abdullah, give evidence. I heard a desperate struggle to get a response to his complaints that is all too familiar in my casework.

Council landlords will want to reflect and take action. I would offer three observations.

First, not only read 'It's not lifestyle'; our Spotlight report on damp and mould, but assess your policies and approach against it (see www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/spotlight-on-reports).

Dig deep and be open and honest about your services. In particular, consider whether a dedicated policy on mould is needed to reflect its complexity. This should be a cornerstone of a proactive, zero tolerance approach.

Then discuss it at the appropriate governing body, as some councils have done.

Second, get a grip on your approach to legal claims and complaints. There is reprehensible practice here, but I also know some myths are developing around disrepair claims.

Foremost, there is nothing in the pre-action protocol that prevents landlords undertaking repairs or gaining access. Nor should landlords necessarily close a complaint prematurely – and the Housing Ombudsman may investigate until the court serves papers.



Landlords should consider reviewing restrictive policies that exclude consideration of complaints where a pre-action legal claim has been made and, instead, consider how better to use the complaints procedure to resolve these disputes. You can find more guidance on our website.

Crucially, do more to raise awareness and access to complaints as an alternative to redress. Our Complaint Handling Code sets out how to achieve this, and we are working closely with the Local Government Ombudsman to make it a joint code.

Councillors can also act as representatives for constituents with a complaint and bring them to the ombudsman.

Finally, promote a learning culture. The common failures on damp and mould are repeated in other areas: poor communication, weak record keeping, and outdated or incomplete policies.

We publish reports looking at these themes – whether damp and mould or, most recently, noise nuisance – to support learning.

In uncertain times, complaints can offer insights into the real-life experiences of services that would be missed otherwise.



The Housing Ombudsman Service

is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. It was set up by law to look at complaints about the housing organisations that are registered with it, and to resolve disputes involving the tenants and leaseholders of social landlords (housing associations and local authorities) and voluntary members. For more information, please visit www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Municipal virtues



Michael Gove is Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

The 19th-century Birmingham pastor Robert Dale was one of the greatest proselytisers for the role of municipal government in Victorian England.

Dale made it his job to celebrate the virtues of public-spirited service in the interests of the community.

"If we are true to each other and true to the town," he suggested in one 1881 sermon, "we may do deeds as great as those done by Pisa, Florence and Venice in their triumphant days."

This brand of pioneering idealism inspired an era of civic progress and achievement that transformed England in the 20th century.

Today, as we begin 2023, those same virtues are kept alive by all of you in local government.

From social care to public health, to keeping our streets clean, councils oversee the stuff of everyday life. But it is the stuff that people care most about.

For a long time, your role in keeping the wheels on our public services turning

*Our councils will be **more important than ever** in helping people through this turbulent period*

was largely in the background.

But during the pandemic that role came right into the foreground, with millions of people seeing just how important local government is to our day-to-day lives.

Whether it was financial lifelines for high street businesses, emergency accommodation for rough sleepers or vital deliveries of food and medicine to those shielding from the virus, councils were on the frontline of the pandemic from start to finish.

And in 2022, once again, you stepped up and took on new, fresh responsibilities for helping support people fleeing war and hardship in Ukraine.

Your efforts to coordinate sponsors, matching those in need with those willing to help, has given fresh hope to thousands of Ukrainians who have started a new life on UK soil.

All of this vital support doesn't happen by accident; it happens because of effective local leadership.

That is why we promised to make localism a centrepiece of our levelling up

agenda; giving local leaders greater agency and helping communities restore pride to places bruised by deindustrialisation and jobs being sucked into the orbit of London.

I'm delighted to say we are delivering on that promise and more.

In 2022 alone, we agreed landmark devolution deals with Cornwall, Suffolk, Norfolk, the East Midlands, and York and North Yorkshire.

These deals go beyond funding; they set a coherent vision for where we want these regions to get to in the years and decades to come.

Many of these deals also come with the future promise of a directly elected leader; an individual who will champion the needs of their local area in Westminster and beyond. You need look no further than Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands, and Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen to see what can be achieved by inspiring local leadership.

Times are incredibly challenging for people, businesses and councils up and down the country. There are no easy

answers and there is no guarantee things will get easier as we go into 2023.

One thing is certain though – our councils will be more important than ever in helping people through this turbulent period.

That is why the Chancellor and the Prime Minister backed local government in a big way at the Autumn Statement, with a funding package of almost £60 billion for the next financial year.

That money is going out the door and, just before Christmas, we published a two-year blueprint for local government finances to give you the clarity needed to start making vital decisions about budgets.

This finance settlement answers your calls for more certainty, more flexibility and more control.

As members of the LGA, you know better than anyone how unsettling a diet of uncertainty can be.

So, after multiple one-year settlements, we're correcting course with a multi-year blueprint that will help us get the best out of our public services.

Many of you told us it would be counterproductive to destabilise councils with adult social care reforms at a time when families are facing cost-of-living

pressures, fuelled by Putin's illegal war on Ukraine. And we have listened, with the rollout of adult social care charging reform now delayed to October 2025.

So, as we work towards a long-term solution, local adult and children's social care will see a substantial injection of taxpayer subsidy, with around £2 billion of funding distributed to local authorities in 2023/24.

On top of this, we are also making a one-off guarantee that means every council will have, for the financial year ahead, at least a 3 per cent increase in the resources available to them before they make any decisions on council tax levels.

To tackle the cost of living, help people onto the housing ladder and level up communities in 2023, our cities, towns and villages need real resources, real knowledge and real imagination.

I look forward to working with you to make that a reality.

i For the Government's 'Local government finance policy statement 2023-24 to 2024-25', see bit.ly/3WjHLq7

□ Councils oversee the stuff of everyday life. But it is the stuff that people care most about □



LGA Annual Licensing Conference

8 February 2023

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

The LGA's Annual Licensing Conference provides an unrivalled opportunity to discuss all the key strategic and practical developments that can be expected to affect councils' licensing committees and teams over the year ahead.

The conference will examine the Government's plans and expectations for licensing as well as exploring the challenges facing licensing authorities, highlighting innovative work being undertaken by councils and their partners and discussing how we can build on best practice.

To book your place visit www.local.gov.uk/events



A positive finance settlement



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

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all **first** readers a belated happy new year, and I hope that you had an enjoyable and restful festive break.

After a turbulent 2022, both internationally and domestically, I am sure that I am not alone in hoping for a quieter and more peaceful 2023.

The week before Christmas we had one of the most important events in the local government calendar – the provisional local government finance settlement.

Overall, the settlement was positive, and the 9.2 per cent increase in core spending power will help councils deal with inflationary and other cost pressures.

I also welcome the extra funding for both adult social care and for tackling the

most immediate budget pressures in children's social care.

However, the LGA will continue to make the case to the Government that the underlying financial pressures remain as councils are still facing significant challenges in setting their budgets for 2023/2024.

It is also the case that shire district councils will see a lower core spending power increase next year, which is something that, in our response to the settlement, we asked the Government to address.

Finally, just a reminder to Conservative colleagues that this year's Conservative Councillors' Association (CCA) Local Government Conference is taking place on the 24-25 February at the Hinckley Island Hotel, Leicestershire.

The LGA's Conservative Group will be involved in various events at the conference, including sponsoring the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' ministerial question-and-

answer session, and organising workshops on civility in public life and devolution.

For those of you who have not attended the conference before, I would encourage you to do so this year. It always provides a great opportunity for the Conservative local government family to come together, discuss key policy issues, hear from government ministers from a range of departments, get great campaigning advice from senior party figures and network with colleagues from across the country.

For further information on the conference, and to book your place, please email the CCA at cca@conservatives.com.

"The underlying financial pressures remain as councils are still facing significant challenges in setting their budgets"



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

Unchanging commitment

This time last year, I reflected on a 2021 dominated by COVID-19.

I think we were all hoping that, in 2022, with the worst of the pandemic behind us, we would be able to return our focus to the big 'bread and butter' issues that make a difference to our local communities – from housing and planning, adult and children's social care, levelling up and devolution to climate change, educational attainment and special educational needs and disabilities, workforce and skills, public health, and emptying the bins.

Instead, on 24 February, Russia invaded Ukraine. Councils were again called upon to step up – supporting new arrivals escaping the war, and responding to the consequent economic and political turmoil triggered by rising fuel and food costs.

While the nature of the crises we face has changed, what has not changed is



councils' ability and determination to make a difference to the people they serve and their local areas.

Once again, in 2022, we saw the very best of local government in our public services and in our support for our residents – young, old and new.

Councils have demonstrated time and time again their ability to come up with effective local solutions to local and national problems, and there is clear and significant evidence that outcomes improve – and the country gets better

value for money – when councils have the freedoms and funding to make those local decisions.

The Government's renewed commitment to devolution, with a £1.4 billion deal for the North East of England – the sixth in 2022, announced late last month – and Labour's proposals to give councils more employment and training powers, are all steps in the right direction towards decisions about local services being taken closer to the people they affect.



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

The right powers to the right places

Everyone in local government knows people are hungry for more power over their own lives and more control over the places they live.

Last month, the Commission on the UK's Future, led by former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, published its report, which, if implemented, would see the biggest-ever transfer of power from Westminster to the British people, spreading wealth and opportunity across the UK.

It demonstrates Keir Starmer's commitment to his promise that the next Labour government will introduce a genuine partnership with local government, delivering the right powers to the right places.

The report acknowledges how councils are more trusted and responsive to local needs than central government, but have been starved of funding and freedoms.

This rings true when looking at the draft local government finance settlement.

While the average 9.2 per cent increase in core spending power was better than expected, it's still below inflation and leaves councils facing impossible choices.

"People are hungry for more control over the places they live"

Worse, it's the fifth year in a row we've had a single-year settlement, so councils cannot plan with any certainty for 2024 and beyond.

The Government quietly included the expectation that all councils will increase council tax by the maximum amount – placing a significant financial burden on households just to keep services going.

Labour knows councils can only deliver exceptional local services if they have long-term financial certainty.

Gordon Brown's report would give councils the funding and powers required to grow local economies, and it can't come soon enough; yet another reason why we need a General Election now.



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

Long-term funding kicked into the grass

Days before Christmas, the Government published its provisional local government finance settlement, setting out the details about local government spending in the coming financial year.

Every year it gets later; every year it is sneaked out as we break up for the holiday, trying to minimise public scrutiny of the detail.

Once again, the Government is kicking difficult subjects, such as social care funding, into the long grass. Funding will go nowhere near plugging the gap – the LGA estimates £13 billion is needed just for our social care system.

"Any increase in our funding is dwarfed by inflation"

Any increase in our funding is dwarfed by the inflation rate of 14 per cent RPI (November 2022) and massive hikes in items such as heating bills, staff costs and agency cover.

This assumes that all councils will raise their council tax by the maximum possible and puts the burden, once again, on council taxpayers in a major cost-of-living crisis.

We need to reduce the burden on our NHS by stopping people getting ill in the first place as much as possible. But the Government always delays the public health grant announcement – why? It is crucial for things such as smoking cessation programmes.

The Government still has not reversed its cuts to the public health budget – currently a real-term cut of £1 billion since the summer of 2015.

All councils require a better deal, but clarity is urgently needed for districts.

All this announcement has done is delay a long-term funding solution for the sector until after the next General Election.



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

Lack of sustainable funding continues

While the local government finance settlement might pull some of our councils back from the brink, we shouldn't kid ourselves that it puts us on a sustainable footing to meet the needs of our communities or our environment.

It relies heavily on councils raising council tax, putting more strain on our residents as their cost of living continues to rise.

Another one-year settlement isn't genuine devolution. Instead, we continue to have the Government's levelling-up version of what they call 'devolution'.

It dangles the carrot of having the powers and funding we need to get the job done, but only if local government reorganises, with fewer councillors with less capacity to represent their communities, ultimately sacrificing genuine local democracy.

Looking ahead this year, we expect more people to be disenchanted with the status quo of the big parties and looking for genuinely local representatives in Independent, Green and the smaller parties. I know many of you will be working towards the 2023 local elections with that in mind.

"Another one-year settlement isn't genuine devolution"

It is disappointing that our representations fell on deaf ears and Parliament passed the requirement for every person to show specified photo ID in order to vote in person.

Unusually, both the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators published full reports pointing out why these changes – less than six months from the 4 May elections – put our democratic system at risk.

The onus will again be on local government – including us councillors – to try to make it work for 'most' people.

Democracy in action



Councillor **Michal Siewniak** (Lib Dem) is a Member of Welwyn Hatfield Council

Frustrated? Bored? Tired? Disengaged?

As a councillor, I've had countless conversations with residents about the UK Parliament, and many people still feel disillusioned and angry with the way our democratic institution works.

I wondered quite a bit whether being involved in November's Parliament Week, for the ninth year running, made any sense.

However, I managed to convince myself that every moment, conversation or simple initiative can help to restore our faith in democracy, and restore at least some political hope for us and our communities.

I was absolutely delighted that, in Welwyn Hatfield, we marked Parliament



Week by inviting Ukrainian refugees to the council chamber.

The meeting, hosted by the Mayor, brought democracy closer to our friends, colleagues and neighbours from Ukraine, and we discussed some of the issues and challenges they face, including housing and employment.

It was fantastic to be invited back to

the Polish Saturday School in Welwyn Garden City and to talk to older students about the role and functions of the UK Parliament. Two heated debates encouraged a lively discussion about the importance of wearing uniforms or attending classes at the school.

Parliament Week culminated in our town centre, with a debate about the ways in which Parliament affects our lives, and what each of us can do to actively support the democratic process – for example, by volunteering for a cause that is close to our heart, writing a letter to a local newspaper, signing a petition, or standing for election.

Democracy is not only our right, but more importantly our responsibility, to support a process that gives us the freedom to choose and select our representatives, who then shape policies at the local and national level.

I will never give up trying to encourage people to take an interest in politics. I hope that, wherever we stand on the political spectrum, we will continue to build opportunities for real dialogue and seek solutions to some of the issues that affect us all.

Allotments for urban kids



Councillor **Salman Shaheen** (Lab) is Cabinet Member for Parking, Parks and Leisure at Hounslow Council

Growing up in rural Suffolk, the abundance of the natural world was easy to take for granted. I was lucky enough to have a vegetable patch in my parents' garden, and the chance to learn about biodiversity and sustainability was never far away.

What struck me when I moved to London was how few opportunities many children have to see where our food comes from and to understand how to live healthy lives.

Today, the health of our children is threatened more than ever by the cost-of-living crisis, with so many kids going to school hungry.

That's why Hounslow Council has launched Grow for the Future – a first-of-its-kind policy to transform 27 acres of public wasteland across the borough into new allotments, community gardens and orchards.

This will tackle the enormous demand



for allotments and growing spaces since the pandemic, and allow families to cultivate their own fresh produce in the face of rocketing food costs.

But more than that, we will look to pair each of the 18 new sites with a local school and dedicate a portion of it to teach urban children, in often deprived areas, about growing in green spaces, nature, wildlife, and eating healthily.

The food grown by the schools can be donated to support children going hungry.

In the initial phase of Grow for the Future, we will transform four new sites a

year, with the first ones opening this summer. From 2025, we'll also start looking at unused private land that could be leased or purchased and opened up to the public and schools.

I'd love to see councils across Britain's cities look at similar opportunities to open up green space. I want to give everyone in urban environments, young and old – so often disconnected from nature – the opportunity to cultivate land they can call their own and understand where our food comes from. To learn, and grow, for their future.



Councillor **Mark Hunter** (Lib Dem)
is Leader of
Stockport Council

At Stockport Council, we are focused on creating opportunities for everyone.

Whether that's through our work with adults to help keep them in their homes and living independently, our work with children and young people to give them the very best start in life, or our ambitious regeneration projects that create jobs and places for people to enjoy – all our colleagues work hard to create opportunities for the people of Stockport to thrive.

This is especially important in the face of the current cost-of-living crisis.

New investors, residents and businesses recognise this potential and our £1 billion investment in the town centre is at the heart of this.

We now have several significant schemes under way and more in the pipeline, ensuring that Stockport is a great place now and for future generations.

We already benefit from first-class connectivity, but this will get even better with the arrival of a new multi-million-pound transport interchange.

As I always stress, however, regeneration isn't just about buildings; it's about people, families and communities.

We're committed to transforming our town centre and breathing life into

Stockport, creating newly integrated neighbourhoods shaped for the future.

We are on track to deliver more than 7,000 new homes and invest in local facilities and services for everyone, redeveloping large areas of the town that were previously run down and in need of attention.

Our plans include:

- opening up access to the River Mersey
- investing in schools and health services
- improving public transport
- creating new walking and cycling routes.

We're delivering this through our pioneering Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC), the first of its kind outside London.

The MDC is leading the way nationally as a blueprint for how town centres can be transformed to benefit their communities and the wider economy.

MDCs are statutory bodies created to bring forward the regeneration of a defined area. They have powers to acquire, develop, hold and dispose of land and property, and have powers to facilitate the provision of infrastructure.

In Greater Manchester, Mayor Andy Burnham has developed a model that will allow the region to harness the potential that MDCs have to bring about large-scale regeneration while being sympathetic to

local circumstances without creating major, additional bureaucracy.

Following a public consultation, Stockport became the first town in Greater Manchester to create an MDC. A board, consisting of representatives from the main political parties, Stockport Council and partner organisations has been created to provide overall direction.

The MDC's ability to ramp up delivery has increased over the past year through its ongoing relationship with Homes England and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and through the appointment of three nationally recognised delivery experts to the board.

All of this ensures that we are well placed to continue delivering on the ambition that the people of Stockport, the council's political leadership and the Greater Manchester Mayor share for the future of the town centre.

That includes welcoming a new generation of residents looking for somewhere to put down roots, attracting new high-quality businesses, and tackling the challenges facing our high streets head-on.

I'm proud of what we have achieved so far, and there is still so much to do. But I'm confident we have the right plans, people and passion for creating a place where people want to live and spend their leisure time.



See www.stockportmdc.co.uk to find out more about **Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation**. You can read a longer version of this article on **first** online at www.local.gov.uk/first



Ordinary people



Dr **Toni Griffiths** is Senior Outreach Officer at the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

Whether your council has never marked Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD), has taken part in the past, or has marked it many times, we encourage you to get involved in 2023.

With just more than two weeks to go, there are still ways you can take part.

HMD is the international day, on 27 January, to remember the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, the millions of people killed under Nazi persecution of other groups, and in more

recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

In 2022, almost two-thirds of local authorities marked HMD and this year, with your help, we hope to increase that number.

HMD is an occasion for your council to join with thousands of people to learn more about the past and to take action to build stronger communities and create a safer future, free from genocide and other forms of identity-based hostility.

The theme for HMD 2023 is 'Ordinary People'. It is ordinary people who make a difference to our local communities and organisations, and on HMD it is ordinary people who drive activities and events, lead community commemorations, and support and encourage everyone around them to

take part in remembrance and education.

We are all ordinary people, and we can be extraordinary in our actions by challenging prejudice, standing up to hatred and speaking out against identity-based persecution.

HMD activities take place in councils, prisons, schools, libraries, faith centres and elsewhere from December to February.

We have designed resources to support a range of events, from flag lowering, lighting up buildings in purple, or making the 'Statement of Commitment' to remember all victims of Nazi persecution and all genocides in your next council meeting, to collaborative projects with community groups, libraries and the arts, and civic ceremonies involving key members of the community, MPs, local schools and others.

At a time of unprecedented pressure, we have produced resources to help you mark HMD in a way that is sensitive to these circumstances, including:

- An HMD blog template – ready to use with key information about HMD, our logo, and room to add yours. There is space to add a message from you, more information about local activities in your area and information about the UK Ceremony. The blog comes with a social media graphic, so you can draw attention to your HMD activity via your social channels.
- Ordinary People film – a short film including experiences of Holocaust survivor Dr Martin Stern MBE and Amouna Adam, a survivor of the genocide in Darfur. You will hear from celebrities and key figures. This can be shared internally and/or externally, on your intranet pages and newsletters, or on social media and in public areas on screens, with subtitles.
- MP letter template – raise the profile of HMD and ensure decision-makers join us in learning from genocide for a better future by inviting them to your activity. It can be sent as an email and easily edited and used for other key stakeholders.

Visit our website (www.hmd.org.uk) to explore these and other resources – including the 'Getting involved guide' for local authorities – and order free stickers and booklets.

And please, remember to let us know your plans.



The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust is funded by the UK Government to promote and support HMD. To find out more, please visit www.hmd.org.uk or email toni.griffiths@hmd.org.uk

Ensuring oversight of bailiffs



Ged Curran
is a Trustee of
the Enforcement
Control Board

As a former local government chief executive, I know that fair and effective revenue recovery is an essential part of addressing gaps in local authority finances and delivering properly funded services.

Since March 2020, according to The Guardian, more than 4.5 million payments to lenders have been deferred.

Those deferrals are now ending and central government funds for tax relief are running out, so local councils are stepping up efforts to recover around £5 billion in outstanding payments, including for council tax, parking fines and child support.

Local authorities in England referred around 280,000 households to bailiffs over council tax debt in the first year of the pandemic, and these numbers are anticipated to rise as the cost-of-living crisis intensifies.

During my time as Chief Executive of Merton Council, we received frequent complaints about inappropriate,

intimidating behaviour from certain enforcement agents, and that lack of clarity around enforcement fees caused considerable distress.

This was proving harmful to those experiencing enforcement and damaging to the council's reputation, so we created an in-house enforcement team, allowing us to control the process.

We were able to be more sensitive to vulnerable debtors and ensure that ethical enforcement standards were maintained. The mandatory use of body-worn cameras made a significant difference too.

This direct experience of the complexities of debt collection and its connection to delivering effective local government services inspired me to join the new Enforcement Conduct Board (ECB) as a non-executive board member.

The ECB was created as part of a joint initiative by debt advice charities and the enforcement industry to ensure that everyone experiencing enforcement action in England and Wales is treated fairly.

We are working on several early priorities, including reviewing the current process for complaints.

This will involve collecting data from the enforcement industry and the debt advice sector to inform a transparent evidence base, enabling better understanding of the reality of the current situation.

We are also seeking to establish the widest possible coverage so that no enforcement agency, whether privately

owned or in-house, can avoid the rules. This will require the direct support of local authorities as significant creditors and commissioners of enforcement services.

Specifically, we are calling on local authorities to commit to only working with enforcement agents who are signed up to ECB oversight and contributing appropriately to the funding of the board.

Given the benefits that would accrue to creditors from improved standards in the enforcement sector, the ECB also intends to approach utility companies and local authorities (among others) to explore whether they could contribute to the oversight costs of the businesses that they rely on for enforcement services.

Pressures on the public purse and the increasing demands on local authorities mean that effective debt recovery is more critical than ever, and the cost-of-living crisis means that the number and vulnerability of people experiencing debt enforcement is likely to rise sharply over the coming months.

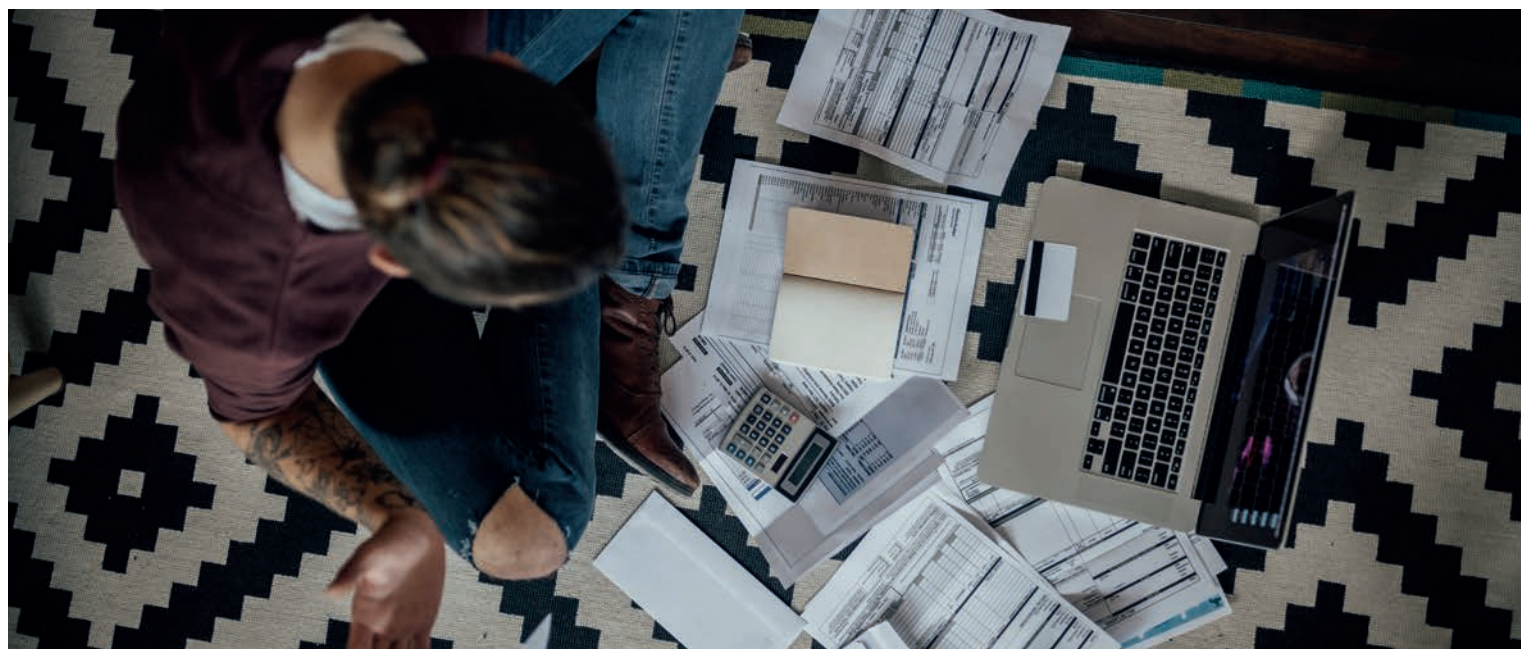
Balancing effective debt collection with the protection of the most vulnerable is a challenging task.

That's why it's so important that the ECB has now been established, and that all interested parties – including those in local government – work with us to assure fair treatment for everyone experiencing enforcement action.

We look forward to working with elected councillors and local government officers to turn this ambition into reality.



To find out more about the work of the **Enforcement Conduct Board**, please visit www.enforcementconductboard.org



LGA Annual Culture, Tourism and Sport Conference 2023 (Hybrid)

Wednesday 15 March 2023, 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



LGA Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition

7- 8 March 2023,
Crowne Plaza Hotel, Nottingham

The Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition is a key event in the conference calendar for senior fire officers and members of fire and rescue authorities and provides an opportunity to meet in-person and discuss developments impacting the fire and rescue sector.

We will hear from a range of expert speakers about some of the key issues facing fire and rescue services and consider how we can meet these challenges.

To book your place visit: www.local.gov.uk/events



ELECTIONS

Record low turnout



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



Wigan's Ashton ward has established an unenviable record, recording the lowest turnout in any council by-election: just 5.3 per cent.

In-person voters faced temperatures well below freezing, and some postal votes may have been affected by postal strikes. Ashton beats the 5.7 per cent turnout in Tamworth's Stonydelph ward, a record that stood for 24 years.

It's unsurprising that both contests were held in December, when monthly average turnout is at its lowest, at just 25 per cent.

While the weather may have been impacting turnout, it was business as usual regarding gains and losses.

The Conservatives' attempts to defend 12 seats saw them fail in nine. That

might have been 10 had Rob Tynan not saved the party's blushes in Warrington's marginal Rixton and Woolston ward, winning by just three votes.

The Liberal Democrats inflicted most damage, making six gains, with Labour gaining three.

Conservative struggles in Surrey continue. Two further defeats – one for a county seat in Spelthorne, another for a district seat in Waverley – made it nine losses out of 10 in 2022.

In the contest for Brighstone, Calbourne and Shalfleet, on the Isle of Wight, there was a large swing towards the Liberal Democrats of more than 21 per cent.

In Test Valley, just two candidates contested Andover Romans ward, a far cry from the 10 that fought in 2019. The Conservative vote rose by three percentage points, but the rise for the Liberal Democrats was 10 times greater.

Two vacancies in King's Lynn and West

Norfolk saw rather different outcomes.

Labour were returned unopposed in the district council seat of Gaywood Clock, but in the Gaywood North and Central county division just more than 100 votes separated first (Lib Dem, just eight votes ahead of Lab) from third (Con).

The Conservatives had little chance of defending a lead of just 58 votes over Liberal Democrats in North Devon's Landkey ward, and the win gives the Lib Dems majority control of the council.

Riding high in the national polls and retaining two parliamentary seats comfortably, Labour is under pressure to bring that form to council by-elections.

The first win, gaining Sutton ward in Bassetlaw, is symbolic because Labour lost the parliamentary constituency in 2019, recording its largest fall in vote share and losing the seat for the first time since 1935.

Labour's two other gains were on the south coast.

Southampton's Bitterne ward had been won by the Conservatives since 2018, but in 2022 the majority was cut to just six percentage points. On paper, this looked straightforward, but Labour's Yvonne Frampton only sneaked the win by 13 votes.

Labour overturned a similar Conservative majority to win one of the two Tory seats in Brighton and Hove's Wish ward, with Labour's vote double that of its rivals.

Independents had mixed fortunes, retaining three seats, including one in Ashfield, but losing to all three main parties, including the Conservatives, in South Holland's Spalding Monks House ward.

Local by-elections

Bassetlaw, Sutton

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
14.3% over Con Turnout 32.8%

Brighton & Hove, Wish

LAB GAIN FROM CON
29.4% over Con Turnout 34.2%

Colchester, Highwoods

1 LAB/1 LIB DEM GAIN FROM IND
1.2% over Lib Dem Turnout 21.4%

Isle Of Wight, Brighstone, Calbourne and Shalfleet

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
29.1% over Con Turnout 37.8%

Norfolk, Gaywood North and Central

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
0.8% over Lab Turnout 13.7%

North Devon, Landkey

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
15.7% over Con Turnout 25.9%

Southampton, Bitterne

LAB GAIN FROM CON
0.7% over Con Turnout 18.0%

South Holland, Spalding Monks House

CON GAIN FROM IND
1.6% over Ind Turnout 17.8%

South Kesteven, Toller

LIB DEM GAIN FROM IND
20.2% over Con Turnout 20.8%

Surrey, Sunbury Common and Ashford Common

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
0.7% over Con Turnout 17.5%

Test Valley, Andover Romans

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
15.3% over Con Turnout 9.7%

Waverley, Chiddingfold & Dunsfold

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
36.3% over Con Turnout 32.1%

i Only seats where there was a change of political control are shown here. For all recent results, visit www.lga-first.co.uk/local-by-elections. The figures in the first sentence of last month's elections column were incorrect and should have read: 'Sixteen of the latest batch of 33 councillor vacancies (48 per cent) saw a seat change hands'. We apologise for any confusion caused



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23