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# NATIONAL CHILDREN AND ADULT SERVICES CONFERENCE 2023

BOURNEMOUTH, 29 NOVEMBER – 1 DECEMBER

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## NATIONAL CHILDREN AND ADULT SERVICES CONFERENCE 2023

29 November – 1 December 2023 | Bournemouth

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**To book and to find out more, please visit [ncasc.info](https://ncasc.info)**

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## Peer support

**T**he LGA works with councils to help support, promote and improve local government, including through our wide-ranging sector support offer and our highly valued programme of peer challenges.

Practising what we preach, the LGA underwent its own corporate peer challenge in December, and you can find out how we did in this month's edition of **first** (p12).

We have responded to the Chancellor's 'back-to-work' Budget, which featured a range of announcements of interest to councils, including on employment support, local roads, swimming pools, regeneration and levelling up (p10).

We have also published the findings from our Levelling Up Locally inquiry (p13); our response to the Government's implementation plan for its reforms of the special educational needs and disabilities, and alternative provision system (p14); and our new Local Leadership Framework, designed to support councillors with their development and their role in their local communities (p15).

Our lead comment is from Su Moore, Chief Executive Officer of the Jo Cox Foundation, which has launched a civility commission to gather practical, implementable solutions to address the abuse and intimidation of elected politicians (p23).

We also hear from Peter Baker, Chief Inspector of Buildings at the Health and Safety Executive (p27), and Paul Morrison, Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate (p29).

**Cllr Izzi Seccombe OBE**  
is LGA Vice-Chairman



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## A 'back-to-work' Budget

**Funding and measures to widen employment support, improve local roads, protect swimming pools from rising costs and support regeneration and levelling up were among the key announcements for councils in last month's Budget.**

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt published details of two 'trailblazer' devolution deals for Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, which will see each combined authority get a single multi-year financial settlement and their 100

per cent business rates retention schemes extended for 10 years.

In what he billed a 'back-to-work' Budget, the Chancellor also promised to extend free childcare currently available for three to four-year-olds to all children aged nine months and over, and announced a consultation on transferring local enterprise partnerships' responsibilities for local economic development to councils.

CLlr Izzi Seccombe, LGA Vice-Chairman, said: "A third round of levelling up funding

will give councils the opportunity to forge ahead with ambitious plans to transform their communities and unlock potential for more local growth.

"However, we remain clear that levelling up should be locally led by evidence of where crucial investment needs to go to, not based on costly competitive bids between areas.

"Given this is a 'back-to-work' Budget, it is disappointing there is no further investment in adult social care, public health and children's services, which all play a vital role in supporting economic growth and helping people back into work, alongside boosting people's health and wellbeing.

"We are pleased the Government has acted on our calls for investment in early years education and childcare.

"Councils have a duty to ensure sufficiency of local provision and so will need to be given a key role in making sure they succeed. Delivering on these announcements will also require significant investment into the workforce and early years' facilities."

She added: "Alongside sustainable long-term investment in local services, bringing power and resources closer to people is also key to improving lives and building inclusive growth across the country, and many more places are ambitious to follow in the footsteps of the devolution trailblazers that are a positive step towards more local decision-making."

● See p10



## LGA is a 'strong organisation'

The LGA remains a 'strong organisation' that has continued to improve since its last corporate peer challenge in 2015, according to a cross-party political and officer team.

The peer team's report highlights the important role the LGA has played supporting councils to respond to a number of national crises in recent years, and that its staff are highly motivated and passionate about what they do.

The organisation has a strong record for influencing the issues facing the sector, its regional teams are highly regarded for the support they bring to councils, and 84 per cent of local government stakeholders are supportive of its sector-led improvement approach – up from 62 per cent in 2015, the peer team says.

The LGA has significantly increased its financial resilience since 2015, and only two councils

in England and Wales are currently not in membership.

The peer team's recommendations include that the LGA should develop a closer working relationship with mayoral combined authorities and new county devolution areas; lead the design of a sector support and assurance framework for local government; and develop more horizon-scanning positions on behalf of the sector.

An LGA spokesperson said:

"With the LGA taking the lead in offering improvement support to councils, it is right that, in the spirit of continuous improvement and as a member organisation, we hold ourselves up to the spotlight too.

"We are pleased that the peer team found the LGA to be a strong organisation that has continued to improve since our last challenge.

"However, we recognise that there is always room for improvement and an initial action plan has already been agreed by the LGA's Board."

● See p12



# Cost of living a 'second health emergency'

**Local health chiefs are warning that the increase in costs of essential food items and energy has created a 'second health emergency' after the COVID-19 pandemic.**

At their annual public health conference in March, the LGA and the Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) said the rising cost of living is having significant health consequences.

Their annual public health report found that people with the least financial resilience are affected the most but increasing numbers of people who were previously 'just about managing' now need support.

The report marks the tenth anniversary of the transfer of public health responsibilities to local authorities. It found that councils and partners have upped their game once again to respond to the rise in the cost of living, building on relationships forged during the response to COVID-19.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board said: "The increase in the cost of living is having a real impact on our local communities, particularly in areas with higher levels of deprivation.

"Councils have been doing what they can to help; bringing together partners from the NHS and voluntary sector to support those who need it the most.

"Building on the experience of the pandemic, public health is at the forefront of each local response.

"However public health services, such as for sexual health or school nurses, which are crucial in helping to relieve the pressure on our health and care system, continue to face challenging financial circumstances.

"To address this, the Government should provide long-term funding increases to public health services, which do so much to improve health outcomes in our local communities."

● See [www.local.gov.uk/health](http://www.local.gov.uk/health) and p24



## Cities can unlock potential, summit hears

Cities can level up the country, grow the economy and tackle the climate crisis if they have the right resources and extra powers, urban leaders have said.

In an open letter to Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary Michael Gove, to coincide with the LGA's second annual Urban Summit, they say the UK remains one of the most centralised countries in the developed world.

More must be done to improve local areas' ability to raise vital funding, increase productivity and improve people's health and wellbeing, say the letter's signatories: Mayor Marvin Rees, Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board and of Core Cities UK; Cllr Georgia Gould, Chair of London Councils; and Cllr John Merry CBE, Chair of Key Cities.

The letter references the work of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) Urban Commission, co-chaired by RSA Chief Executive Andy Haldane and Mayor Rees, which is exploring how best to unlock cities' potential.

The letter says that "cities have a long and proud history of being at the forefront of economic growth and development in our country" and that the Levelling Up White Paper rightly states that every area of the UK should have a globally competitive city.

But it warns the RSA's research thus far confirms the UK's cities "lag behind their global competitors when it comes to productivity and growth" and highlights the links between income and health disparities.

The letter says last month's summit could be used as a basis to work with government on developing a long-term plan for cities, to unlock the full potential of places for years to come.

● See p13

## 'Devolve employment support to councils' – LGA

People's job prospects post-pandemic would have been better if councils and devolved authorities had been able to take the lead on supporting them, the LGA has said in response to a report on the Government's Restart programme.

The scheme has ended up costing more per person and helping fewer long-term unemployed than planned, according to the House of Commons' Public Accounts Committee.

Participants face a duplicative and inefficient experience; the scheme's design meant many most in need were unable to access it; and

the Department for Work and Pension's weak knowledge and management of contracted providers adds to difficulties, committee members concluded.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said people's job prospects would have improved if support had been devolved, allowing councils and devolved authorities to use their local knowledge, connections and expertise.

He added: "The report highlights there were missed opportunities to use the underspend for Restart to address the rising scale of economic

inactivity, which now presents the biggest gap in the workforce.

"Instead of large providers covering vast areas, which we know can lead to capability and capacity issues, all contracted employment support should be devolved to local government.

"This would lead to more integrated services, better targeting of investment, provision of wraparound support such as on housing, health, training and debt management and working with local and national partners, all of which can be done within a national framework."

## In brief

### Health inequalities

Rates of severe illness and death among ethnic minority groups during the pandemic were largely driven by a greater risk of infection, according to a University of Manchester report.

"Ethnic minority communities have experienced higher levels of COVID-19 infection and death rates. Geography, deprivation, occupation, living arrangements and health conditions have all played a role, as well as genetic factors," said Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board.

"Reduce deprivation and much of the associated problems dissipate to an extent. This means greater support for education and employment in order to aid recovery and make progress against health inequalities."

### Road repairs

A survey by the Asphalt Industry Alliance shows the backlog for local road repairs would cost councils £14 billion to tackle because of the impact of severe weather and inflation. The report found that councils would need an extra £7.7 million each to improve the condition of local road surfaces. An LGA spokesperson said: "It is alarming that, due to soaring inflation and historic funding cuts, councils' repair backlog has grown and this has become increasingly challenging to tackle. To improve the condition of our roads, the Government should provide a funding increase for councils, including meeting new inflationary pressures." ● See p8.

### Nitrous oxide

A review into nitrous oxide has recommended that the Government should close loopholes allowing people to buy the gas for recreational purposes, and clamp down on the volume that can be bought.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board said: "The problems caused by nitrous oxide in our local communities are no laughing matter. Councils are concerned that not only does it lead to a plague of anti-social behaviour, but there is growing evidence that it can cause serious health problems for those who use it. Councils want to work with the Government to make sure these new regulations can be as successful as possible."

## Scrap costly funding bids, says levelling up inquiry



Costly competitions between councils vying for vital funding pots should be replaced to help realise the Government's levelling up agenda, an LGA inquiry has found.

The Levelling Up Locally Inquiry report is the result of a year-long series of roundtables gathering evidence from independent experts, about how best to bridge the gap between national ambitions and the priorities of local leaders and communities.

Published 12 months on from the Levelling Up White Paper, the report highlights the need for a step change in devolution, with greater powers and resources to drive prosperity transferred to the local level.

It says councils and combined authorities' role in promoting economic growth should be formally recognised, including being able to fairly keep and reinvest the proceeds of local growth according to local need.

Single budgets for all places that want them should also be rolled out under the leadership of local government, which would lead to improved joined-up public services, the inquiry found.

The report comes as the current competitive bid process has seen some councils spend hundreds of thousands of pounds on preparing detailed bids to the Levelling Up Fund, only to find out they were unsuccessful and, in some cases, not even eligible to apply in the first place.

The LGA says that any subsequent rounds of the Levelling Up Fund should be allocated based on evidence of need, rather than bids between areas.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said: "Extra investment into our local areas has the potential to transform people's lives and livelihoods and this needs to be accompanied by greater powers for councils, with the support of national and local partners, without needing to negotiate funding competitions."

● Levelling Up Locally Inquiry, see p13

## Unfunded NHS pay rises could mean cuts to services

**Councils have warned that proposed new NHS pay rises could lead to cuts to vital public health services if they are not funded, after the new public health grant settlements were published.**

The Government has provided a 3.2 per cent increase in the public health grant for the next two years because of increases in demand for services and increased running costs.

However, the Department of Health and Social Care also wrote to councils to explain that they would be expected to use their existing budgets to pay for increases in NHS pay for community services they commission.

Councils are calling for more support to meet a proposed 5 per cent pay increase for

NHS staff working in council-commissioned health services.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "It is good that councils finally have clarity on their public health spending for the next two years. However, NHS pay rises should not be an additional burden on already pressured council public health budgets.

"Public health services run by local councils cannot continue to maximise their role at the heart of communities while continually having to manage uncoded new burdens. To ensure our vital services can continue supporting those in our communities who need them the most, the Government should fund new NHS pay rises in full."



## River pollution 'blocking 20,000 new homes'

**Urgent action and funding are needed to address river pollution and low water levels so 20,000 new homes left in limbo can be built, the LGA has warned.**

Pollutants, generated by agriculture and water companies, that run into rivers mean some planned house building is unable to go ahead, at a time when demand for housing is growing rapidly.

Rising levels of water abstraction for drinking water supplies are also leading to further threats to wildlife and the natural environment, according to a new report by the LGA. While there are some plans to offset these issues – such as creating new wetlands – these can be expensive, time-consuming and require large amounts of land.

The LGA says immediate steps that could be taken include giving affected areas funding for improving homes' water efficiency, targeted agricultural upgrades, and upgrading wastewater treatment works.

An LGA spokesperson said: "Thousands of new homes are on hold because of river pollution and water level concerns, leaving councils in limbo on how to meet increasing demand for urgent accommodation."

"We need to find short-term local ways to address this pollution and water availability before longer-term solutions are found to stop the pollution at the source, so the land can be built on."

"This will help address the housing crisis, with more than 1.2 million households on social housing waiting lists in desperate need of somewhere to stay."

"Councils want to work together with government, agencies, developers and the agricultural sector to find ways to address pollution locally, so homes can be built, while doing everything possible to reduce pollution at source, maintain safe water levels and avoid other areas getting caught up in this environmental bind."

## 57,000 Right to Buy homes 'will not be replaced'

A further 57,000 social homes in England will be lost to Right to Buy by the end of the decade, with no region or local authority capable of providing one-to-one replacements.

An estimated 100,000 homes are likely to be sold through the scheme by 2030, with just 43,000 replaced, according to a report by consultants Savills, commissioned by the LGA, the Association of Retained Council Housing and the National Federation of Arms-Length Management Organisations.

While the discounts are positive for prospective homeowners, councils are left with too little to replace the homes sold. With discounts increasing by a further 10.1 per cent from April this year, in line with inflation, it will become even harder to deliver replacements.

The LGA is urging government to allow councils to set discounts locally and retain 100 per cent of sales receipts. It also wants them to be able to combine receipts with government grant funding, and transfer funding from sales to arms-length management organisations or housing companies.

An LGA spokesperson said: "Every home sold that isn't replaced risks pushing more families into the private rented sector, driving up housing benefit spending and rents, and exacerbating our homelessness crisis."

"It is becoming impossible for councils to replace homes as quickly as they're being sold, as they are being left with nowhere near enough money to provide replacements."

"Rising Right to Buy discounts mean that one household's home ownership is increasingly being prioritised over another's access to secure, safe, social housing."

## 'Perfect storm' for homelessness services

Some councils are 'still not getting it right' when it comes to preventing people from becoming homeless, according to a report from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

In response, the LGA called for the Government to bring forward its commitment to removing Section 21 'no fault' evictions, and to look at developing a cross-departmental prevention strategy that addresses the drivers and levers of homelessness.

The building of affordable homes must also be prioritised, and councils should be

given the powers and resources to build 100,000 social homes a year to address the national shortage of affordable housing and reduce the number of people on social housing waiting lists.

An LGA spokesperson said: "Councils work incredibly hard to prevent the tragedy of homelessness from happening, as well as supporting those who find themselves affected."

"Homelessness pressures, combined with depleted social housing stock and an unaffordable private rented sector, feel like a

perfect storm for already stretched services."

Five years since the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into effect, the ombudsman's report highlights examples of where opportunities have been missed to prevent homelessness, provides advice on good practice, and suggests questions officers and councillors can ask to ensure their authorities are fulfilling their duties.

In 2021/22, the ombudsman service received 372 complaints about homelessness and upheld 75 per cent of the 126 investigations it carried out.



## In brief

### Life expectancy

Being born in the country's wealthiest areas can add up to 12 years to your life, new research shows. The campaign group Health Equals analysed data from the Office for National Statistics to determine the life expectancy for babies born this year in all 650 parliamentary constituencies. The research showed that poor housing, substandard education and poverty were 'cutting short millions of lives by over a decade' and harming children's development. Health Equals is calling for new government strategies to reverse health inequalities. It is backed by a range of organisations and firms, including the LGA, British Red Cross and the Confederation of British Industry.

### Unregulated children's homes

All supported accommodation providers for looked after 16 and 17-year-olds will be required to register with inspection agency Ofsted and meet standards from October 2023, the Government has confirmed in response to a consultation on regulating supported accommodation. The Department for Education will provide £142 million in funding over three years, including £123 million to support councils with the reforms. An LGA spokesperson said: "It is important that all children in care live in good quality homes that meet their needs and help them to thrive. However, we continue to call for children's social care services to be fully funded so that all children in care and care leavers can receive the support they need to thrive into adulthood."

### Culture challenge

The LGA is offering a limited number of fully funded, online, culture and library peer challenges. These can be used to investigate themes ranging from community engagement and health and wellbeing to co-location and heritage. The process is designed to be supportive and provide insights into issues such as resources, partnerships and collaborative working, which can contribute to strategic activity. To find out more and apply for the Arts Council-funded challenges, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/arts-culture-and-libraries-2023](http://www.local.gov.uk/arts-culture-and-libraries-2023)

## Digital switchover alert

Vital telecare equipment used by nearly two million older and disabled people, as well as traffic lights and cash machines, could cease to operate unless councils get more support with preparing for the upgrade to next-generation digital networks.

The Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), which is based on copper wires, will be switched off by 2025 as the UK's telecoms infrastructure is upgraded to digital connectivity.

The LGA said services that rely on the existing network to help people live independently at home, including personal alarms and telephone handsets used by older and disabled people, will need to be reconnected, upgraded or replaced altogether.

While the PSTN upgrade is being undertaken by the telecoms industry, the LGA says councils need greater support with data sharing, testing, awareness and funding to prepare residents for the

switchover, alongside better coordination from government.

An exclusive LGA survey found almost 40 per cent of councils responding do not yet know how they will pay for the move to digital telecare, in the wake of local government funding reductions over the past decade.

Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE, LGA Digital Connectivity Spokesperson, said: "Councils have a critical role to play in the digital switchover that is fast approaching and will impact on a whole range of vital services, including adult social care.

"Our survey shows that unless action is taken now to support councils to help their residents and suppliers with this change, we face the prospect of serious disruption to people's lives, including most urgently those who use personal devices such as alarms and fall detectors to stay safe in their own homes."

● Digitalisation, see p22



## Rough road ahead...

**The Government spent 31 times more per mile maintaining motorways and A roads last year than it did on funding councils to repair crumbling local roads, according to LGA analysis.**

Recent figures show that the Government spent £192,000 per mile on strategic roads, such as motorways or major A roads, compared with just £6,000 per mile on fixing potholes on local roads.

This is despite local roads making up 180,000 miles of the UK's overall network, with strategic roads totalling just 4,800 miles.

Last month's Budget included an additional £200 million for pothole repairs, which the LGA has described as 'helpful'.

However, despite the efforts of

councils, which repair a pothole every 19 seconds, the local roads repair backlog is rising, with latest estimates showing it would take more than £12 billion and 10 years to clear.

Councils have faced significant increases in carrying out road repairs because of rising inflation and a shortage in material such as bitumen, with latest estimates showing it is costing some councils up to 22 per cent more to repair a pothole.

An LGA spokesperson said: "All journeys by car begin and end on local roads, which make up the vast majority of our road network. Spending more on improving our motorways while neglecting crumbling local roads is counterproductive."



## Banging the devolution drum

The LGA has long called for genuine devolution to local areas



### Local leaders are well placed to deliver the best outcomes for local communities.

They are also best placed to align the work of government departments and agencies with the assets and opportunities of different places.

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, currently making its way through Parliament, presents opportunities to act upon long-running asks from councils and the LGA for further devolution in England.

We are pleased that the Government has proposed to speed up the process and make good on its commitment to offer all of England the opportunity to benefit from a devolution deal by 2030.

It is important that councils of all sizes are engaged in the devolution process.

The LGA, with the assistance of our parliamentary vice-presidents, proposed and supported amendments to the Bill, including one from Baroness Taylor of Stevenage calling on the Government to publish draft legislation for a Devolution Bill.

We also briefed MPs ahead of a recent

Westminster Hall debate on the future of the UK constitution and devolution.

During the debate, Bim Afolami MP (Con) emphasised the importance of regularising local government and devolution structures across England.

He highlighted Hertfordshire, where there are district councils and a county council, while Bedfordshire, a neighbouring county, has a unitary system and, in the Tees Valley, there is a mayoralty.

He added that the powers are different in that mayoralty compared with the West Midlands, and the powers are different again in London.

Afolami also said that, if the Government was going to empower local people, there needed to be greater funding, as well as a clarification of the responsibilities between local authorities and the Treasury.

Alex Norris MP (Lab) highlighted LGA research that showed, in the four years to 2019, there were 448 separate funding pots for which councils were invited to bid, and said devolution needed to move away from a competitive bidding process in which the Government selects winning bids.

He added that, in the current system, winning councils are also long-term losers, because the money they get back

is less than they have had cut from their budgets in the first place.

The LGA has been engaging with the Government on several fronts to achieve greater fiscal freedom, and ensure councils have the power to raise more money locally and greater control over how this money is spent in local areas.

We further highlighted our call for genuine devolution through the work of the Devolution All-Party Parliamentary Group, which is supported by the LGA.

A recent meeting of the group considered international examples of devolution and assessed the performance of devolution in England. The LGA gave evidence on behalf of councils, alongside an international panel of speakers.

We outlined the success of devolution and benefits to local communities where it has taken place in England, and urged government to ensure it is extended further, faster and to more places.

Highlighting LGA-commissioned research, we noted that the UK is an international outlier and one of the most fiscally centralised countries in the developed world.

We will continue to engage closely with ministers, civil servants, and parliamentarians to ensure councils are empowered to deliver for their communities.



See [www.local.gov.uk/parliament](http://www.local.gov.uk/parliament) for more on the LGA's parliamentary work

# Spring Budget 2023

The Government has set out its spending priorities

**A**ccording to ministers, levelling up is at the heart of the Spring Budget 2023, with measures “set to put powers and money in the hands of communities most in need” and “deliver more jobs, better services and more opportunities for local people”.

The Budget includes an expansion of free childcare to those over the age of nine months, reforms to support people into work, and greater responsibilities for local leaders over economic growth, among other announcements of note to councils.

In the LGA's initial response, we say that it is good that the Chancellor used the Budget to act upon council calls to widen employment support, improve local roads, protect swimming pools from rising costs and fund vital regeneration efforts.

Lower borrowing rates for councils will also provide a boost for vital council house building projects.

Disappointingly, though, key local services that help support economic growth – including adult social care, public health and children's services – saw no additional investment.

We want to work with the Government on a long-term funding plan that ensures councils have adequate resources to deliver local services for our communities.

## Workforce participation

It is positive that the Government is addressing workforce participation as part of a wider effort to tackle high vacancy rates affecting the national economy and local communities.

Every local economy is different, and people can find themselves ‘economically inactive’ for different reasons.

With control over fragmented and disjointed national employment and skills funding or schemes, councils could build on their track record of helping get people back into the workplace – including those who are furthest from the jobs market – and plugging growing skills gaps.

The LGA's Work Local provides a positive, place-based vision for an integrated and devolved employment and skills service that can support everyone with the wraparound support that is needed (see [www.local.gov.uk/work-local](http://www.local.gov.uk/work-local)).

## Early education, childcare and SEND

Good quality early education and childcare enables people to work, increase their hours or take on new opportunities, and to move out of poverty. Most importantly, it improves families' and children's long-term life chances.

Plans to raise the universal credit cap on childcare will make a significant difference to many families, as will reforming the system to ensure that parents and carers are not hindered by a complex process to reclaim childcare costs.

It is helpful that the Government has committed to increasing the hourly funding rate paid to providers to deliver the existing free hours offers in England.

To ensure these announcements have their intended impact, the full cost of delivering early years entitlements must be covered to enable providers to pay staff appropriately and give high-quality support to children in their care.

Furthermore, we need to secure the right support for children with

special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Adequate funding, skilled early years practitioners and wider system support are essential to the early identification of need and support for children with SEND, as set out in the Government's own SEND and alternative provision improvement plan (see p14).

## Social housing

The Government is bringing forward a new, discounted Public Work Loans Board policy margin to support local authorities borrowing for housing revenue accounts and the delivery of social housing.

This will provide much-needed additional support for vital council house-building projects. However, this will not mitigate the impact of the Government's 7 per cent social rent cap for 2023/24.

The Chancellor also missed a key opportunity to give councils the power to set their own Right to Buy discounts and retain 100 per cent of sales receipts. This would have gone some way to supporting councils to replace much needed social homes.

## Levelling up

A third round of levelling up funding and an extra \$400 million for levelling up projects in England will give councils the opportunity to forge ahead with ambitious plans to transform their communities and unlock potential for more local growth.

The LGA remains clear that levelling up should be locally led by evidence of where crucial investment needs to go and not based on costly competitive bidding processes. Our recently published ‘Levelling Up Locally’ inquiry report looks into how this agenda might better strengthen local communities (see p13).

## Devolution

‘Trailblazer’ devolution deals negotiated with Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities include a long-term commitment to local authorities retaining 100 per cent of their business rates and to single multi-year funding settlements at the next Spending Review, as well as additional powers in areas such as affordable housing, transport and skills funding.

The Government's ambition is to roll this model out to all areas in England with a devolution deal and a directly elected leader over time.

It is positive that the Government

**i** This is an edited version of the LGA's 2023 Spring Budget Briefing, which is available in full at [www.local.gov.uk/finance](http://www.local.gov.uk/finance). Other issues covered in the briefing include public spending, borrowing, business rates, children's social care, employment support for Ukrainians, nutrient neutrality and house building, energy bills discounts, cost-of-living support, energy price guarantee, suicide prevention, carbon capture usage and storage, Great British Nuclear, transport, alcohol duty reform, local government pension scheme, and tax reliefs on the arts.



aims to further roll out the single place-based funding settlements, recognising the need to move away from the current costly, inefficient and fragmented approach.

We urge the Government to clarify the timelines for this, and to work with local government so areas that want to go further and faster can do so.

The Government's ambition to extend devolution across England is also welcome. The LGA has long argued that decisions are best taken as close as possible to the communities they affect, and evidence shows that devolution leads to better outcomes.

However, it is important councils of all sizes are engaged in the devolution process, and that new deals are locally led, and reflect the range of options set out in the devolution framework in the Levelling Up White Paper.

Areas should be free to choose the most appropriate model for their community, and non-metropolitan areas should not be prevented from pursuing devolution if they have a clear proposition informed by good governance principles.

### Local enterprise partnerships

The Chancellor's commitment to transfer responsibilities from local enterprise partnerships to local authorities from April 2024 provides a helpful timeline for councils and combined authorities, and the LGA looks forward to seeing the updated

policy position confirming next steps. Transfers of responsibility will need to be matched by sufficient funding and support for areas with capacity issues.

### Swimming pools

The LGA has long called for support for leisure centres and public swimming pools, so the announcement of more than £60 million for public swimming pools across England is welcome.

It is recognition of the importance of our pools to the nation's health, our communities and the safety of children.

This funding will enable councils to keep the doors open and continue the transformation of our pools to an energy efficient future.

### Veterans

The Government is providing an additional £33 million over the next three years to increase the service provided to veterans, including support for those with serious physical injury resulting from their service and increasing the availability of veteran housing.

While this additional funding is welcome, it is short term and limited in nature. Given the other funding pressures local government faces, this means it cannot fully fund the local capacity needed to sustainably drive forward the Armed Forces Covenant Duty.

Councils must also continue to receive enough funding to support veterans and their families across a range of services that affect mental health, including housing, money advice, employment support and other public health and wellbeing services.

### Investment zones

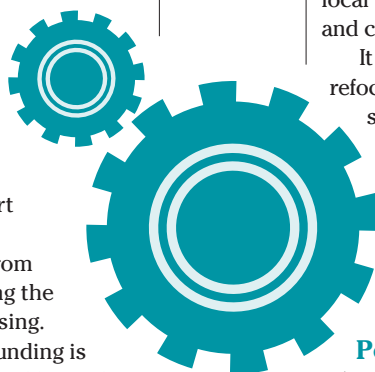
The Government is launching the refocused Investment Zones programme to catalyse 12 high-potential knowledge-intensive growth clusters across the UK.

English investment zones will have access to interventions worth £80 million over five years, and plans will be developed by mayoral combined authorities, working in partnership with local universities, councils, businesses, and central government.

It is good that the decision to refocus investment zones has seen a move away from costly competition between areas and towards a transparent selection methodology that goes with the grain of devolution and prioritises the UK's path towards net zero.

### Potholes

As part of the Government's mission to improve roads, councils are seeing an additional £200 million in their pothole repair funding to meet some of this cost, although challenges remain if they are to tackle the nine-year road repair backlog.





# Challenge and support

A peer challenge is helping the LGA further improve its support to councils

**P**ractising what we preach, the LGA invited an esteemed cross-party political and officer team to undertake a corporate peer challenge (CPC) of the LGA in December 2022.

As is the case in councils, the challenge was tremendously valuable, highlighting very many positive things, along with some helpful suggestions about how we can further strengthen our work for councils and local government overall.

"If the LGA didn't exist, we'd have to invent it" is a quote from the recently published CPC report that captures how many of our partners and stakeholders feel about the LGA and the vital role it plays in the local government sector.

It found that the LGA remains a 'strong organisation' and has continued to improve since its last CPC in 2015, citing evidence including higher membership levels, strong support for our sector-led improvement approach, our influence on issues facing the sector, recognition as the key partner in the relationship between central and local government, and our "remarkable" ability to gain political consensus.

However, with local government again in a period of significant change, the report says the LGA will need to continue to develop how it operates in the months and years ahead.

The report recommends building a closer working relationship with combined authorities and new county devolution areas, and discussions are already under way with the mayoral combined authorities, the M10 group of chief executives and mayors, and the new devolution areas to explore what they need from the LGA.

The requirements of sector support and challenge are also changing. The



*The LGA remains a strong organisation and has continued to improve since 2015*

peer team felt it is important that the LGA not only changes with this, but also leads the change on behalf of the sector.

So, in our action plan, we commit to working with the sector to develop a support and assurance framework for local government, mapping the wide range of current support and assurance mechanisms.

We agree with the peer team that it will be helpful to lead a conversation to provide clarity about what those mechanisms are, as well as considering whether there are improvements to the framework that could be made.

Additionally, many of those in the LGA's membership want to see the LGA develop more forward-thinking

positions on behalf of the sector, looking out more and scanning the next horizon – and this, too, has been incorporated in our action plan.

Other areas where we are responding to the CPC's report include refreshing the development and induction offer for members involved with the LGA's boards, and considering how to better use analysis from international networks to support our work on behalf of local government.

The peer team notes strengths we can build on to deliver the CPC action plan – including a strong and well-established senior management team, highly motivated staff who are passionate about what they do, and strong recognition externally of the LGA 'brand' and the influence it is able to have.

Building on these strengths, we can continue to improve and, in doing so, we can continue to make a big difference to councils and the communities they serve.



## The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge 2022

**feedback report and action plan** can be read in full at [bit.ly/3LAh3XQ](https://bit.ly/3LAh3XQ). To find out more about how your council could benefit from a CPC, please visit [bit.ly/3LtpnbZ](https://bit.ly/3LtpnbZ)



Councillor **Kevin Bentley** and Mayor **Marvin Rees** are Co-Chairs of the LGA's Levelling Up Locally Inquiry



# Closing the gaps

## Levelling up requires a reinvention of the relationship between national, local and community governance

**T**he Government's Levelling Up White Paper was published in February 2022 and set out an ambitious programme to reduce inequality and close the gaps in productivity, health, income and opportunity within the United Kingdom.

Councils have a material interest in the outcome of this agenda.

We want our local economies to thrive, the vulnerable to be taken care of, and our places to provide attractive and healthy environments to live, work and visit.

We recognise that these are long-term challenges that require sustainable finance, a coherent

strategy, partnership, and policy stability: there are few, if any, quick or cheap fixes available.

As such, the LGA's City Regions and People and Places Boards convened a Levelling Up Locally Inquiry in early 2022, out of the ambition held by local leaders everywhere to do the best for their people and places, with the aim of bridging the gap between national diagnosis and local delivery.

We gathered a panel of independent experts to consider the realities of levelling up locally, the role of councils, and the relationship between this agenda and the future resilience of the UK.

The inquiry took the form of four

roundtables and engaged with more than 70 organisations, drawing in contributions and sparking new ideas and best practice.

In the year since the White Paper, new devolution deals and new resources have taken small steps towards greater local control, but the scale of the challenge continues to demand nothing less than a wholesale reinvention of the relationship between national, local and community governance.

The inquiry's recommendations (see below) can provide key elements for that new relationship. The LGA looks forward to working with partners across society to help explore and deliver on their potential.

## Levelling up locally – recommendations

### Creating the conditions

- To better address regional and demographic inequality, councils' and combined authorities' key role in economic growth and prosperity should be recognised, and they should be empowered to fairly keep the proceeds of local growth to reinvest according to local need.
- To reduce inefficiency and strengthen the case for investment, competitive funds should be replaced by a single pot of capital funding allocated according to a robust evidence base, allowing councils and combined authorities to invest in social and community infrastructure.

### Strengthening the role of local government

- Pilot, and quickly roll out, single budgets for all places that want them under the leadership of local government, enabling better join-up of public services, more preventative investment and improved outcomes for communities.
- At their best, local government leaders are representative of the communities they serve. Local and national government should build on existing campaigns to work with communities and partners to develop a talent pipeline of future leaders that better reflects the diversity of need facing people and place.

### Local and national priorities

- Improve policymaking by giving local and community leaders a formal role in ensuring people's experiences are a key part of policy design.
- Embed progress for those facing the greatest inequalities by working with diverse and underrepresented groups to shape the levelling up metrics and missions, and evaluate tangible progress over the longer term.
- Strengthen the ability of Whitehall to act as a strategic partner to places by creating transparent and targeted cross-departmental plans to accelerate joined-up delivery across government.



The LGA has responded to  
SEND reform proposals

# Right support, right place, right time



Councillor **Patricia Bradwell** OBE is Vice-Chairman of the LGA's Children and Young People Board

**F**ulfilling the potential of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), building parents' trust, and providing financial sustainability are the focus of proposed reforms to the SEND system.

Councils share the Government's ambition to make sure every child with special educational needs gets the high-quality support they need, as per its improvement plan, 'Right support, right place, right time', published in March.

Previous reforms to the SEND system, set out in the Children and Families Act 2014, sadly failed to improve provision.

Placing children and young people at the centre of the SEND system was right, but the Act's reforms were not supported by sufficient powers or funding to allow councils to meet children's needs, nor to hold health and education partners to account for their contributions.

The LGA understands the need for greater consistency of approach across the SEND system, including through a single, digitised, education,

health and care plan (EHCP), and we welcome the clarity that will come with proposed national SEND and alternative provision standards. These set out the support that children and young people should receive, as well as which partner will be responsible for funding and delivering that support.

The focus on early identification of need and providing early support is also welcome, and central to improving outcomes. However, we cannot forget our early years settings, which must be funded so they too can fulfil their role.

Given the scale of the proposed reforms, the LGA is concerned that the £70 million for the change programme will be insufficient: we believe the Department for Education (DfE) needs to keep this under review and provide additional funding if required.

We are also concerned that the improvement plan does not include proposals to give councils additional powers to lead SEND systems effectively.

It is not possible or desirable for the DfE or the Department of Health and Social Care to build the capacity and expertise to hold partners to account in the detail needed for cooperation

on both developing and delivering local plans.

Councils, education settings and integrated care boards must, instead, be accountable to each other, not Whitehall.

Improving levels of mainstream inclusion will be crucial to the success of any reforms. We therefore welcome the proposal to underpin national standards with legislation to facilitate intervention if standards are not met.

The introduction of these intervention powers will be crucial in impressing on all mainstream education settings the need to take an inclusive approach. This will, in turn, reduce the use of special schools and independent, non-maintained special schools, and relieve pressure on councils' high needs budgets – as well as improve outcomes for SEND children.

To ensure action is taken quickly where poor practice is identified, these powers should, however, sit with councils, and not the DfE.

We are concerned that the improvement plan will raise the expectations of children, parents and carers of what a reformed SEND system will be able to deliver, and by when.

Parental confidence in a new SEND system will be crucial if it is to work effectively. The Government must be careful to manage expectations about the pace of reform, given the planned timetable.



**The LGA's full response to the Government's SEND and alternative provision improvement plan** is available at [www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses](http://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses)





Councillor **Brigid Jones** is Deputy Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board

# Support for local leadership

A new LGA framework aims to help councillors develop their skills



**L**ocal leadership has never been more important. Our communities, businesses and neighbourhoods have faced huge challenges – from the cost-of-living crisis to the war in Ukraine, all set against the backdrop of pandemic recovery and the ongoing impact of Brexit.

Looking ahead, local government will continue to lead the response to some of the biggest challenges in our history, including tackling the climate emergency.

Being a local councillor can, therefore, be hugely rewarding.

We can make a real difference to the communities we serve, achieving meaningful change in areas as small as the design of a local pedestrian crossing and as large as the transformation of entire health and social care systems.

It is also challenging, however, requiring levels of commitment and hard work that are often invisible to an outsider.

Expectations from our residents are high – rightly so – at an increasingly difficult time of shrinking budgets and diminishing resources.

As public figures who live in the communities they serve, councillors are experiencing historically high levels of abuse and intimidation, simply for carrying out their role (see p23). Women

councillors, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and elected members from black, Asian and other ethnic minority communities face additional structural barriers and inequalities.

Being an effective local leader requires a unique combination of knowledge, skills and experience rarely seen in other paid roles.

We are experts in our local areas and the issues that matter to our residents; we oversee multi-million pound tender processes and programmes; we are corporate parents for thousands of our most vulnerable children and young people.

To thrive, and not simply survive, we must also develop our own personal resilience and self-care practices, striving for a positive work-life balance.

To support councillors with their development and role in their communities, the LGA, in partnership with a research team from Riber Consultants Limited, has developed a Local Leadership Framework – a practical resource informed by engagement with elected members.

The framework includes suggestions, prompts and further resources to help you think about the skills you use as a councillor, starting with a personal profile identifying your aspirations, strengths and priorities, and designed to kick off the development conversation.

A section on foundation skills sets out the essential knowledge-based,

personal and practical skills councillors need to navigate their role.

The framework also identifies eight local leadership skill sets that will help councillors make the biggest difference and respond to the challenges they face.

These include:

- network-building – making the connections others can't and bringing people together to solve problems
- political skills – demonstrating good political awareness and understanding
- resident engagement – keeping up to date with local concerns and ambitions for the area, and ensuring that all voices are heard
- communicating – regular and effective communication with all parts of the community, using a range of methods
- influencing – using negotiation and diplomacy to help get things done
- challenging – contributing to good governance by acting as a critical friend and challenging discriminatory language or behaviour
- bringing people together – helping to resolve conflicts and solve problems
- holding difficult conversations – supporting residents, or people using services, who have complex, emotional or distressing issues.

We hope you find the framework useful, and that it helps you develop and grow as a local leader as you work with your local community to make a difference.



The **Local Leadership Framework** can be accessed in full at [www.local.gov.uk/publications](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications)



**Krista Patrick** is Principal Consultant (Nature Recovery Network) at the Planning Advisory Service

# Helping nature recover

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## Councils have a key role to play in increasing local biodiversity

**T**he LGA's Planning Advisory Service has been talking to local authorities about how they are addressing the global biodiversity and climate emergencies at a local level.

This includes action being undertaken to help nature recover and increase biodiversity, while also securing a wealth of health and economic benefits for communities.

The UK Government published its

Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP23) in January, building on commitments made five years ago in its 25 Year Environment Plan to improve the environment within a generation.

The ambition is to protect and effectively manage 30 per cent of our land and sea for nature, halting the decline in species abundance by 2030, with a new commitment that everyone should live within 15 minutes' walk of a green or blue space.

Central to achieving the EIP23's apex goal of recovering nature is the Nature Recovery Network – the biggest nature-restoration project in our nation's history.

It will be a single national ecological network of wildlife-rich places, and is being supported by a range of delivery mechanisms, many of which have been

introduced by the Environment Act 2021. These include the preparation of 'local nature recovery strategies' (LNRS) from this April and mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) from November.

From then, planning permissions granted in England (with a few exemptions) will have to deliver 10 per cent BNG, requiring all developers to leave the natural environment in a better state than it was pre-development.

PAS has interviewed 12 local authorities across the country to



See [www.local.gov.uk/pas](http://www.local.gov.uk/pas) and follow @PAS\_team on Twitter and LinkedIn **for more about the work of the Planning Advisory Service. The LGA's free biodiversity e-learning module for councillors and officers** is available at [bit.ly/3LmmF7W](https://bit.ly/3LmmF7W)

## Delivering green infrastructure

Essex County Council facilitated collaboration between different organisations and partnerships to identify, target and accelerate its green infrastructure commitments.

After the publication of a green infrastructure strategy in 2020, the council brought together more than 30 stakeholders to launch a climate action commission in May 2020.

The group regularly meets to collaborate on reports, and advises the council on tackling climate change and enhancing the county's green infrastructure.

The council welcomed the commission's first net-zero report, published in 2021, and recognised the urgent need for action, both throughout the commitments in its corporate plan, 'Everyone's Essex', and its climate action plan.

The council has also given the commission £5 million to deliver the net-zero report's recommendations. Part of this funding supported the employment of two green infrastructure planning roles and a green infrastructure delivery officer.

Alongside the commission, the council facilitated the creation of a local nature

partnership in March 2022, to bring together a range of local organisations, businesses and charities to work together to deliver the commission's recommendations.

The council highlighted some challenges from increased collaborative working with stakeholders on nature recovery projects, which included stakeholder disengagement over time.

It aims to resolve this through quarterly publication of a newsletter, to support efficient decision-making by the partnership while keeping wider stakeholders abreast of progress.





Meadow management at Seven Acres Local Nature Reserve, Bolton



Essex Forest Initiative volunteers planting a small native copse at Danbury

The case studies of Cornwall Council and Bath & North East Somerset Council illustrate the benefits of introducing BNG policy into local planning processes early, examining how supplementary planning documents and chief planning officers' notes can be a way of learning ahead of the introduction of mandatory BNG.

A review of planning applications submitted to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and the London Borough of Sutton sheds light on the application of BNG policies in practice, the challenges that are common, and how they are being tackled.

Third, wider corporate objectives can be met through nature recovery.

Sheffield and Birmingham City Councils' case studies reflect on their experiences of delivering nature recovery in urban environments, and examine how mapping can be a beneficial tool to pinpoint areas where nature recovery projects would prove the most valuable for people and nature.

The concept of delivering social and environmental outcomes is further explored in the examples of the London Boroughs of Camden and Islington, which reconsider how greater footfall in the boroughs' green spaces can be positive for nature and local communities.

Finally, coordination and partnerships are key.

Buckinghamshire Council's case study illustrates how cross-departmental working with ecology teams, legal departments and planning teams is useful when preparing for mandatory BNG, while Hampshire County Council demonstrated the benefits of external partnerships for county-wide nature recovery.

Walsall and Lichfield District Councils' case study explores their experiences of collaborating with Natural England on a landscape-scale nature recovery project.

PAS is funded to help local authorities with planning and service delivery.

Natural England and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs fund our work on BNG and nature recovery.

You can find out more about all the case studies featured here at [bit.ly/3JhKh1a](https://bit.ly/3JhKh1a), and please get in touch if you have experience of biodiversity and nature recovery that you'd like to share, by emailing [pas@local.gov.uk](mailto:pas@local.gov.uk).

## Generating investment in natural capital

In Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), a range of innovative 'natural' capital initiatives are seeking to reverse the decline in nature, secure much-needed investment and deliver wider environmental and socio-economic benefits.

The main challenge has been to move the focus from high-profile political ambition to delivery on the ground, and to do this at scale – which requires long-term funding and investment beyond that within the control of the GMCA and its constituent local authorities alone.

So, the GMCA developed its Natural Capital Investment Plan, which encourages investment in the natural environment to secure financial and social returns through a range of innovative finance models, including habitat banking and carbon trading.

Consequently, GMCA has been pioneering a new approach, the Greater Manchester Environment Fund (GMEF), formed in 2021 by a partnership between it, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, and Finance Earth – the first of its kind in the UK. The GMEF provides a mechanism to collect and distribute funds for natural environment projects across Greater Manchester. To date, it has brought in more than \$5 million.

Effective partnerships have been critical to the GMCA's progress. Greater Manchester has a long history of partnership working and existing partnerships were used to build capacity for natural capital investment.

For example, rather than create a new partnership, a key forum for the GMCA was the Natural Capital Group, which is Greater Manchester's Local Nature Partnership. The group is now embedded within the GMCA's wider structure, providing the profile, relationships, and authority it needs to accelerate project delivery on the ground.

explore how they are preparing for these changes and to showcase projects that are facilitating positive environmental outcomes.

Every local authority faces unique circumstances and a plethora of challenges when undertaking a nature-recovery project, but the case studies also show the multiple benefits that nature can bring for people, environment and economy.

Four themes emerged when councils were asked to give their experiences of biodiversity and nature recovery.

First, many councils expressed difficulties in securing finance to support the long-term resourcing of staff on nature-recovery projects.

Greater Manchester Combined Authority's case study showcases how it is developing innovative funding models, blending private and public sector funding opportunities. Similarly, Essex County Council's recruitment of new environmental officers allowed it to leverage additional resource and create sustainable funding opportunities for new nature-recovery projects.

Second, early preparation is important.



# Grassroots access to communities

A new toolkit aims to strengthen council relationships with local voluntary groups

**T**he importance of strong relationships between councils and their local voluntary and community sector has been underlined by the need to respond to an unprecedented series of crises, including a pandemic, refugee arrivals and, now, a cost-of-living crisis.

The LGA and Locality, the national membership network for local community organisations, has launched a practical toolkit to help councils take a fresh look at how effective their strategic relationships with local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations are.

Aimed at councillors and senior officers, the toolkit is based around a self-assessment tool that aims to help councils map their strategic relationships, understand the strengths, identify weaknesses, and plan ways forward.



For many councils, working closely with VCS organisations during this incredibly challenging period has been a reminder that the sector can provide grassroots-based infrastructure and access to communities that councils struggle to reach.

The pandemic, in particular, built shared foundations for many by increasing councils' appreciation of the VCS's work.

However, good relationships with the VCS should not exist solely in times of crisis management – strong, strategic relationships are a powerful and essential part of building successful places.

The VCS is an essential partner for councils in tackling exclusion and disadvantage, hearing from a wider range of voices in our communities, and shaping services.

Many councils know this and embrace their local VCS as a key strategic partner.

A recent study by the LGA and Locality, published last December, identified some innovative and exciting examples of joint working.

These included: a 'district collaborative' partnership structure in Malvern Hills, which builds solid relationships, face to face, between the council, VCS, NHS, service users and community partners; and the building of shared foundations and collaborative principles in Derby through a community power network, bringing together a self-described 'motley crew' of local government and VCS leaders in a community of practice.

However, the LGA/Locality study – 'The state of strategic relationships between councils and their local voluntary and community sector' – found a national picture that is very mixed, with some councils engaging clearly and consistently across departments, some having effective relationships in pockets, and others having little engagement at all.

The report identifies a range of barriers to effective strategic



working, including: a lack of time and resource to invest in relationships; commercialisation of relationships reducing scope for collaboration; and a lack of shared understanding of agendas, priorities and roles.

The LGA/Locality toolkit has been designed to help councils overcome some of these barriers.

It has been honed through workshops with officers and councillors working in this area, to ensure it is a practical resource for councils of all tiers and at all stages in their journey of building, or re-examining, their VCS relationships.

The toolkit also encourages councils to undertake the mapping exercise in partnership with their local VCS, looking for honest feedback around what works and what doesn't in their local relationships.



**The VCS toolkit was launched at the end of March** and can be found at [www.local.gov.uk/topics/communities](http://www.local.gov.uk/topics/communities). For 'The state of strategic relationships between councils and their local voluntary and community sector', see [www.local.gov.uk/publications](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications). See p26

# Decarbonising transport

Council collaboration is helping deliver positive social outcomes



Councillor **Liz Green** is Vice-Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board

**T**ransport is the largest contributor to UK domestic greenhouse gas emissions, but decarbonising transport is difficult.

New government guidance on local transport plans (LTPs), which is to be released later this year, will place a greater emphasis on councils demonstrating how their LTP and associated transport investments will help reduce emissions.

Therefore, to support local authorities, the LGA recently ran an 'Action learning set' (ALS) programme to enable 30 local authorities to meet regularly online to share their

challenges and learn from each other.

Over three months, the ALS programme, delivered in collaboration with management, engineering and development consultancy Mott MacDonald, brought together 10 councillors and 20 officers from across England.

The participants were divided into five groups that met every two or three weeks to address shared challenges in relation to transport decarbonisation.

Each ALS group created a community that built trust, shared knowledge, and identified solutions to some of the challenges being faced. Feedback from participants on the process included that it was "informative", "collaborative", "interesting" and "thought provoking".

From this project we have been able to gather insight into the many challenges that councils are facing.

More than 50 topics were discussed and questions posed to participants to tackle, including:

- How do we engage the public in schemes?
- What sustainable transport options are available in rural towns and villages?
- How do we ensure sustainable transport users are prioritised in the planning application process?

Councils taking part faced similar challenges, which the participants found very reassuring. While members of the groups were from a variety of roles, they were able to support and provide different approaches and perspectives to these topics.

The ALS process allowed participants to come up with actions that could be followed up outside of the sessions to progress the challenges they are facing. For example, one

participant who wanted to involve the public on a pilot project about using dual-fuel hydrogen refuse trucks decided to engage with schools on the learning opportunities around science, technology, engineering and maths, and to create a project website with regular updates on monthly carbon savings.

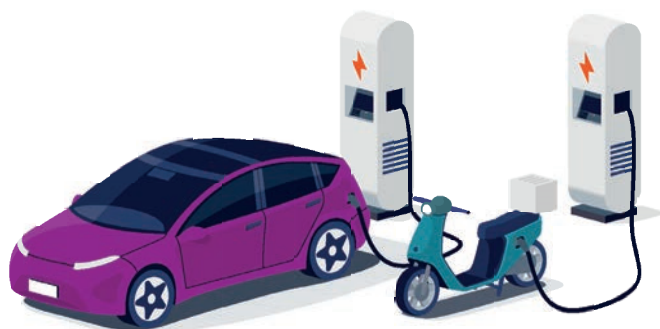
Participants wrote case studies to reflect on their ALS journey, and these provide a learning resource from which other councils can benefit (see [bit.ly/3Jrn2wA](https://bit.ly/3Jrn2wA)). They include:

- South Somerset District Council on issues around e-scooter trials, such as evidencing reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and policing
- Tees Valley Combined Authority on ensuring decarbonisation takes place on existing road space where there are competing priorities – for example, for bus and cycle routes and residents' parking
- Wiltshire Council on ensuring that consideration is given to the needs of non-car users in determining planning applications.

The programme has also generated a long list of resources – including research reports, maps, videos, guidance, case studies and other information – on a range of topic areas relating to decarbonising transport.

Car clubs, local transport plans, mobility hubs, cycle and walking infrastructure plans, electric vehicle charging, transport equity, school streets and low-traffic neighbourhoods, car-free days, last-mile delivery, alternative fuels, and rural transport are among the areas covered (see [bit.ly/3yoWu8X](https://bit.ly/3yoWu8X)).

Creating a time and place to regularly collaborate on and tackle each other's challenges helped councils work together towards the goal of decarbonising transport – and, ultimately, build a better transport future that delivers positive social outcomes.



**i** For the LGA's decarbonising transport action learning sets, see [bit.ly/3Zyrol8](https://bit.ly/3Zyrol8). To find out more about the LGA's Climate Change Improvement Support programme, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/climate-change-hub](https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/climate-change-hub) or email [climate@local.gov.uk](mailto:climate@local.gov.uk)





# Showcasing talent

Entries have opened for the Local Government Apprentice of the Year



**W**hether you're taking the first step on your career ladder, taking the next step in your profession or even taking a sideways step into a brand-new occupation, we all know how important apprenticeships are to staff in local government.

Almost 27,000 apprentices are currently 'on programme' in councils across England, an ever-growing part of our workforce.

This means recognising their contribution, celebrating their successes and showcasing their talents has never been more important.

That's where the Local Government Apprentice of the Year comes in. Now in its third year, it is the only event of its kind in the sector.

Held online to facilitate maximum attendance, the competition is open to all current Level 2 and 3 apprentices (and those qualified within the past 12 months) working for councils in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Taking place on 24 and 25 May, the Local Government Apprentice of the Year 2023 provides apprentices with an exciting opportunity to learn, network and showcase their skills.

The event works in a similar way to the LGA's Local Government Challenge, with apprentices put through their paces in a series of tasks designed to simulate the experience of delivering successful local government services, covering everything from policy making and consultation to communication and their own personal development. Our theme this year is climate change.

Every apprentice who takes part will get the opportunity to work alongside other apprentices from across the three nations.

They will take part in a day of activities designed to test their skills, ideas and experience, all applied to real-life challenges faced by local government, with support from our team of development leads throughout the event.

Up for grabs are awards and prizes, including 'Best Team', two overall runners-up and the coveted Local Government Apprentice of the Year, who will also take home £500 in Love-to-Shop vouchers.

The event also includes a Q&A with a guest speaker from the world of local government and apprenticeships. Previous speakers have included the then apprenticeships ministers Gillian Keegan MP and Alex Burghart MP, and Steve Rotherham, the Metro Mayor of Liverpool City Region.

After the event, apprentices and their managers will be sent an individual report with scores for each

activity and an employer checklist to help relate apprentices' experiences back to the knowledge, skills and behaviours in their qualification.

Numerous apprentices who took part in earlier events have told us how much they enjoyed the experience and why they would recommend the event to other apprentices thinking of entering (see [bit.ly/3JJA4Ws](https://bit.ly/3JJA4Ws)).

Ackeem, a Level 2 apprentice Civil Enforcement Officer at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, took part in the 2022 event.

He said: "After joining apprentice of the year I gained a lot of recognition of my talent [and] I've been awarded learner of the year... I would definitely recommend this to other people, because it's widened my knowledge of the different areas of the council and its created other job opportunities."

So what are you waiting for? Book one of your apprentices a place today!

**i Registration for Local Government Apprentice of the Year 2023 is open now** and closes on Wednesday 3 May 2023. More information about the event, including entry fees and how to book is available at [www.local.gov.uk/local-government-apprentice-year-2023](https://www.local.gov.uk/local-government-apprentice-year-2023)





# Fresh perspective

Younger staff want to make a difference to local communities



**Marshall Scott** and **Aurora Petrova** are graduate trainees at the LGA



make an impact. The rotational nature of the NGDP scheme really attracted me; it seemed like no other sector offered such a variety of opportunity – from policy, planning and housing, to digital and social media.

For my first placement, I am in the LGA's Workforce Team, where we support the local government workforce and help it adapt and respond to changes.

Just 4.7 per cent of people aged under 25 are working for local government, so a large focus in my placement has been on developing resources to attract young people to the sector.

I have promoted the benefits of young employee networks in the LGA's early careers toolkit, which is designed to help councils attract and retain young people (see [bit.ly/3JHsN9M](https://bit.ly/3JHsN9M)).

In partnership with Youth Employment UK, a not-for-profit social enterprise, I have also developed a careers hub to promote local government as a pathway. In addition, I have helped with the LGA's T Level support programme, which helps councils offer industry placements to young people in their area.

A unique opportunity I have had is developing the LGA's commercial offers, such as the Employer Link workforce subscription service (see [www.local.gov.uk/employer-link](https://www.local.gov.uk/employer-link)), and our Emergenetics psychometric profiling workshops, in which a handful of teams, including Warwickshire County Council, participated in our pilot session (see [bit.ly/42flgGI](https://bit.ly/42flgGI)).

**S**ix months ago, we joined the National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP), the LGA's flagship graduate scheme.

We would like to share our insights and experiences of the programme and of local government as a sector.

## Marshall

As a university student, I found it tricky to find a career path that provided a challenge and professional progression while also having a positive impact on others and their communities.

After noticing an advert for the NGDP, I became hugely interested in local government, and the value it brings to society.

Fortunately, because of the flexible and dynamic nature of the programme, I now have the opportunity to use my ideas and experiences to create positive change in many different areas.

Currently, I am working in the LGA's Building Safety Team, lobbying central government to ensure that new legislation makes residents safer, but also gives councils enough financial support to make England's building stock safe in the long term.

For graduates such as me, the NGDP provides a sense of responsibility and allows us to positively engage in the governance of local communities.

## Aurora

I wasn't entirely sure what I wanted to do when I graduated, but I knew I wanted to be somewhere I could



**Marshall and Aurora** in Warwick

## Networking opportunities

Following on from Warwickshire County Council's Emergenetics session, we both had the opportunity to visit the council.

We learned about the work Warwickshire is doing and the challenges it is facing, and we met its third cohort of NGDP graduate trainees, who then later came to London to visit the LGA.

The NGDP offers excellent networking opportunities, and we have both joined networks that graduates have created themselves, such as the policy, gender equality and London graduates' networks.

Reflecting on our experiences on the scheme so far, we feel that the programme has offered us a great opportunity to gain skills and experiences, and network with fellow graduates.

We feel incredibly proud of the impact that our generation is having in the local government sector.



**To find out more about the LGA's National Graduate Development Programme**, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/ngdp](https://www.local.gov.uk/ngdp)

# Leveraging data and technology



A new resource aims to make digitalisation more accessible



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

**M**arch saw the launch of the 'Local government digitalisation almanac: a simple guide for local councils' at the LGA's fourth digital showcase event.

The publication expands on 12 'digitalisation outcomes' conceived last year by the LGA, the Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation (Socitm) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace) to help improve and support local government.

It aims to make the topic of digitalisation – leveraging data and technology – more accessible and understandable to a wide range of users from all backgrounds, including elected members with and without digital portfolios.

When you access the almanac, you'll see simple steps, practical examples and

recommended reading to support you in pushing forward with your council's digital journey.

Rather than an instruction manual, you'll find pointers to help initiate wider conversations and prompt collaborative efforts within your council.

The almanac can help your council enjoy the full benefits of digitalisation for staff, residents, businesses and communities, regardless of where they are on the journey. Greater clarity and alignment on the outcomes of digitalisation can push local government to meet citizens' needs in new and different ways.

We've published this resource in response to the rapidly evolving digital landscape which is changing the ways councils work and what is expected of them.

Your council will have its own drivers for digitalisation – from reducing costs or responding to population change – that are pushing the use of data, digital and technology solutions in new and different ways.

Cyber, digital, data and technology are now a core part of council business.

The challenge of this environment is to build a shared understanding of how to improve and support local government digital programmes.

The almanac looks at outcomes – the reasons why your council invests in digitalisation.

The 12 strategic outcomes are connectivity, data, democracy and participation, ethics and sustainability, inclusion,

leadership, economic productivity and growth, organisational capability, partnership, security and resilience, services, and value.

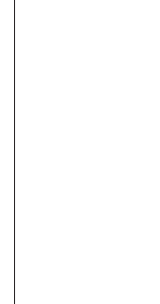
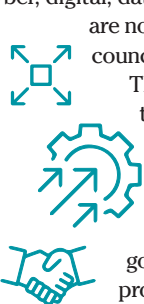
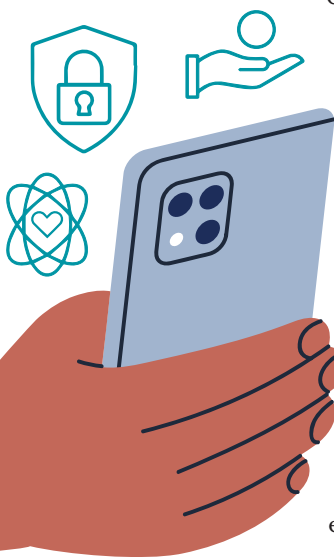
We commissioned consultants PUBLIC to expand on our early framework and explore each outcome in more depth – what each area means, the steps to take to understand more about each goal, and notable examples from authorities to consider in one's own local context.

The almanac is a resource that adds to our ability as a sector to share practice, communicate effectively and build partnerships, and we will be reviewing and refreshing it over time to ensure it stays relevant and responds to changes and challenges.

The agreed language and shared strategic aims it outlines help us to take digitalisation to the next level; strengthening our position to engage across local and central government, and ultimately deliver digital services to citizens more effectively.

I'm delighted to be introducing the almanac as a resource to support councils in delivering the best possible local services, growth and opportunities, with digital at its heart.

Designing and delivering modern public services requires transformation from within councils and across the sector – and the almanac presents 12 outcomes to support you and your organisations as you champion and respond to the needs of your communities.



**i** For the 'Local government digitalisation almanac: a simple guide for local councils', see [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/cyber-digital-and-technology](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/cyber-digital-and-technology)

## COMMENT

# Democracy threatened by abuse of politicians



**Su Moore** is Chief Executive Officer of the Jo Cox Foundation

**At The Jo Cox Foundation, we believe that abuse and intimidation of elected politicians is one of the biggest threats to democracy in the UK.**

The LGA's fantastic Debate Not Hate campaign (see [www.local.gov.uk/debate-not-hate](http://www.local.gov.uk/debate-not-hate)) and information gathered through its 2022 councillors' census show it's not an issue that's limited just to national politicians.

We know that it's impacting many of you on a day-to-day basis and that it's causing some of you to question whether you want to continue in your roles.

We're also hearing that the increasing levels of abuse are having an effect on the pipeline of people choosing to put themselves forward for political office.

The impact is also seen when those currently in office choose not to speak out about specific issues because of the levels of abuse that follow.

You have told us that some topics – particularly those related to traffic or licensing – can lead to increased and dangerous levels of threats.

We also know that this issue doesn't affect everyone equally. Evidence shows that women, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, people with a disability and LGBTQ+ politicians receive a disproportionate amount of abuse.

That's why The Jo Cox Foundation is determined to bring about change on this issue.

Jo was passionate about supporting other women into politics, and a fierce advocate for a 50/50 Parliament.

We believe that while this culture of abuse persists, we are not going to be able to achieve a representative democracy, as too many people will be put off participating.

Addressing abuse and intimidation is extremely complex, with action needed



Jo Cox MP outside Parliament

© JO COX FOUNDATION

across various sectors, including social media, policing and political parties.

It has often been put on the 'too difficult' pile. But Jo didn't believe in 'too difficult'. That is why the foundation launched the Jo Cox Civility Commission in February to gather practical, implementable solutions to address the problem.

During the first phase, which runs until the summer, we're asking experts from various sectors, and people with lived experience of abuse, to share potential solutions. We anticipate that some approaches will be easily implemented in the short term, but that some solutions will require more time.

An example of something that will

require a long-term solution is an issue with political education; we've been hearing from many quarters that often abuse is a result of people not understanding who should be approached to deal with their specific issue or concern.

Once the consultation period is concluded, we'll put forward a set of recommendations to bring about change.

With our commission co-chairs – Baroness Bertin and Lord Coaker – we'll advocate for those recommendations to be implemented. We are determined that this isn't going to be another report that sits on a shelf.

The more people we hear from, the more robust our final recommendations will be. We welcome responses from as many serving local politicians as possible.

The best way to share your thoughts is via our online submission. You can find the link, and more information, at [www.jocoxfoundation.org/commission](http://www.jocoxfoundation.org/commission)



**The Jo Cox Foundation is a charity** working to nurture stronger communities, champion respect in politics and advocate for a fairer world, see [www.jocoxfoundation.org](http://www.jocoxfoundation.org)



## Nothing in the Budget for important public services



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

**D**ue to the revolving door of Chancellors in 2022, Jeremy Hunt's Budget was the first in 18 months.

The Spring Budget was the Government's opportunity to unlock Britain's potential, but, at best, it papers over the cracks of 13 years of Conservative failure.

The UK currently has the lowest growth in the G7 group of advanced economies and, after 13 years of wage stagnation, British workers are now £11,000 a year worse off, leaving families struggling.

The tax burden continues to rise and is on course to hit the highest levels since the Second World War.

What was the Chancellor's response?

Mr Hunt prioritised a handout for the very richest and their pension pots, and his plans to extend free childcare won't benefit any child that has already been born.

While greater devolution to Greater Manchester and the West Midlands is welcome, the rest of the country is still subject to centralised decision-making from this disastrous Conservative government. The Chancellor announced no further investment for housing, public health or children's services – and his answer to the adult social care crisis was a £250 million cut that is desperately needed to boost the workforce.

No extra resources were committed for tackling antisocial behaviour. Under the Conservatives, criminals are let off and victims let down, with only one in 20 recorded crimes resulting in a charge.

After 13 years of cuts to public services, police forces are strained. Police officers are expected to respond to mental health crises or spend hours in A&E when they should be patrolling our streets.

Government must recognise public services are connected: investing in local government and our NHS will help tackle crime. Visible policing matters to communities. Bobbies on the beat not only make residents feel safe but prevent crime. Labour will protect communities, with 13,000 more neighbourhood police, more action to stop people being drawn into crime and more prosecutions.

Our country prides itself on policing by consent and Labour's new mandatory vetting requirement will ensure trust in our police forces.

Labour is the only party of law and order. A Labour government will deliver safer homes, safer streets, and safer communities.

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**“Labour will protect communities, with 13,000 more neighbourhood police”**

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Councillor **Izzi Secombe OBE** is Vice-Chairman of the LGA

## Public health prevents ill health

**C**ouncils in England are pleased to have at long last received their public health grant.

We have long argued that, at a time when NHS and social care pressures are greater than ever, vital sexual health, drug, alcohol and health visiting services need clarification on this funding to help cope with soaring demand.

While the allocations do include indicative figures for 2024/25, we have called for a review of the adequacy of public health funding, to support the Government's wider aims by improving health outcomes, reducing health spending and putting the NHS on a better footing for the long term.

As a country, we face an unavoidable choice; invest more in preventative action or keep paying the social and economic consequences of not doing so.



That message was underlined at the LGA's annual public health conference in late March, at which the LGA and the Association of Directors of Public Health warned that the rising cost of living is having significant health consequences, particularly in those communities that have higher levels of deprivation already.

Despite the best efforts of councils and their directors of public health, who have provided support such as dedicated warm hubs and access to

affordable food, the LGA is concerned that current health inequalities could be widened.

Economic prosperity and health go hand in hand, but the links between the two need to be much more widely understood.

On behalf of councils, we are calling on the Government to address this challenge by making long-term increases to local public health funding, which can go to support those in communities who need it the most.



Councillor **Robert Alden** is a Conservative Deputy Chairman of the LGA

## Key Budget wins for local government

In advance of May's local elections, local government secured key wins in last month's Budget, with many of these resulting from continuous lobbying by the LGA and Conservative councillors over recent months.

In 2019, our party committed to delivering devolution to people and places across the UK.

On a personal level, I am delighted that our fantastic Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street, has ensured the Government fulfilled its promises by securing a landmark devolution deal.

Andy's deal has secured £1.5 billion for the West Midlands region.

In addition, the announcement of 12 low-tax investment zones, one of which will be in the West Midlands, is a positive step forward.

Talking to councillors across the country, you regularly hear how local leisure centres are considered a vital part of the range of services councils offer.

## "Councils will welcome the £63 million support package to keep our swimming pools afloat"

Often acting as a community hub as well, our leisure facilities have faced pressures over the past year because of inflationary forces, placing many at risk.

I know, therefore, that councils will welcome the £63 million support package to keep our swimming pools afloat over the coming months.

My message to Conservative councillors ahead of the local elections, in just a few weeks' time, is clear: We have a strong record of delivery in local government to sell between now and May. We must let no waking hour be wasted; we must get out there in our communities and sell it!



Councillor **Bridget Smith** is Deputy Leader of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group

## 'Close the door behind you', LEPs told

We had some doubts about the abolition of regional development agencies by the then Coalition Government, which led to the creation of local enterprise partnerships (LEPs).

These were envisioned as growth agents to lead the country's long-term economic recovery.

A decade on, we now face the axing of LEPs following five years of uncertainty and prevarication – a great cruelty to their thousands of dedicated employees.

There have been justifiable concerns about the lack of consistency of their role, the variable democratic accountability, and uneven regional outcomes, but there are very many examples of success and innovation, especially when LEPs and local authorities are fully integrated.

## "We have a government obsessed with the reinvention of the wheel"

Is there sufficient justification for the announcement that they will be consigned to the dustbin of failed top-down economic meddling, with the associated costs of staff redundancies and dismantling of large independent organisations?

We have a government obsessed with the reinvention of the wheel, chopping and changing things that we are trying to make the best of.

Rather than investing in identifying best practice and learning from mistakes to put things right, government continues to advocate for top-down structures – bypassing councils when there are exemplar models of local government and the private sector working well to deliver the growth this government promotes.

It is local councils, working with the business sector, that are best placed to create jobs, revitalise our high streets and town centres, work with businesses, large and small, lead on major projects that regenerate communities, and boost economic growth in our areas.



Councillor **Mike Haines** is the LGA Independent Group's National Lead Peer

## Rising number of Independents

As the local elections approach, for many it is a time for planning and focusing on local issues, as well as an expectation of the effect of national politics on the outcomes that we will see on 5 May.

I am not seeking re-election this time, so I will be a more relaxed spectator!

It has been my privilege and pleasure to be involved with the LGA for the past 20 years, including roles as deputy chair of two boards and national lead peer.

I have enjoyed working with members from all political groups, with our shared focus to support, promote and improve local government. I have particularly enjoyed the LGA Independent Group's Next Generation Programme over the past nine years, and would recommend it if you are looking to progress your political career – see [www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent/our-work/next-generation-0](http://www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent/our-work/next-generation-0) for the opportunities it offers.

## "Voters recognise the benefits of having local councillors who are not subject to political party whips"

Over the past decade, we have seen a steady rise in the number of Independent, Green and smaller-party councillors across the country, and a growing number of administrations or coalitions of those members. We look forward to this trend continuing, as voters recognise the benefits of having local councillors who are not subject to political party whips.

With the growing number of Independent Group councillors and administrations, there is even more need for peers from our group. If you are interested in this role, please contact me or the Independent Group Office ([independent.groupLGA@local.gov.uk](mailto:independent.groupLGA@local.gov.uk)) so we can discuss your experience and expertise.

# Cost of living support for young people



**Abbee McLatchie**  
is Director of Youth Work at the National Youth Agency

**This is a hugely tough time financially for young people.**

Only this year, Centrepoin, the UK's leading homelessness charity, said in its report 'Young, homeless and hungry', that a third of vulnerable young people often go without food for a whole day because of lack of money.

Independent social change organisation the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in December's 'Going under and without' 22/23 winter tracker, found that 92 per cent of younger adults aged 18-24 go without essentials, up from 76 per cent six months ago.

The National Youth Agency (NYA) is deeply committed to supporting the youth

work sector and supporting the needs of young people affected by the economic crisis.

Our practical new resource aims to assist youth workers, social workers and other allied professionals in helping young people understand the cost-of-living crisis, develop essential money management skills, and build emotional resilience and ways to manage their health and wellbeing.

The 'Exploring the cost of living crisis' resource pack responds to the negative impact the economic recession is having on the emotional wellbeing and mental health of young people, their families, and the communities in which they live.

Aimed at those aged 13 to 19, or up to 25 with additional needs, it provides 12 practical group sessions in a safe and non-judgemental space to help young



people better understand how the cost-of-living crisis has occurred and open up difficult discussions about how it is affecting their life.

The sessions include the cost of living, the real cost of inflation, debt, savings, cooking and diet on a budget, relationships and family life, domestic abuse, wellbeing on a budget, the minimum versus the living wage, unions and strikes, and taxes.

All the activities in 'Exploring the cost of living crisis' fit with the National Youth Work Curriculum, launched by the NYA last year, which provides an educational framework and reference tool for decision-makers, policy makers, commissioners, youth workers and young people.



See [www.nya.org.uk/](http://www.nya.org.uk/) to download the resource pack and for more information about the **National Youth Work Curriculum**

## Lend a hand



**Emma Bowkett**  
is a Researcher at Neighbourly Lab

**Community volunteering is an important part of the UK's story, from air raid wardens during the Second World War to more than 12 million of us who stepped forward during the pandemic.**

Now thousands of organisations – big and small – are getting together to mark HM King Charles III's coronation by giving everybody the chance to try volunteering for themselves and to make a difference in their communities.

The Big Help Out on 8 May – part of the coronation weekend celebrations – is a day to celebrate and strengthen volunteering locally and across the nation.

Here at Neighbourly Lab, a non-profit organisation seeking to improve social connectedness across the UK, we see volunteering as a powerful tool to build social connections.

We are partnering with the Big Help



Out (BHO) to support local authorities to get involved and support the day.

Volunteering opportunities are already live on the Do-It app, and we want to help councils upload and advertise their opportunities. We can help with this, as well as with sharing ideas for how you can get involved with the BHO, supporting you to develop volunteering opportunities,

and providing comms materials for you to share locally.

We are also producing a toolkit for local authorities, focusing on setting up and delivering successful volunteering opportunities for the future.

Some local authorities are already supporting the BHO, by encouraging local organisations and residents to get involved; by staff members promoting the day and participating in volunteering; and by running 'park' events with local voluntary, social and community organisations to introduce their volunteering opportunities and encourage residents to sign up – while enjoying music and food.

Councils can also help facilitate other organisations and groups to take part by providing access to council facilities and spaces, link the BHO into their long-term volunteering strategy, and broker partnerships between residents and volunteering opportunities.

If you'd like to share any of your current goals for the Big Help Out, we would be happy to hear them. Please email me at [emma@neighbourlylab.com](mailto:emma@neighbourlylab.com)



To find out more about the Big Help Out and access support, please visit [www.neighbourlylab.com/](http://www.neighbourlylab.com/)



# Making buildings safer



**Peter Baker** is Chief Inspector of Buildings at the Health and Safety Executive

**The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is working closely with local authority building control and fire and rescue services to deliver the new building safety regime in England.**

The Building Safety Act 2022 names the HSE as the new Building Safety Regulator (BSR) and, as more of the regulator's functions and services come online, it's important that duty holders are prepared for their new roles and responsibilities under the Act.

It introduces a new regulatory framework for higher-risk buildings and a new approach to the oversight of the safety and standards of all buildings, placing residents' safety at its heart.

The regulator will help and encourage industry to step up and take action, but it will also hold to account those responsible for the safety management of buildings if they put people at risk and fail to comply with their new duties.

Ultimately, the BSR is responsible for regulating building safety in higher-risk residential buildings. However, significant regulatory decisions on building control requirements and safety case assessment will be supported by multidisciplinary teams, including, as appropriate, local authorities, fire and rescue services, and other experts.

The new building safety framework will also work alongside, and complement, existing fire and building safety and standards regimes, and the BSR will work closely with our local authority and fire and rescue service regulatory partners to ensure the right safety outcomes are achieved.

Building control, and the professionals who work in it, are a key component of a regulatory system that inspires the

confidence of industry, homeowners, and residents, and delivers safe and good-quality buildings.

The regulator's oversight function will cover the performance of all building control bodies, with local authority building control departments required to adhere and report to BSR, against a set of operational standards rules.

All professionals in the discipline, in both the private and public sectors, will be required to demonstrate their competence if they wish to continue to practise.

The Act introduces two new roles: registered building inspectors (RBIs) and registered building control approvers (RBCAs), both of which are required to meet strict competency requirements and new professional conduct rules.

The two registers will open from October this year, and the new set of standards for inspectors and approvers will become enforceable from April 2024.

The aim is to give confidence that, whether citizens engage their local authority or an approved building inspector for building control, they will receive a consistent

standard of professionalism, competency and approach.

The primary responsibility for ensuring that building work is properly managed, meets the functional standards of the Building Regulations, and delivers safe and good-quality buildings rests firmly with those carrying out the work.

It is the responsibility of local authorities and registered RBCAs to ensure that the inspectors you employ are ready to step up and work to the standards set out in the new regime.

Changing the way the building control profession is regulated is a vital part of the reforms, to make sure all buildings are designed, built and maintained to be safe and meet high standards.

The future of building safety is in all our hands and it's time for everyone to step up and act – so that, together, we can lay the foundation for a world-leading building safety regime.



**To get the latest news and updates on the BSR**, please subscribe to the BSR e-bulletin at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/building-safety/>





**Eleanor Eaton** (c) is a Postgraduate Research Student and **Dr Alistair Hunt** (r) is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Bath, and **Daniel Black** (l) is Programme Director for TRUUD at the University of Bristol

# Evaluating the health effects of urban development

**Poor-quality urban environments have substantial impacts on public and planetary health – something of which local planners and public health teams will be well aware.**

'Tackling the Root causes Upstream of Unhealthy Urban Development' (TRUUD) is a research project based at the University of Bristol, looking at how urban centres can be planned to reduce health inequalities.

It brings together experts from academia, industry and government to recommend and create new tools and processes for healthier cities.

It includes two active case studies in Bristol and Manchester.

At the University of Bath, we have been working on a new tool to evaluate the health effects of urban development proposals, with a recent paper published in the journal 'Frontiers in Public Health'.

We've demonstrated that it is possible to value the potential health effects of our urban environments and weigh these against the traditional financial costs and benefits of city development.

The tool evaluates a range of factors including how buildings, transport, natural

environment (including air pollution and green space), socio-economics and community infrastructure in new developments might improve or worsen health for their future residents. By integrating environmental economics with public health systematic reviews and urban design analysis, we were able to value the potential health effects that may result from development proposals and provide evidence to assess the health costs of urban planning decisions.

The tool, which sub-divides the urban environment into 28 characterisations, places a value not just on air pollution, which is most commonly evidenced, but also on a range of factors that could lead to premature death and chronic morbidity, profoundly affecting quality of life and the cost of healthcare. For instance, green

spaces provide a range of health benefits, especially for adults in reducing diabetes and risk of weight gain. However, they can also contribute to childhood asthma.

By adjusting scenarios, planners could have a tool for measuring the likely health impacts of increasing or decreasing the amount and quality of green spaces.

We still have some health impacts, such as mental health and chronic pain, where the evidence is incomplete, and where further research will help create a full picture for planners and policymakers.

The tool's approach was conceived during two previous studies on climate risk, followed by a pilot that shifted the focus of the tool to urban health risk and revealed that there was probably substantial demand from senior decision-makers for a valuation approach such as this (see [bit.ly/3JjNG9n](https://bit.ly/3JjNG9n)).

This is a key paper for our work in attempting to fundamentally change the way we make decisions about how we develop and manage the places in which we live, by reprioritising and more fully accounting for human and planetary health.



**To find out more about the evaluation tool,** please visit [www.bath.ac.uk/announcements/new-tool-to-value-health-of-urban-developments](https://www.bath.ac.uk/announcements/new-tool-to-value-health-of-urban-developments). For 'Tackling the Root causes Upstream of Unhealthy Urban Development' (TRUUD), please see [truud.ac.uk](https://truud.ac.uk)



# Planning for the future



**Paul Morrison**  
is Chief Executive  
of the Planning  
Inspectorate

**When I knew that I was joining the Planning Inspectorate, I spoke to people across the planning system to get a sense of what I could expect.**

I was overwhelmed by the professional respect and esteem with which the organisation is held.

It has a reputation won by delivering our core purpose, to make fair, open and impartial decisions, reports and recommendations, with great expertise. My first priority is to maintain and enhance that reputation.

But those I spoke to were not backward in coming forward on the things that could be even better.

The inspectorate has made significant improvements in the time taken for planning appeals decided by inquiry, and by hearing. We are now tackling those appeals decided by written representations.

But, overall, casework still takes too long and the time it takes is too variable.

My ultimate ambition is that all the services we provide are delivered to more consistent, quicker timelines, with no reduction in the quality of decisions and greater efficiency.

That is a task that sounds easy when written in one sentence, but it will require hard work and innovation if it is going to become reality rather than just words in an article.

It will require the overhaul of our digital systems. We saw some new services come online in 2022/23 and that will continue to roll out.

But in the coming year we will also have a particular focus on the less visible, but equally essential, developments around our data and back-office IT.

It will require us to modernise our culture and ways of working.

It will require us to adapt to a fluid policy environment and implement key policy priorities such as the planning provisions in the Levelling-up and



Regeneration Bill, changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, and the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects reforms.

It will also require us to collaborate even more closely with our partners across local government.

It has been my very great fortune over the course of my civil service career to work with many exceptional people in councils across the country, many of whom I hope are reading this article.

My experience on programmes ranging from planning reform to delivering the groundbreaking Homes for Ukraine programme has left me with a firm belief that genuine collaboration across tiers of government is critical to delivering effective public services.

It will continue to be the hallmark of how I pursue this new role.

The inspectorate has a unique position in the planning system. We connect multiple dots in this complex web of local planning authorities,

Whitehall departments, and their families of arm's-length bodies, the market and communities. I believe we are also the largest single public sector employer of chartered planners in the country.

I want to be generous in using our position to work with local government colleagues on many of the issues that will be of mutual interest.

That includes helping to align apparently competing policy priorities, building systems that allow us to reduce demand arising from the failure to do something or to do it right, and collectively addressing the challenges we face in attracting and retaining qualified planners into public service.

On these and many other critical areas of our work, I look forward to working with you.



**For more information about the Planning Inspectorate**, please visit [www.gov.uk/planning-inspectorate](http://www.gov.uk/planning-inspectorate)



# Embedding ethics in organisational culture



**Lord Jonathan Evans**  
is Chair of the  
Committee  
on Standards in  
Public Life

**The Nolan principles of public life – honesty, integrity, objectivity, selflessness, openness, accountability and leadership – are the benchmark for ethical behaviour, underpinning codes of conduct across the public sector, including in local government.**

Sticking to these principles is a personal responsibility whether you are elected, appointed, or employed by a company delivering public services on behalf of the taxpayer.

Of the seven principles, leadership was seen by Lord Nolan as the most important, critical to all the others.

Our latest report, 'Leading in practice', looks at how organisations in different sectors have sought to build and maintain ethical leadership.

In some cases, the good practice emerged from a deeper focus on standards following a crisis and, in others, from a realisation within the organisation that new systems and processes were

needed to support their employees.

The clear message from the evidence is that ethical leadership isn't just a 'nice to have'. Business and public sector leaders told us that having shared values and helping staff live up to them is critical to the wider success of every organisation.

Codes and rules can only go so far. People don't operate in a vacuum; organisations can hinder or facilitate ethical behaviour, which is why organisational culture is so important.

An approach that focuses only on compliance is a missed opportunity; the best leaders galvanise and empower the people in their organisations to aim high, tapping into the public service ethos that attracts many to a career in the public sector.

There is no single right way to embed an ethical culture in organisations, but a range of possible approaches and measures. So, instead of making recommendations, our report shares case studies and examples to inspire further discussion and action, recognising that each organisation and every local authority is different.

The examples are highlighted not as a gold standard to reach, but to show how others have tried to integrate ethical values into their policies, practices and ways of working – from the way leaders communicate with employees, to the priority given to developing good decision-making, to the approach taken to recruitment and performance management.

Building an ethical culture does not happen by accident, it requires proactive attention to make ethics part of the day-to-day conversation.

Central government has welcomed this work and I hope it will help stimulate those discussions and action in local authorities too.



**i** 'Leading in practice' can be read in full at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/leading-in-practice](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leading-in-practice)

## Exchange of ethical dilemmas

Avon and Somerset Police and Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust have partnered to share skills and experience on ethical decision-making.

Senior staff from the trust chair the police ethics committee and ethical cases are shared in both organisations' ethics committees.

Exchanging dilemmas has been valuable where there is an overlap between the police and the medical profession.

For example, how best to protect girls born in the UK to women who have undergone female genital mutilation?

Key officers presented a specific case to the medical committee. It was a complex scenario, raising issues such as the protection of individuals, confidentiality, family dynamics, community issues, and appropriateness of intervention.

The issues were debated thoroughly by both ethics committees and, subsequently, a multi-agency risk-assessment tool was created, considering a host of likely risk factors, which has

helped relieve tensions resulting from some communities feeling unfairly and disproportionately targeted.

Sharing dilemmas has also been used successfully in unconnected areas – for example, dilemmas relating to

organ transplants and undercover policing. This sharing has helped to develop the thinking of both committees, and it has provided the referring officers with a broader range of considerations on which to reflect.



# ELECTIONS



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



## Greens ‘becoming stronger’

Only one seat changed hands in this latest batch of 10 local by-elections, as the Greens recaptured Hythe West in Kent from the Conservatives.

Jenni Hawkins’ victory adds to the party’s presence on the county council and encourages its district councillors that they will shortly retain seats on Folkestone & Hythe District Council.

The Greens will be defending more than 200 seats in May, but should add to that number, such is the party’s current progress.

Between recording its first by-election gain in the now-defunct Glanford District Council, in June 1990, and 2019, the Green Party made 28 gains.

In the past two years alone, it has matched that number, largely at the expense of the Conservatives, who have lost 21 seats to them.

A combination of electoral dissatisfaction with the Conservatives, nationally and locally, and opportunities often arising from planning and environmental issues, the Greens are becoming stronger. But there remains a notable geographic skew in performance.

Seven in 10 by-election successes have been across the South East, South West and Eastern England. In the annual May elections, the party struggles to have broad appeal, with the notable exceptions of Brighton & Hove, and Bristol.

We should also mention Lancaster and Sheffield in the North, with Norwich, Solihull and Stroud further south, where the party now has resilience.

There are many councils where Greens are elected in smaller numbers and, in these places, local activists must consider the calls being made by Liberal Democrat Leader Sir Ed Davey for electoral pacts against the Conservatives in May and beyond.

While the Greens do not claim to have anywhere near the electoral base the Liberal Democrats still retain, they do have momentum.

In the three years before the pandemic, Green candidates contested half of all by-election vacancies, with Liberal Democrat challengers in more than eight in 10.

Since 2021, the Greens have been contesting 56 per cent of seats, while the Liberal Democrats have fallen back to 74 per cent.

Frequently, far from avoiding one another, the two parties stand together.

The complexities of evolving the so-called progressive alliance between these two and Labour are many. Despite this, there are instances where enthusiasts for an electoral pact play the ‘what if’ game.

The Conservatives’ two successful

defences in Staffordshire, where the seats adjoin one another, provide examples.

In Tamworth, the winning margin of 20 votes over Labour in the district contest was smaller than the 35 votes cast for the Greens.

In the fight for the larger county division, the Conservative candidate won by 144 votes, with the Liberal Democrat challenger polling 160 votes.

What if the Green and Liberal Democrat had each stood aside, then surely Labour would have made two more gains from the Conservatives? Maybe, or maybe not.

There will be heightened interest in the pattern of party competition at this year’s May elections, particularly in areas where parties under the umbrella of ‘progressive’ are seen to conduct talks with one another.

But we shouldn’t expect local activists – the people campaigning throughout the year – to necessarily bend to the entreaties of national party leaderships.



For more details on these and other recent results, please visit [www.lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections](http://www.lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections)

### Local by-elections

#### Haringey, Tottenham Hale

LAB HELD  
43.2% over Lib Dem      Turnout 20.0%

#### Hounslow, Heston West

LAB HELD  
30.1% over Lib Dem      Turnout 21.1%

#### Kent, Hythe West

GREEN GAIN FROM CON  
13.6% over Con      Turnout 27.3%

#### Newcastle, Byker

LAB HELD  
17.1% over Green      Turnout 19.2%

#### Oxford, Littlemore

LAB HELD  
7.4% over Ind      Turnout 34.0%

#### Oxfordshire, Rose Hill and Littlemore

LAB HELD  
4.6% over Ind      Turnout 34.0%

#### South Cambridgeshire, Cottenham

LIB DEM HELD  
9.0% over Con      Turnout 41.4%

#### Staffordshire, Watling South

CON HELD  
7.8% over Lab      Turnout 19.2%

#### Tamworth, Belgrave

CON HELD  
2.1% over Lab      Turnout 17.4%

#### Wrexham, Smithfield

PLAID CYMRU HELD  
6.0% over Lab      Turnout 28.0%

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# LGA 23

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