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“90-95 per cent of what we do in local government has nothing to do with politics, and that’s our strength”

**Councillor James Jamieson OBE,
outgoing LGA
Chairman**

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In the zone

I'm looking forward to seeing many of you at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth from 4-6 July.

It's the local government event of the year, covering all the key issues facing the sector, with speakers including Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary Michael Gove, Labour Leader Sir Keir Starmer, and Liberal Democrat Leader Sir Ed Davey (p10-11).

The conference's ever-popular Innovation Zone will be providing inspiration and coffee (p13), and we will be launching our latest report on providing support to councillors facing abuse and intimidation (p16-17).

Elsewhere in this month's **first**, we also hear from the Welsh LGA about the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act and how it will improve wellbeing and public services (p15).

We outline the LGA's updated sector support programme, primarily funded by the UK government (p20-21).

With councils around the country marking LGBTQ+ Pride, we hear from Cllr Sarah Courtney about being a role model, community leadership and governance (p29); and from Housing Ombudsman Richard Blakeway about housing management (p30).

Our lead comment is from Veterans Minister Johnny Mercer MP, who outlines available funding and flexibilities to help councils resettle Afghans currently living in hotels (p25).

Cllr James Jamieson

is LGA Chairman

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Editor Karen Thornton
Design & print CPL www.cpl.co.uk
Advertising julie.badrick@cpl.co.uk

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

Email karen.thornton@local.gov.uk
Tel editorial 07464 652610
Tel advertising 01223 378 023

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Local 
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Pressures remain on adult social care

More adult social care is being delivered in England, but it is not keeping pace with increased needs, according to a new survey from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS).

A huge effort by council social care teams to rebuild services after the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced care waiting lists from a high of 542,000 in April 2022 to 430,000 at the end of March 2023.

Despite a reduction in the number

of people waiting for care assessments, however, care waiting lists remain far too high and ADASS is warning they could rise again this winter without more staff.

To improve social care, boost the economy and enable carers to continue working, ADASS is calling on the Government to invest in support that helps people avoid going into hospital or a care home in the first place, and enables them to recover, get back on their

feet and back home if they do end up in hospital this winter.

ADASS also wants increased support for carers and improvements in workforce pay, and a fully funded, long-term plan to transform social care to ensure everyone in England can get the care and support they need, when they need it.

Cllr David Baines, Vice-Chair of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said the LGA supported the report's recommendations.

"While the decrease in the number of people waiting for care assessments is a positive and notable achievement, a record NHS backlog, rising mental health needs, and support around domestic abuse of people with care and support needs means demand continues to rise for councils," he added.

"The fact that directors are having to plan savings of £806 million, as part of wider council budget-setting in 2023/24, further demonstrates the extremely challenging situation adult social care is facing.

"It is deeply concerning to see that most councils are not confident they can meet all of their statutory duties required by law.

"This, partnered with the increase in the number of unpaid carers reporting burnout, could have serious impacts for many people who draw on care and support.

"This report shows the impact of a chronically underfunded system and the pressures councils continue to face."



Call to increase ill-health prevention spending rejected

The Government has rejected calls to increase the proportion of funding spent on preventing ill-health – a decision described as “disappointing” by the LGA.

Former health secretary Patricia Hewitt published her independent review of integrated care systems (ICSs) in April, in which she made a series of recommendations, including increasing the proportion of spending on prevention by 1 per cent a year.

The Government's response, published in June, outlines the steps the Department of Health and Social care will take over the coming months, working with

NHS England and local health and care systems, to support learning and improvement and join up care for patients and communities.

However, it rejects the health prevention recommendation.

Cllr David Baines, Vice-Chair of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: “The LGA is largely supportive of the recommendations of the Hewitt Review to government, in particular those that proposed a significant reduction in the number of national targets for ICSs, and the clear focus on prevention as a priority for ICSs.

“We are therefore disappointed that the Government has rejected

the Hewitt Review suggestion to grow the proportion of funding spent on prevention by 1 per cent per year.

“Without resources specifically earmarked for prevention, we will not see the radical step change in NHS investment that is required to turn the curve on a growing burden of ill-health and long-term conditions.

“While the response recognises the value of sector-led improvement, we are also somewhat disappointed that the Government has not given an explicit commitment to supporting the development of a peer-led approach for ICS leaders.”



No more delays to packaging waste reforms, LGA urges

Further delays to the implementation of extended producer responsibility (EPR) will cost taxpayers and the environment, the LGA has warned.

The UK-wide EPR scheme encourages businesses to reduce packaging and boost recycling by passing the costs of managing the waste to them, in ways that reward using recyclable material. The UK Government first proposed the scheme in 2018, with the aim of it beginning in 2023. It has been widely supported by partners, but has already been delayed by a year to 2024.

Data shows that delay has meant producers haven't had to pay £1.2 billion to meet waste and recycling costs. This has left local taxpayers having to continue to pick up this bill, which would double to £2.4 billion if EPR is delayed by a further year.

Cllr Linda Taylor, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson, said: "Public satisfaction with their local council waste service remains high, but everyone wants to see less waste and more recycling.

"Currently, local taxpayers foot the bill for processing the waste, often dealing with excessive packaging and the challenges of material that is difficult to recycle.

"EPR is a transformative policy, widely supported by partners, in helping to cut packaging waste, boost recyclability, save money, and protect the environment. We cannot afford further delays.

"Every place is different, and what works for reducing waste in an urban tower block is different for a rural cottage.

"Councils need the flexibility to meet the needs of communities and play their lead role working with government, industry and communities to lead this change in partnership."



14,000 unable to vote due to ID changes

Around 14,000 people were unable to vote at the May local elections in England because they did not have correct photo identification, according to the Electoral Commission.

It found that 4 per cent of all people who said they did not vote identified the new ID requirement as the reason.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA chairman, said: "Councils have risen to the challenge to deliver these new voter ID requirements smoothly and this is a testament to the hard work of local election teams.

"They also did all they could with the resources they had to raise awareness of the changes in their local communities.

"It is a fundamental part of the democratic process that elections can run smoothly and effectively where

every citizen is able to exercise their right to vote.

"It is therefore of concern that this review found that some groups may have been more impacted than others by the introduction of voter ID, with a small number being left unable to vote.

"Councils know their communities best and, with the right resources, are a key part of the solution to tackle a lack of awareness of voter ID requirements in local areas. This is particularly important as we approach a potential General Election, where turnout will likely be much higher.

"We look forward to hearing the Electoral Commission's forthcoming recommendations and hope that the Government acts decisively to address any concerns it raises."

COVID-19: Government 'didn't trust councils'

Central government was "not always willing to share information with local partners" and occasionally showed a "lack of trust" in councils, the Covid-19 Inquiry has heard.

In his opening statement to the inquiry, Robin Allen QC, the LGA's and Welsh LGA's barrister, highlighted the huge role played by local government in supporting communities through the pandemic.

He also flagged concerns about central government's lack of understanding of the way local government in England worked and what it could contribute, and pointed to a lack of trust in local authorities, as well as a misplaced confidence by central government about what it could achieve itself.

Mr Allen drew the inquiry's attention to the lack of funding for councils over the past decade, stressing that councils had lost 60p out of every pound of funding against a backdrop of rising demand for key services, such as adult and children's social care.

This, he said, had impacted the ability to plan, prepare and resource for a pandemic, and the overall resilience of services.

The LGA and Welsh LGA are core participants for modules 1 and 2 of the inquiry, to ensure the local government perspective is properly represented in the inquiry's work.

Modules 1 and 2 cover 'resilience and preparedness', and 'core UK decision-making and political governance'.

The LGA is also working with the inquiry team to facilitate the provision of information it requires from local government, while minimising the burdens on councils.



In brief first survey

What do you think of **first** magazine – and do you read the **first** e-bulletin or use **first** online (www.local.gov.uk/first)? Whether you are a newly elected councillor or a veteran with many years' experience, we want to know how we can improve **first** and its e-versions to make it more useful to you and your colleagues. Current readers should shortly receive a personal email with a link to our 2023 readership survey, or you can make your views known by completing the survey at bit.ly/436lwXN or www.local.gov.uk/first. The closing date is Monday 31 July, and all responses will be treated confidentially. Please email karen.thornton@local.gov.uk with any queries about the content of the survey, and keiron.watt@local.gov.uk for any technical problems completing it.

Top apprentice

Laura De Campos Duhdamell, from Surrey County Council, has been named 2023 Local Government Apprentice of the Year. A Projects and Partnership Support Assistant and Level 3 apprentice in business administration, Laura was one of more than 130 Level 2 and 3 local government apprentices to take part in a virtual day of challenges designed and delivered by South West Councils and the East of England LGA, working alongside the LGA. The one-day national event, now in its third year, saw apprentices from councils in Wales and Northern Ireland take part for the first time. See www.local.gov.uk/news

Teachers' conditions

A handbook setting out the conditions of service for school teachers in England and Wales has been updated for the first time in more than two decades. The Burgundy Book is a national agreement between the five teacher unions and the national employers. It is relevant to around 500,000 teachers and is an essential reference for all schools – maintained and academies – with the majority choosing to incorporate the agreement into their teachers' contracts of employment. Its main provisions relate to notice periods, sick leave and pay, and maternity leave and pay. LGA member councils can download the Burgundy Book from www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support

Sexual health services 'at breaking point'

Increased demand at the same time as historic reductions to local public health budgets are putting sexual health services at risk of a breaking point, the LGA has warned.

New figures published by the UK Health Security Agency show diagnoses of certain sexually transmitted infections doubled last year.

Gonorrhoea diagnoses increased to 82,592 in 2022, a rise of 50.3 per cent compared with 2021, while there was a 23.8 per cent increase in the number of new diagnoses of sexually transmitted infections in 2022.

The figures also reveal that there were 2,195,909 sexual health screens performed by sexual health services, an increase of 13.4 per cent compared with 2021.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "These new statistics continue to show that local council-commissioned sexual health services are at risk of breaking point, with rising demand coming at the same time as real-terms cuts to funding.

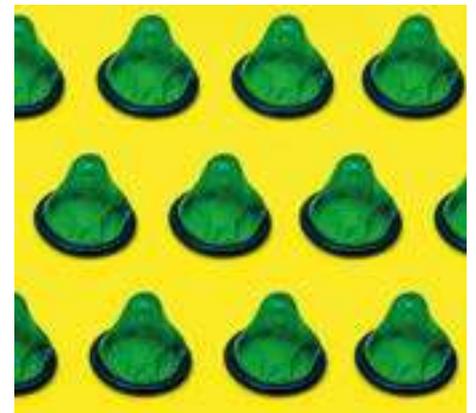
"It is encouraging to see more people visiting their local sexual health clinic, which is a testament to the work of councils with hard-to-reach communities in their areas,

as well as the new cutting-edge treatments on offer.

"However, this is becoming increasingly unsustainable without a long-term increase in councils' public health grant, which goes towards funding vital sexual health services.

"The Government should ensure sexual and reproductive health funding is increased to levels that match the increases in demand local services have seen.

"Investment in early intervention helps to save costs to the health service and prevents problems developing further down the line."



Pay rise funded for councils' NHS staff

Staff working for the NHS in council-commissioned community health services are due to have their pay rise funded by government, it has been announced.

In a document sent to directors of public health, the Department of Health and Social Care said that NHS provider staff working in services commissioned by councils – such as for sexual health and health visiting – would have their pay rise funded by government.

However, it is not clear if this will be extended to staff working for social enterprises or charities who are also entitled to the pay increase.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "It is positive that the Government has acted

on calls from the LGA to fund increases in pay for hardworking NHS staff working in council-commissioned community services.

"Without these assurances, councils would have had no choice but to make cuts to vital services, such as local sexual health clinics, health visitors and addiction support services, in order to fund the increase.

"Councils now also need clarity on whether pay increases for staff working in other non-NHS provided services, who provide vital services in their communities, will also be fully funded. This includes staff employed by charities and other organisations.

"If unaddressed, a two-tier system could be created, impacting on staff and services."

Councils sound alarm on local climate threats

Risks to people's health from heatwaves is the greatest priority climate concern for councils, according to a new LGA survey on local climate preparedness.

Other council concerns identified in the survey include: damage to critical infrastructure and buildings, such as roads and homes; widespread risks to people and the economy from climate-related failure of the power system; lack of data; and lack of funding.

Last year brought record-breaking temperatures, wildfire incidents and significant infrastructure disruption, with extreme heat leading to thousands of excess deaths across the country. The year before, councils dealt with significant flash flooding.

The LGA said urgent action is needed to prepare our villages, towns and cities for the impacts of climate change. It is calling for the UK Government to enable urgent acceleration of local adaptation action as part of its forthcoming

National Adaptation Programme (NAP) in England. The NAP must include more to raise awareness of how people and partners can adapt to climate change, improve the availability of data to prepare for climate risks in places, and ensure policies and investments reflect adaptation, as well as net-zero efforts, according to the LGA.

Cllr Linda Taylor, LGA Environment Spokesperson, said: "The impacts of climate change are going to intensify into the future, and councils are warning people and places will be left increasingly vulnerable without further preparation.

"Councils need support to prepare their communities for the impacts of climate change now and... funding and resources to adequately reduce the risks to lives and livelihoods.

"As the leaders of local areas, councils are at the forefront of local climate action: they must be made able to protect their residents."

'Restore £200m cut in active travel budgets' – LGA

The LGA has called for active travel funding to be restored to councils, in response to a report that found funding uncertainty has held back ambitions in this area.

The National Audit Office, Parliament's financial watchdog, has reported that the Government is "not on track" to meet its objectives to increase rates of cycling and walking.

Cllr Linda Taylor, LGA Transport Spokesperson, said: "Councils have been at the forefront in creating new active travel schemes, and have embraced the Government's ambition that 50 per cent of all journeys in English towns and cities are walked or cycled by 2030, and for

the UK to be net zero by 2050. As this report rightly highlights, they can only continue to do this with long-term certainty for vital local projects that help to cut congestion and make our air cleaner.

"It is therefore disappointing that councils have seen an unexpected £200 million cut to their budgets for these projects, and the Government should urgently restore this much-needed funding.

"This will allow councils to plan a pipeline of active travel infrastructure investments, engage more effectively with local communities, and invest in necessary skills and capacity for their own staff."



Funding for resettling new arrivals

The Government has launched a second round of funding for councils to help resettle new arrivals to the UK and reduce the risk of homelessness.

The majority of the £250 million second round of the Local Authority Housing Fund is for housing people on Afghan resettlement schemes who are currently in bridging accommodation, mainly hotels.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "We are pleased that the Government is continuing to work with the LGA and councils on funding to help families move to their own homes, reduce homelessness risks and help local partners acquire more housing.

"It is helpful the Government is continuing to respond in a more joined-up way to issues across all programmes for new arrivals.

"We look forward to continuing to work with them to identify and implement further solutions to growing accommodation challenges. The flexibility to open up these new or repurposed homes to more general use in the long term will also assist with housing challenges across local communities.

"There continues to be a crisis across the refugee and asylum system, compounded by a housing crisis and the rapidly approaching deadline for Afghan families to move on from hotels by the end of the summer.

"Councils have been at the sharp end of the rise in the number of people presenting as homeless, and need urgent solutions to pressing housing needs in the short and the long term across all the schemes that welcome new arrivals to the UK."

● See p25





Protections for renters

LGA calls for rent repayment orders

The long-awaited **Renters (Reform) Bill** has been introduced to Parliament, almost a year after the publication of the Government's 'A fairer private rented sector' White Paper.

The Bill is a landmark opportunity to improve security and conditions for tenants in the private rented sector and make it fit for the future.

The legislation introduces a range of reforms to achieve this, including: abolishing unfair Section 21 'no fault' evictions; ending the system of assured shorthold tenancies; creating a new register of private sector landlords and a property portal to improve data on the sector for tenants and enforcement authorities; and establishing a redress scheme through a new ombudsman.

Councils will play a key role in the delivery and enforcement of these reforms, including ensuring compliance with the landlord register, property portal and grounds for possession, and enforcing the new Decent Homes Standard, which the Government will introduce in secondary legislation.

While local government has the appetite to drive up standards in the private rented sector, many councils continue to face significant challenges in resourcing their enforcement teams to undertake the scale of proactive work that is needed.

Ahead of the Bill's first debate in Parliament, the LGA has been impressing upon government and MPs that adequately resourcing councils will be fundamental to the success of the reforms.

We are also calling on government to urgently work with sector experts to develop a skills and capacity-building strategy to tackle workforce challenges in regulatory and enforcement teams.

Without this, the legislation is unlikely to deliver the changes for tenants that are desperately needed.

As the Bill progresses through Parliament, we will be working with government to refine the legislation to close loopholes and ensure councils have the right tools to make it work on the ground.

Enforcing several key aspects of the Bill will rely heavily on tenants understanding their rights and being able to identify and report non-compliance.

We therefore believe that local housing authorities and tenants should be able to seek rent repayment orders from landlords that do not comply with the landlord register and property portal, or misuse grounds for eviction.

"Councils will play a key role in the enforcement of these reforms"

As well as acting as an additional deterrent to fines, the ability to claim back rent would incentivise tenants to check for and report non-compliance – in turn, supporting and reducing the burden on councils' enforcement teams.

We will also be working to ensure that the new grounds for eviction are not open to abuse, and that councils have full local flexibility to employ selective licensing schemes.

While the Bill is a vital step forward, it will do nothing to support private renters who are already struggling to afford their rent alongside other cost-of-living pressures. That is why we continue to press government on the need for urgent action to tackle the drivers of the housing emergency.

This includes empowering councils to deliver a step-change in council house building, and ensuring the private rented sector is an affordable option for low-income households by realigning local housing allowance with at least the 30th percentile of local property values.

 To find out more about the LGA's work in Parliament, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament



How best can we help **young care leavers** transition positively to adult life?

CCLA has been managing council investments since 1961. A pioneer in sustainable investing, we continue to push for progress to be a force for Good in our industry.

But at this year's LGA conference, we're discussing another pressing issue.

Making the transition to adult life is a difficult time for most young people, especially for those leaving care who may not have enjoyed the stability of their own family. Care leavers can face the future feeling alone, without the financial support to move into safe accommodation, enter education, find employment or achieve good health and a positive sense of well-being.

So we seek to build a collaboration between CCLA, community foundations and local authorities to find practical ways to tackle these significant social challenges.

Visit us at the CCLA stand at LGA2023 or get in touch to find out more:

clientservices@ccla.co.uk



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Councillor **James Jamieson** OBE is LGA Chairman

Make it local

With a General Election due by early 2025, it's time to listen to our communities and let them shape the agenda

The LGA's Annual Conference and Exhibition returns to Bournemouth next week – and I'm very much looking forward to seeing many of you there for three days of discussion and debate.

As usual, we have a plethora of high-profile national, local and international speakers (see right), to help us reflect on and learn from the key issues facing local government.

What's the long-term outlook for adult social care and support? Should growth be a statutory responsibility? Do we need to change the way we travel?

These are just some of the questions delegates will be asked in a series of conference sessions covering everything from housing quality to supporting asylum and resettlement, tackling the crisis in children's social care to the future of waste services, and devolution to strengthening financial wellbeing and resilience.

Meanwhile, councils at the forefront of innovative thought and practice will be showcasing their projects in the conference's vibrant, creative and interactive Innovation Zone – fuelled by free, professionally brewed coffee, courtesy of Newton, the zone's sponsor (see p13).

We will be celebrating the 10th anniversary of One Public Estate, the winners of the Local Government Challenge and the work of the LGA's member and officer peers.

I hope you also find time to catch up and socialise with colleagues.

We will, of course, be meeting ahead of a General Election that could be called any time in the next 18 months.

The LGA has already begun work to influence the political parties' manifestos on behalf of local government, and we will be launching a

new report at conference setting out the changes our communities want to see.

'Make it local' makes the case for listening to local communities and outlines recent polling showing our residents already have clear priorities for the General Election.

These include growing the economy, improving our health and care services, acting on climate change, tackling the rising cost of living, building more houses, improving life chances for all children, making our communities safer, and building strong local politics.

Councils are integral to getting these issues right for residents. Homes, jobs, and basic public services, such as roads and parks, are all core to what councils provide for their communities.

Councils touch the everyday lives of people and places and have experienced first-hand the way in which national and international pressures impact on communities – arranging accommodation for those fleeing conflict in Afghanistan and Ukraine, supporting people and businesses through the pandemic, and planning for climate resilience.

Local leaders also understand that you cannot build a safe and thriving high street from a desk in Whitehall; you cannot tackle multi-generational health and income inequality through departmental silos and short-term funding pots; and you cannot drive prosperity and growth without power and resources aligned to the different opportunities and challenges of England's towns, cities, and villages.

Councils shape their local areas but they are also providers of key services.

As we all know – and as 'Make it local' sets out – public services can be delivered faster, better and more efficiently at a local level.



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"There is an opportunity now to fully empower communities through local government"

For example, local climate action could hit net zero by 2050 while saving taxpayers around £140 billion when compared with national approaches – and return an additional £400 billion in wider co-benefits.

There is an opportunity now to fully empower communities through local government. This would mean trusting that communities, through their local councils, are best placed to take decisions on how frontline services are delivered.

However, if national government wants to tackle these challenges we all face and achieve the ambitions of the electorate, it must reset its relationship with local government.

Our delivery offer to central government requires a new central-local partnership in which local government can work to its full potential.

It requires fully empowered local

“We have a plethora of high-profile national, local and international speakers”



Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove at the LGA's 2022 annual conference in Harrogate

See you in Bournemouth...

The LGA's annual conference kicks off in Bournemouth from 4-6 July, with a host of speakers from across local and national government, other public services, business and the third sector, addressing more than 1,400 delegates.

It's not too late to book your place, at www.local.gov.uk/conference. You can also download the conference app via the App Store or Google Play (search for 'LGA events'). And you can follow events on Twitter using **#LGAConf23**, or online by visiting www.local.gov.uk.

In addition to councillors, elected mayors and chief executives from across local government, this year's conference speakers also include:

- **Michael Gove MP**, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
- **Sir Keir Starmer MP**, Leader of the Labour Party
- **Sir Ed Davey MP**, Leader of the Liberal Democrats
- **Gillian Keegan MP**, Secretary of State for Education
- **Sir Robert Chote**, Chair, UK Statistics Authority
- **Richard Blakeway**, Housing Ombudsman
- **Alice Tai MBE**, Paralympic Swimmer
- **Kwajo Tweneboza**, Housing Campaigner
- **Lord Amyas Morse**, Interim Chair, Office for Local Government
- **Lee Rowley MP**, Minister for Local Government and Building Safety
- **Kerry McCarthy MP**, Shadow Minister for Climate Change
- **Clive Betts MP**, Chair, Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee
- **Lord Timothy Clement-Jones CBE**, Liberal Democrat Lords Spokesperson for Science, Innovation and Technology
- **Dame Christine Lenehan**, Director, Council for Disabled Children
- **Jo Bibby**, Director of Health, The Health Foundation
- **Matthew Taylor**, Chief Executive, NHS Confederation
- **Jane Gratton**, Head of People Policy, British Chambers of Commerce
- **Gillian Cooper**, Head of Energy Policy, Citizens Advice
- **Chris Skidmore MP**, Chair, Net Zero Review
- **Sunder Katwala**, Director, British Future
- **Steve Gooding CB**, Director, RAC Foundation
- **Tom Hawthorn**, Head of Policy, Electoral Commission
- **Sue Bridge FRPI**, President, Royal Town Planning Institute
- **Beverley Tarka**, President, Association of Directors of Adult Social Services

government, a resetting of Whitehall culture, and a new approach to funding and resources.

'Make it local' sets out some of the specifics of this. For example, devolution needs to go further, and councils should have a statutory right to convene national public services delivered locally.

We need a new code for ministerial advice that asks 'what do our local frontline services say?' before embarking on new initiatives.

And we need to save money through fewer initiatives and by ending the costly and fragmented funding regime.

National policy alone cannot make effective change.

It is only at a local level – with local knowledge – that services are effectively delivered and that we can make a difference to the lives of our communities and deliver on their hopes for the future.

i Please visit www.local.gov.uk/conference to join us at the LGA's annual conference, the local government event of the year. **If you can't make it, you can follow the conference on social media** at **#LGAConf23** or online via our website.



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Delegates at the annual conference last year

NEWTON

REIMAGINING PUBLIC SERVICES



Newton is delighted to be sponsoring the Innovation Zone at this year's LGA Conference.

We invite you to join a special 'Spotlight On' session with bestselling writer, speaker, coach and consultant James Kerr. James has studied the leadership secrets behind the world's most successful sporting team, the All Blacks, and translated this into powerful and practical lessons for individual, team and organisational leadership.

His insight into sports psychology, leadership practice and organisational science act as a powerful catalyst for change within organisations.

Hosted by Owen Mapley, Chief Executive of Hertfordshire County Council, James will share his reflections on leadership, sustained success, resilience and creating high performance cultures in local government.

The session will take place on **Tuesday 4th July from 3.20pm to 4.00pm.**

Find out more from the conference app.

We'll be running several other sessions in the Innovation Zone that draw upon our local and national client and partnership programmes. They are reimagining public services and are focused on the needs of people and communities in a way that also ensures the financial sustainability of critical public services and fosters greater staff engagement. We look forward to sharing our insight with you. Please see the conference app for more details.



Delivering Home Ownership Through Affordable Rent-to-Buy

Rentplus is the leading provider of affordable rent-to-buy housing on new developments. Fully NPPF-compliant, we support aspirant renting households who dream of owning their home. We do this by removing the deposit barrier, turning renters into homeowners.

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We offer bespoke strategic partnerships for local authorities to achieve accelerated delivery of affordable housing.

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t: 01908 738738

e: info@rentplus-uk.com

w: www.rentplus-uk.com





Peter Fleming OBE is Chair of the LGA's Innovation Zone Member Working Group

Challenge and **change**

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Innovation Zone in 2022

Find out about emerging practice and innovative ideas

The Innovation Zone is the 'ideas hub' of the LGA's annual conference, featuring the best and brightest new ideas in local government.

As Chair of the Innovation Zone Member Working Group, I'm absolutely delighted to be participating in this year's programme, and to share this vibrant and creative space with you at conference, which takes place from 4-6 July in Bournemouth.

This year's Innovation Zone will feature an engaging programme of sessions set around the theme of 'Challenge and change'. It will recognise the significant shared obstacles councils face today, while shining a light on some of the emerging notable practice and innovative ideas being taken forward to respond and drive improvement in the sector.

Our diverse programme features more than 50 engaging talks from councils and partners from across the sector, including international speakers.

Delegates will have the opportunity to learn about new and innovative

approaches to topics such as: adults' and children's services; digital and cyber technologies; community wellbeing and health; economic growth; workforce; and equality, diversity and inclusion. There will be presentations that bring projects and approaches across these areas to life.

These sessions form the main part of the Innovation Zone programme, with up to three presentations running at any one time, so there is always something exciting on to inspire delegates.

All sessions will be creative and interactive, with opportunities for delegates to ask questions and share learning about improving local government services and communities across all regions.

This year, there is the return of 'Spotlight on' sessions, which will highlight particularly innovative practice from across the sector and are not to be missed!

The series highlights a play by Stan's Café Theatre Company, which turns Birmingham City Council's budget-setting process into an

entertaining performance involving 7,000 golden dominoes and a life-sized bear named Bordesley.

With thanks to Newton, our Innovation Zone sponsor, the 'Spotlight on' series will also feature a special presentation by James Kerr, author of the global bestseller 'Legacy', who will discuss how to bring inspirational leadership to your organisation.

Following the huge success of 2022's climate change panel, we will be repeating this event with a series of new speakers. These include the Centre for Alternative Technology with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council; Local Partnerships with Cambridgeshire County Council; the South West Net Zero Hub with Cornwall Council; and Westminster City Council.

New to this year's programme are the 'Celebrating Success' events. I will be chairing a celebration of the work of our peers, and other events in this segment include the Local Government Challenge awards ceremony, One Public Estate's 10-year anniversary, and an opening session from Liverpool City Council celebrating Eurovision and the importance of culture.

Finally, besides its own excellent programme of events, Newton will be supplying free coffee throughout the conference, brewed by a team of professional baristas, to give delegates a chance to recharge!

Find out more about the Innovation Zone and book your conference place at www.local.gov.uk/conference – I can't wait to see you in Bournemouth.



i You can access the Innovation Zone programme online at www.local.gov.uk/innovation-zone-2023 and on the free LGA conference app, which can be downloaded from the Apple App Store and Google Play by searching for 'LGA Events'. **If you have any questions about the Innovation Zone**, please email innovationzone@local.gov.uk

Significant budget savings with drone roof surveys

Traditionally, councils (and many others) undertake roof surveys and property condition reports for housing stock manually, with scaffolding erected around each property – allowing for human inspection.

Programmes of this scale can last anything upwards of a year, depending on the portfolio.

They can be intensive in terms of staff hours, and costly, and they can also be a nuisance for residents – particularly in the summer months when scaffolding can prevent the opening of windows.

For local authorities, finding partners who can offer significant cost efficiencies without impact on quality is critical. One solution is to deliver surveys by drone using aerial specialists Sky Revolutions.

This approach entirely negates the need for scaffolding, removes nuisance to residents, cuts down on the time needed to undertake surveys, delivers detailed data much quicker and, importantly, massively reduces inspection cost.

In the financial year 2020-21, English housing associations alone spent a combined £5.4 billion on repairs and maintenance.

An FOI request by MyJobQuote revealed responses from 244 UK councils showing that spend on responsive repairs and maintenance averaged £8,173 per house in the year 2020-21, placing considerable demand on council budgets – at a time when pressure on the public purse has never been greater.

Drones offer significant savings on traditional surveys, and these are likely to be even higher when factoring in the reduced nuisance to residents.

As well as having to keep windows shut in places, residents face an increased security risk and concerns relating to fire hazard – increasing their anxiety and placing a heavy burden on back-office admin



in resident communication management.

Sky Revolutions' Managing Director, Ben Gorham, says: "Accurate observation is key in our markets.

"We're often tasked with working in tricky, hard-to-reach areas, and sometimes sites can pose logistical or safety challenges. This means we need to be incredibly efficient in gathering the data our clients need.

"Directing our drones to the point of interest quickly and safely is critical. Our building and asset inspection software platform lets us systematise image content efficiently, meaning we spend more time highlighting the issues for our customers and less time organising the data; the platform does much of that hard work for us.

"This double efficiency is of massive benefit to our clients."

Only specialist commercial operators with the right permissions for flying in populated areas can undertake these types of aerial surveys in inner cities.

But coupled with this expertise is the knowledge to translate what is being seen into actionable data.

Sky Revolutions has built its drone expertise on top of solid construction experience, meaning it has a head-start in understanding what their drones can see.

Gorham says: "I've instilled construction knowledge in my team here at Sky Revolutions, recruiting and training team members and pilots to spot remediation issues from height.

"Whether we're looking at roofs, wind turbines, power lines or telecom towers – customers have faith in our ability to get to the heart of the matter quickly and present that data to them clearly."

Sky Revolutions' pilots are professional commercial operators with permission to work in built-up areas.

The cost, speed and safety benefits of using drones to survey are slowly trickling through to the complex housing management sectors.

Moving away from long-entrenched methods of inspection can take time, but as we evolve to make better use of tech, so the benefits are beginning to be more widely shared.

To find out more, please visit skyrevolutions.co.uk/local-authority or call 01778 560929

Social partnership

Working together for a fairer, greener future



Councillor **Anthony Hunt** is the Welsh LGA's Workforce Spokesperson

A landmark piece of legislation was recently passed in Wales which galvanises a uniquely Welsh way of working, with local government right at its centre.

The Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act, the first in Wales to receive Royal Assent by HM King Charles III, will aim to improve wellbeing and public services through social partnership and socially responsible procurement.

The Act creates a statutory social partnership framework at an all-Wales level by establishing a permanent Social Partnership Council for Wales, bringing together the Welsh Government, employers – including local government – and trade unions, to help influence policies, activities, and strategic priorities.

Public bodies will also be required by the Act to deliver socially responsible procurement, which means putting environmental, social, economic, and cultural wellbeing at the heart of Wales's £8 billion annual procurement spend.

In local government in Wales, we take pride in the close relations that we have cultivated with the Welsh Government, trade unions, and other vital partners.

That is why Cllr Jane Gebbie and I, as the Welsh LGA's Workforce Spokespersons, have been so proud to participate in developing the Act alongside our social partners in the Welsh Government and trade unions.

Our collective work is grounded in

mutual respect, and in knowing that our workforce is our most important asset.

This is the established approach that has enabled so much constructive and positive engagement with ministers and trade unions, especially in helping to secure funding for our essential local services, which have been so hard-hit by inflation and rocketing costs.

Wales, of course, is a nation steeped in cooperative tradition and philosophy.

However, this new law isn't a rose-tinted homage to the past, but a cornerstone laid together to build progressive, fairer communities better placed to face the uncertainties of the future.

And the challenges ahead are as large as they are many.

In the immediate term, the cost-of-living crisis continues to wreak its devastating impacts on households up and down the land, with local services feeling the pinch of soaring energy bills.

Enormous pressures and changes in demographics are squeezing our health and social care services like never before, and the effects of the

“Wales is a nation steeped in cooperative tradition and philosophy”

climate crisis are already being felt.

Councils' role in responding to all these challenges is all-important. After all, who could be better placed than local government to understand the needs of communities and service delivery?

But we know that only by collaborating with our brilliant workforce, other public bodies, and national governments, can we seek to secure the economic, environmental, social, and cultural wellbeing of people in our communities.

This pioneering new law gives public organisations, the workforce and the Welsh Government the tools to unify in pursuit of the vision of the fairer, greener future we want to see for Wales.



i To find out more about the work of the Welsh LGA, please visit www.wlga.gov.uk



Councillor **Shabir Pandor** is Co-Chair of the LGA's Civility in Public Life Steering Group

Ending abuse in public life

A new report sets out how local authorities can better support councillors

Councillors are the lifeblood of local government, representing the needs of their residents and working across their local areas to improve outcomes for all.

Their decisions contribute to people's wellbeing and prosperity; it is therefore vital to support strong and vibrant local democracy with councillors who reflect the communities they represent.

However, there is a growing issue of abuse and intimidation in public and political discourse that can harm councillors and their families and deter people from local democracy.

This time last year, the LGA published a report setting out the results of our 'call for evidence' of abuse and intimidation, and made the argument that abuse is increasingly impacting councillors and local democracy.

In the report, we highlighted that, according to the LGA's 2022

national councillor census, seven in 10 councillors reported experiencing abuse and intimidation, and 28 per cent said they frequently or occasionally felt at risk while fulfilling their role.

Most councillors who experienced abuse said it happened on multiple occasions, with high volumes of online abuse, and half said the abuse was ongoing.

In that report, we outlined five themes for further consideration:

- normalisation of abuse in public discourse, particularly online
- targeting of individuals with protected characteristics for particularly vitriolic or high volumes of abuse
- vulnerability of councillors because of their local visibility and accessibility to the public
- personal and democratic impacts of abuse on councillors, their families and the wider community – including the deterrent effect on prospective candidates standing for election

- the variability of support and response offered by councils, political parties and the police across the country.

We committed in the report to support councils and encourage other relevant partners to take greater responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of councillors.

We promised to do our part to gather and disseminate good practice from across the sector, generate new solutions, and provide councils with the tools they need to address this pernicious issue.

This year, we've taken our first steps in delivering on this promise, by running a project to identify the barriers stopping councils and other relevant agencies from providing better support, and identifying and developing solutions to those challenges.

We've brought these together in one report, 'Ending abuse in public life', which performs multiple functions.

It sets out actions councils can take to improve the support they provide and work better with partners, and highlights issues that local authorities cannot influence directly.

The report digs deeper into



Reporting processes and responsibility for supporting councillors with abusive residents vary from place to place. For example, one council we heard from uses its anti-social behaviour system to take reports of abuse against councillors, while others report through democratic or legal services.

However, it is essential that councillors know who to go to when experiencing an issue and understand how their complaints will be dealt with.

Strong relationships with local police are absolutely vital to handling both low-level abuse and threats against councillors.

Proactively fostering strong relationships at a strategic and neighbourhood level can improve coordination and advance a mutual understanding of abuse that affects councillors, and the policing role in addressing it.

In many places, increased support had often been precipitated by a local or national incident that brings home the risks associated with being elected. However, councils shouldn't wait for an incident to occur.

Risk assessments should be tailored to individual risk and be used to proactively and dynamically manage risk associated with the councillor role.

This approach can make it easier to scale support up and down, as Telford and Wrekin Council demonstrated when it worked in partnership with local police to individually grade the risk for each councillor and put in place appropriate mitigations during a period of community tension.

A critical strand of addressing abuse and intimidation is prioritising councillor wellbeing, and considering how the council can support councillor wellbeing and resilience in the face of robust challenge, personal attacks or hurtful commentaries.

We know these issues deter people from staying in local politics,

so it's critical to provide them with appropriate aftercare to help them recover and continue playing their role in local government.

Criminal thresholds and the current legal framework can also make it challenging to support councillors experiencing abuse.

Serious threats clearly meet the threshold for police intervention and are easy to understand under the current legal framework, as they usually concern a 'single victim and perpetrator' dynamic.

However, online abuse by multiple individuals, so-called 'pile-on abuse' – or individual incidents that appear low level, but may be part of a course of behaviour that amounts to harassment or stalking – are more challenging to address.

We recognise that some of these issues are outside of local government control. To have an impact, we must look to national government, other public agencies and private agencies to effect change.

In the report, we make three recommendations.

We call on the Government to work with Ofcom to ensure that harmful and abusive behaviour does not continue unrestricted online, and that the experience of elected members is considered in any relevant guidance mandated by the Online Safety Bill.

We also want the Government to work with the police to set out clear and consistent guidance on the role of policing in addressing abuse, intimidation and harassment of elected members. This includes creating specialists in each police force to monitor crime against elected members and act as a single point of contact for councils and councillors.

Finally, we call on the Government to widen the scope of the 'Defending democracy' programme, to explicitly consider the safety, security and wellbeing of locally elected politicians.

All councillors should expect to be treated with mutual respect.

We hope this work will set the context for a wider discussion across national and local governments, and provide the basic tools for councils that want to protect their elected members from the negative impacts of abuse by the public.

some of the themes identified in our research last year and sets out how the response to abuse of councillors has grown up organically in response to changing dynamics.

Abuse has presented differently in different places and – coupled with a varied level of capacity and awareness in councils, police and other agencies – this has resulted in various preventative and supportive measures aimed at addressing abuse of councillors.

To support councils in taking a proactive approach, we have established five principles they can use to reflect on their own support processes and what more they could do to ensure councillors are protected from abuse by the public.

We propose that councils take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse to combat the normalisation of abuse in public and political discourse.

Visible actions are vital to demonstrate this approach, including establishing and enforcing strict policies on public engagement with councillors and officers.

Setting expectations with councillors from the outset can help them identify and report unacceptable behaviours.



You can read 'Ending abuse in public life' in full at www.local.gov.uk/publications. **The report will also be discussed at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth on Tuesday 4 July**, in a parallel session called **'Supporting councillors to prevent and handle abuse and intimidation'**. Please visit www.local.gov.uk/conference to find out more and book your place

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If you're committed to digital transformation, it's time to question whether your current approach can really deliver on this goal. In today's digital-first world, it's critical to have the right Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) capabilities in place to run your council operations efficiently.



Figuring it out

The LGA has refreshed its support for councillors on finance, governance and audit



Councillor **Abi Brown** is Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board

During what are increasingly challenging times for the local government sector, it is important that councillors have the skills and knowledge to deliver on their councils' priorities.

To do this effectively, councillors need to understand their role in regard to local government finance, good decision-making, and understanding and managing risk.

The LGA has developed what we hope is an accessible support offer for

newly elected councillors and those looking for a refresh on these key topics.

As the Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, I am passionate about supporting councillors to develop their skills.

We know that when you are newly elected you have a lot to learn in a short space of time.

We hope that the programmes and resources we have developed equip you with the skills and knowledge you need to do your role effectively.

All of the programmes can be found on our website and are fully subsidised. They operate on a 'first come, first served' basis, so please book in soon!



i The LGA's development support offer for councillors is not just focused on finance, governance and audit; it covers everything from biodiversity to being an effective ward councillor – see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership. See also our councillor hub for events for new councillors, at www.local.gov.uk/our-support/councillor-and-officer-development/councillor-hub

Financial resilience – support offer

Finance without numbers

As the title suggests, this virtual event, running on 14 September and 2 November, is ideal for new councillors and provides an overview of local government finance without any numbers. Instead, it focuses on roles, responsibilities, key terminology and processes. Please register on our events page (www.local.gov.uk/events).

Introduction to audit for new councillors

Understanding the effective governance and decision-making process of a council is one of the key skills for a newly elected councillor. This short session, on 10 July, will assist with one aspect of this in particular – the role of the audit committee. Visit www.local.gov.uk/our-support/councillor-and-officer-development/councillor-hub/events-new-councillors to book your place.

uk/our-support/councillor-and-officer-development/councillor-hub/events-new-councillors to book your place.

Financial governance

By law, councillors are “charged with governance”, so it is essential that every

councillor understands what effective financial governance looks like. This online course raises awareness of their role in ensuring that the council's systems, processes and culture deliver effective financial governance arrangements.

Leadership Essentials

We are continuing to run our popular Leadership Essentials programmes to support councillors in chair or cabinet member roles. These programmes are held in person at Warwick Conferences, Coventry.

They include:

- **Finance leadership** – this programme is an opportunity to focus on financial management and governance ahead of the final stages of the 2023/24 budget process.
- **Audit leadership** – this programme will discuss how councils' audit committees can be most effective.
- **Finance for non-finance cabinet members** – an exciting new course that will demystify the financial elements of your portfolio or the policy committee that you chair.

For further details, please visit www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership/leadership-essentials and/or email grace.collins@local.gov.uk.

E-learning

Expand your political leadership skills with our free e-learning platform for councillors, which includes modules on local government finance and an introduction to audit committees – see www.local.gov.uk/councillor-e-learning.

Councillor workbook – local government finance

This workbook considers the way local councils receive their funding and highlights the legal and best practice requirements in managing your council's financial affairs, see www.local.gov.uk/councillor-workbook-local-government-finance.

Regional audit forums

For audit committee chairs, we facilitate regional audit forums to help identify systemic audit issues and share good practice. Please contact ami.beeton@local.gov.uk for more information.



Sector-led improvement

Support for councils at all stages of their improvement journey



Councillor **Abi Brown** is Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board

The LGA is delighted to announce its updated sector support programme, primarily funded by the UK Government, which offers wide-ranging support to local authorities to realise local ambitions, address challenges and deliver better outcomes for residents.

As in previous years, the programme is informed by our sector-led improvement approach. It draws on expertise and direct insight from local government to ensure that local authorities have the support they most value and need.

This year's offer features a number of new and existing programme elements, both virtual and face to face, that will help councils drive improvements and respond to live issues that emerge.

As agreed with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the programme for this year will cover areas including governance, leadership, finance and workforce.

It will also feature a brand-new offer on transformation, being shaped through direct engagement with councils.

This will provide direct support and advice, as well as varied learning and development opportunities, to help local authorities deliver on their own internal transformation priorities, across a range of areas and needs, such as improving

services and delivering greater efficiencies.

Following the recent local elections, councils that have experienced a change of control or leadership are encouraged to consider the options available through our post-elections support offer. This includes mentoring, top-team development and a range of wider bespoke offers provided by expert peers and regional teams.

Post-elections support helps to deliver greater leadership capacity, improve governance and smooth political transitions: 94 per cent of councils receiving post-elections support in 2022/23 said this had helped their council.

Our 'Changes in political leadership' hub provides more details on the tools and resources available (see www.local.gov.uk/

our-support/sector-support-offer/changes-political-leadership).

Peer challenge remains a cornerstone of our wider governance offer. This year's programme will support councils to meet their improvement priorities by providing corporate, governance and finance peer challenges.

Additional peer challenge offers – covering areas including children's services, adult social care, cyber, culture, planning, and communications – will continue as part of our wider sector support offer.

This covers programmes such as Partners in Care and Health (adult social care), Children's Services, One Public Estate, the Planning Advisory Service, and Cyber, Digital and Technology. See www.local.gov.uk/our-support for more.

Corporate peer challenges (CPCs) remain a well-renowned tool for improvement, with 100 per cent of councils that received a challenge in 2022/23 reporting that it had a positive impact on their authority.

The integration of CPC reports,



“It is important that councillors and officers have the skills to deliver on local priorities”

action plans and progress reviews has helped to enhance the CPC process and better provide assurance in recent years. Our sector support programme will contribute further to this picture this year by developing a support and assurance framework for local government (see **first** 684).

LG Inform – the LGA’s freely available, award-winning data platform – is a crucial part of the assurance infrastructure and our growing governance offer (see **www.local.gov.uk/lginform**). This powerful benchmarking tool uniquely integrates thousands of local-level data items in a single system, which allows councils and the public to compare performance against other authorities, including those with similar characteristics, such as the

Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy’s ‘nearest neighbours’.

LG Inform delivers data for informed decision-making by providing comparisons and themed reports that are configurable for each authority.

These reports can be viewed on the LG Inform website and include a variety of data across issues such as finance, health, deprivation, housing, and education, as well as service areas, including adult and children’s services. Further reports are set to be added throughout the course of the year.

During what are increasingly challenging times for the local government sector, it is important that councillors and officers represent the communities they serve and have the skills and knowledge needed to deliver on local priorities.

Our well-established councillor development programmes, including Leadership Academy, Leadership Essentials and Next Generation, will remain as flagship elements of our programme, continuing to help councillors to deliver their responsibilities.

This year, in collaboration with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (Solace), we will also be introducing a package of new and updated support to develop and grow the pipeline of officer talent.

This includes new training and development opportunities for chief executives and a new campaign, co-produced with Solace and the sector, to attract new talent and market local government as a career of choice, highlighting the infinite variety of roles that it has to offer.

With capacity issues representing an ongoing challenge for the sector, we are offering an even wider range of programmes to help councils meet demand.

Our National Graduate Development Programme, which allows councils to build capacity by placing high-calibre graduates within local authorities, is increasing its annual cohort this year.

Meanwhile, our workforce programme is introducing a new skills shortages offer, alongside existing apprenticeships support, to help councils address capacity challenges in key demand areas.

Further bespoke and targeted help is available to councils facing complex challenges. This includes workforce support, including mediation and specialist HR and employment law advice from our workforce experts, plus targeted finance support provided by experienced finance associates (all of whom are current or former chief finance officers).

Our comprehensive regional support programmes provide an even wider range of options, including direct help to address performance issues. There is also mentoring and councillor and officer peer support, to help local authorities build resilience, as well as political and managerial capacity.

The sector support programme provides tools and resources to local authorities at all stages of their improvement journey.

The high levels of take-up and positive feedback from recipients of support have underlined the value of the LGA’s offer and the various ways in which sector support continues to help councils deliver on their priorities.

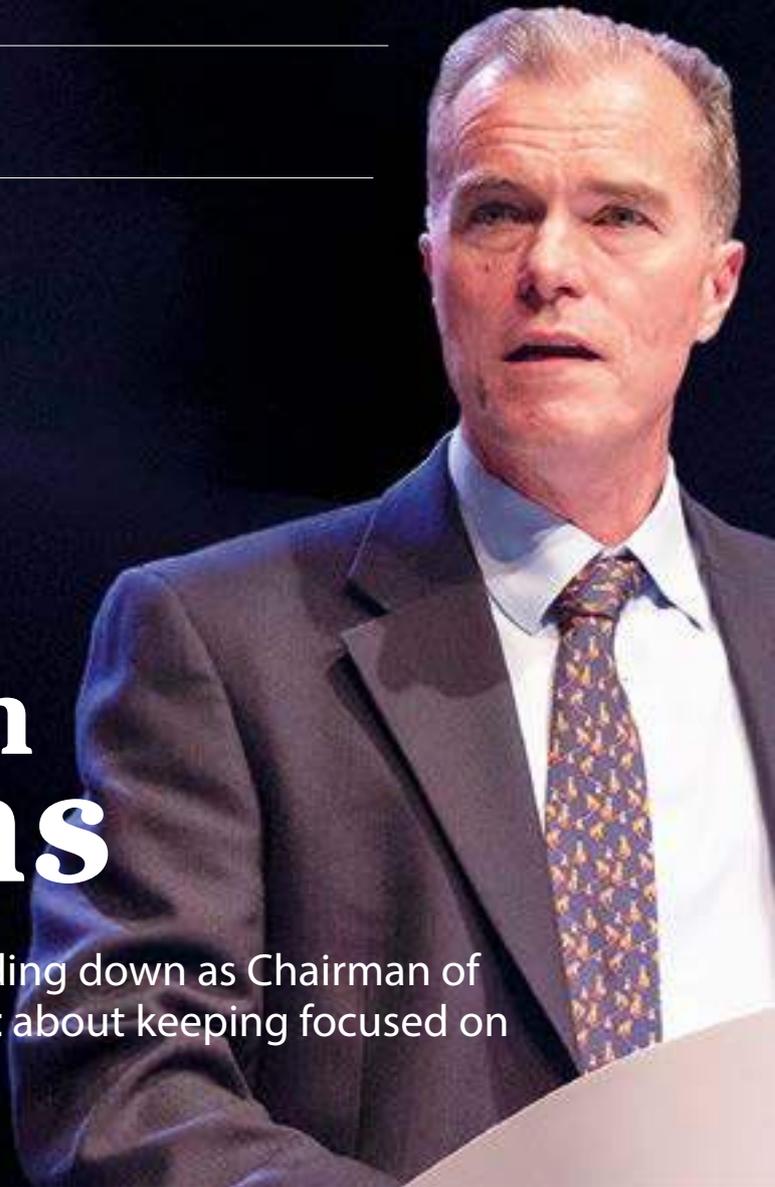
According to the most recent research, 99 per cent of chief executives and 91 per cent of council leaders say that LGA support has had a positive impact on their local authority.

i See www.local.gov.uk/publications/sector-support-offer-local-authorities-202324 to view the full details of the new LGA’s sector support programme. For further information about any aspect of the programme, please contact the LGA principal adviser for your region (see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-principal-advisers)



The unknown unknowns

Councillor James Jamieson OBE is standing down as Chairman of the LGA after four years. He talks to **first** about keeping focused on local goals amid global crises



Q What were your priorities when you started in 2019?

A I took this role on because, as a council leader, I felt that adult social care, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), planning and money were big issues, and that devolution was a way of achieving change – albeit not an objective in itself.

These are still my priorities, to which I would add the environment in its broadest sense. Events meant we got a little sidetracked.

Q What's changed since then?

A As US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said, there were the 'known unknowns', such as Brexit, and there were the 'unknown unknowns' – the COVID-19 pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine, four prime ministers and six secretaries of state in four years...

The pandemic delayed things, but local government wasn't completely sideswiped. We did carry on.

People's bins got emptied, we

delivered everything we were supposed to deliver, on top of which we cared for the vulnerable and supported businesses.

That is a testament to the strength of local government and the LGA.

Almost 200,000 Ukrainians have come here under the fantastic Homes for Ukraine scheme. They have been supported by their sponsors, found homes, and most of that was incremental.

It's a real illustration of how local and central government can work together. I can't praise former Refugees Minister Lord Richard Harrington enough for making things happen.

He was appointed to a joint role between the Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and personified working across silos – it's a model for cross-government working we would like to see more of.

I would not want something like Ukraine or the pandemic to ever happen again, but they have demonstrated just how good local government is when we pull together.

“Devolution means not having 501 targets. It means government being very clear on a very limited number of targets”

Q Has progress been made on your priorities?

A Three things are very much on the agenda – planning, SEND and adult social care.

Have we fixed everything? No, but in all three areas there is a real recognition and desire to move forward. It's just not happened as quickly as we would like and it's more pressing now because of the financial perspective.

The one that disappoints me most is devolution. Government talks a lot about it and we have seen devo deals, but Whitehall hasn't embraced it because so many things are still about the desire for Whitehall to have levers.

It's great that we get more money, and

“Every time you go to the Treasury with your hand out, you are losing local freedoms and the ability to make local decisions”



You need to think very differently in those two areas. Government, though, will have one pot of money for EV charging and one for public transport, and won't let us put them together to use more for one in one area than the other.

There are a lot of things that require this place-based approach. So, it's about the classics – single-pot, long-term, flexible funding. Or maybe it's about providing local tax-raising powers, linked to going green.

It would be much more interesting if we weren't dependent on government funding. Every time you go to the Treasury with your hand out, you are losing local freedoms and the ability to make local decisions.

Being able to raise local revenue – whether that's a sales or tourism tax, income tax, stamp duty, whatever – provides a fiscal incentive, but also freedom and choice, and holds councils to account.

Q Looking ahead, what are the key issues for local government?

A The one that's worrying me a lot is the housing shortage.

Being able to afford to live in a reasonable home, locally to where you want to live – whether that's rented, owned or other tenure – many people are having real difficulties with that.

There have been some good reforms, such as allowing councils to retain 100 per cent of the proceeds from Right to Buy sales and to borrow at Public Works Loan Board rates for housing: there has been a clear move to support council housing, which is positive.

Q The LGA is a cross-party organisation. Has it been difficult to work on that basis?

A Sometimes! One of the things that I and my predecessor, Lord Gary Porter, really pushed was to focus on the areas that the LGA's political groups agree on and put to one side the areas we don't, because we will get nowhere if we cannot put a proper united front on whatever subject it is.

Around 90-95 per cent of what we do in local government has nothing to do with politics, and that's our strength.

The public does not think that emptying your bin is a political statement, nor looking after an elderly relative, supporting a vulnerable child or trying to get a better recreation ground.

These are things on which everyone can agree.

I would advise any party that there's a real opportunity to work with the LGA and councils to thrash out policy in some tough areas. For example, because every council is impacted by adult social care or SEND or housing, we, as councils, have an incentive to find solutions. That can provide the political impetus and cover to get some difficult decisions through Westminster.

Q You were re-elected in May – what keeps you in local government?

A You can make a big, big difference, locally.

I'm proud that, working with colleagues, we got a new leisure centre built and drove through a housing strategy that means Central Bedfordshire is now building 100-plus council homes a year for the elderly.

There's a lot of personal, nice, 'small' stuff, helping one person – for example, getting some dropped kerbs so a resident can get into town on their mobility scooter.

That, and the bigger projects – how do I make the council more efficient, how do I fix more potholes, how do I make my place better – still get me excited.

Q What advice would you give your successor?

A First, local government united can do great things. Disunited, it will fail.

Second, recognise that the LGA is populated with very talented, good people, and really use them and engage with them. It's a fantastic organisation.

The key role of the LGA chairman is to promote and unite, bring people together, make things happen, find a sense of unity, provide a sense of direction, and move forward on the things that matter.

Remember, the vast majority of people want you to succeed – even opposition leaders – because it's about the sector succeeding.

Q What are your plans for the future?

A I want to finish some local projects, very ward-specific.

I would like to do something useful for local government – whether in housing, the green agenda, or the health-social care interface.

I also want to give a big thank you to the many different people – across party and government – who have given me so much help and support. We've done lots of good work.

we have bidding for grants, but there is an awful lot of 'here is a pot to bid for, here is the new Office for Local Government, here is the new CQC inspection regime' – so while they are giving with one hand, they are taking back with the other.

There seems to be political recognition of the benefits, but not a cultural recognition that devolution means letting go. That means not having 501 targets. It means government being very clear on a very limited number of targets.

Government genuinely needs to devolve to place – for example, on zero-carbon transport.

In Hackney, east London, you don't need to do much on public transport. Yes, you need to green it, but everyone can catch a bus or train. However, getting a charging infrastructure for electric vehicles (EVs) is problematic because most people live in flats and terraced houses.

In my area, in Central Bedfordshire, buses are as rare as police officers, so you can't rely on public transport, but most (not all) people have a drive, so charging EVs from home is an issue, but not a massive one.

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Councils are key to settling Afghan arrivals



Johnny Mercer
MP is Minister for
Veterans' Affairs

It was 2010. One of my soldiers was killed by the Taliban.

It was at this moment an Afghan interpreter disregarded his own safety and stayed behind to help me.

Within the full view of the enemy, he helped me to carry this man on a stretcher. Under constant fire for about 40 minutes, he kept going until we reached safety.

This one example shows how, nearly two years on since the largest UK military evacuation in more than 70 years, we must fulfil our commitments to the cohort of Afghans who we opened our arms to and welcomed to Britain.

This will require continued hard work and collaboration between central and local government.

I firmly believe that this can be done, and with more than 9,000 Afghans already living in settled accommodation, we need to make sure that we finish the job.

So, I'm writing today to call on local councils to redouble the already excellent work that has gone on to help this cohort.

I know that councils face housing pressures already. But there is an urgent need to act now. With thousands of Afghans still requiring settled accommodation, deadlines are fast approaching.

To meet this need, we've provided a £35 million funding package to help local authorities to give increased support for Afghan households.

We've consciously made this as flexible as possible, so that local experts on the ground can use it to meet the local needs of the area.

This funding includes the new Flexible Housing Fund, which provides £7,100 per person to support moves into settled



accommodation. We are leaving it to you as councils to determine what constitutes 'settled accommodation'.

Flexibilities have been introduced to the bridging accommodation wraparound support funding. This enables councils to fund landlord incentives, deposits and rent in advance.

And the integration tariff (£20,520 per person over three years) can also be used for deposits, landlord incentives, furnishings and other associated costs.

These are to name a few of the flexible funding sources, and I encourage all councils to use the range of housing and integration funding options available.

We cannot achieve our shared goal of ending hotel use for legally resettled and relocated Afghans without the help of councils across the country.

Since I announced in March of this year the end to hotel accommodation, I have visited a number of hotels across the country.

I've met Afghan families, and local authority and civil service staff, who work every day to help families find the future they deserve. I have always been impressed by the knowledge, hard work and dedication of those staff working in the hotels.

We know that hotel accommodation is not the best way that people can integrate into society. Speaking to families who have been resettled, I've been inspired by their stories of hope, and their desire to forge a new life here in the UK.

I know that through your skill and hard work this will be the case.

But we must leave no stone unturned in these crucial next few months, to help these families realise their future in Britain.

i See www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-authority-housing-fund for more on the **Local Authority Housing Fund**

A stronger liberal voice in local government



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

I am still getting over the Liberal Democrats' fantastic set of local election results from May.

We saw 12 new majority Lib Dem councils elected and kept control of 17 authorities. We also share the leadership in other cross-party coalitions and alliances.

In total, 75 councils in England and Wales have a Liberal Democrat leader or deputy leader.

While many gains were from the Conservatives, we also won against Labour – for example, in Hull, Liverpool and Manchester.

Our commiserations to those who, despite working very hard, did not make it this time.

For example, the excellent Mayor Dave Hodgson did not win re-election in Bedford, missing out by just 145 votes.

If the election had been held under the previous supplementary vote system that the Government recently abolished, Dave would likely still be in post.

We gained more than 400 councillors, bringing our UK total to just under 3,000 on principal authorities.

Our gains give us a stronger national voice inside the LGA and our highest profile for many years. We gain an extra LGA board chair and extra places on most LGA boards.

We'll build a team so we can make a positive impact for residents and communities across the country.

Over the next two years, we will see a General Election and a likely change in government.

We will use our higher profile to push for causes important to our group, such as fixing our social care system,

supporting local action on climate change, fighting for truly affordable housing, and pushing back against the increasing centralisation of power this government has pushed through.

Whether that is the forced merger of our police and fire services, the mistaken obsession that regional and combined authority mayors are the only way to devolve power, or the endless rounds of insisting councils compete against each other for ever-decreasing pots of money, we will be there making the case for local autonomy and decision-making.

In other words, government that is local rather than a delivery arm of Whitehall.

"We will be making the case for local autonomy and decision-making"



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

Putting residents first

In July 2019, I stood up to give my first speech as LGA Chairman at our annual conference in Bournemouth – and on 4 July I will be returning there to hand the reins to my successor, Cllr Shaun Davies.

I came into the role focused on adult social care, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), planning, the environment, and funding – plus devolution, as a means to these ends.

However, it's safe to say that the four years since 2019 have not turned out how any of us expected.

The COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the consequent and continuing cost-of-living crisis have affected us all, both individually and as leaders of place.

In addition to this, the domestic political 'churn' of the past few years has made the LGA's work with central government harder. My term as chairman has seen four prime ministers, six secretaries of state, too many housing



Cllr Jamieson in 2019

©LGA/CHRIS SHARP

ministers to remember, and three permanent secretaries at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Yet, throughout this tumultuous period, I am immeasurably proud of how we have all continued to deliver for our local areas and our residents, new and old.

During the pandemic, councils emptied the bins and kept vital local services running while also supporting the most vulnerable, ensuring the vaccination programme reached every community, and getting vital financial support to local businesses.

We continue to support local

residents and businesses through the cost-of-living crisis, while also helping new arrivals from Afghanistan and Ukraine.

Yet, central government still doesn't seem to trust us to deliver.

Next week, at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth, we will be launching our new report 'Make it local', which sets out our delivery offer to government.

In return, we want devolution to go further, a resetting of Whitehall culture, a new approach to funding – and a brand-new central-local partnership in which local government can work to its full potential.



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

Time to allow councils to set planning fees

In my final column for **first** as Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group, I want to put on record my thanks to all Conservative councillors across the country for the tremendous hard work you put into your communities.

Conservative councils have always been the best-managed councils and I look forward to playing my part in the Conservative local government family in the future.

“Local authorities need more flexibility and freedom over their finances”

I wish my successor all the best as they start their tenure in July.

Over the course of my term as group leader, it has become my firm view that local authorities need more flexibility and freedom over their finances.

In particular, I now believe that government should actively consider allowing local authorities to set planning and licensing fees internally, based on the needs of respective communities.

In the case of planning, it has become acutely clear to me that workforce retention is becoming an issue within local planning departments as we seek to compete with our friends in the private sector.

If government provided us with the powers to set planning fees internally, we could recruit more planning officers and speed up the process of dealing with applications – thus, supporting government in its ambition to build more homes in the right places.

Inevitably, local government should be on the same level as national government.

Councillors should be able to set fees according to need, and, in the same way as MPs, they will be held accountable by the public through the ballot box.



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

Giving power back to towns and cities

It will be a pleasure to see many of you in Bournemouth next week for the biggest event in the local government calendar.

The LGA's annual conference provides an opportunity to discuss issues impacting councils, and the fantastic Innovation Zone will showcase best practice in tackling some of our biggest issues.

My own council, Telford and Wrekin, will explore the future of adult social care, revealing how technology, gadgets and a person-centred approach can revolutionise independent living.

I'm particularly delighted that Sir Keir Starmer will be a keynote speaker: the first Leader of the Opposition to address LGA conference in person in more than a decade, and a demonstration of the commitment he has made to working in partnership with local government.

The next 18 months are set to be a turning point for the future of devolution.

It is in the hands of councillors of all parties to show why giving power back to towns and cities will deliver prosperity for the whole country.

“The next 18 months will be a turning point for the future of devolution”

We know local government is ready to play a leading role in driving growth. We must demonstrate to national politicians why they should value the local leadership of councillors and empower us to make decisions in the best interests of the communities we serve.

I hope you enjoy this opportunity to meet up with your council colleagues and leave Bournemouth with fresh ideas to implement in your own community.

I would also like to thank the LGA staff who work so hard to deliver such a successful event. See you there!



Councillor **Adam Paynter** is the National Lead Peer for the LGA's Independent Group

The importance of peer support

It was a great privilege to be chosen as National Lead Peer for the LGA's Independent Group.

In 2001, I was elected to Cornwall County Council, where I have seen lots of change, including the move to unitary status and Cornwall Council.

“Local people rely on us to run our councils well”

I have been lucky enough to carry out many different roles in my council, including being the leader a few years ago.

As councillors, we certainly do the role because we love it, and local people rely on us to run our councils well.

That is where peer roles come in and I am a great believer in the good that peers do. Whether that is participating in corporate peer reviews of councils or mentoring groups or individual councillors, the benefits to the sector are huge.

In my new role, I want to recruit more peers to work within our group to ensure diversity and make sure they are trained and supported to do the role.

The LGA's team of regional peers is important as the 'ear on the ground' in local areas, able to work with LGA staff and identify councils that need support.

We saw a huge change in local politics following May's local elections, with more councils than ever being under 'no overall control'.

Many have not experienced this before, meaning more help is needed for both councillors and officers to support the change.

This is positive for communities, as no one group has all the right solutions for a place, and collaborative working can bring benefits.

Affordable loans for retrofitting homes



Councillor **Martin Pearce** (Lab) is Portfolio Holder for Communities and Homelessness Prevention at Exeter City Council

Architectural styles may vary subtly across the UK, but one thing does not. Whether they were built in the 1960s or the 1990s, many of the country's older homes have very poor energy performance.

While the climate emergency is one of Exeter City Council's major priorities, you don't have to be an ardent environmentalist to recognise the value of retrofitting.

Installing insulation, solar panels, ground source heat pumps and other measures in homes is good for the environment and for homeowners' pockets; it keeps residents warmer and healthier,

alleviating NHS pressures; and provides work for local tradespeople.

Especially right now, many homeowners will struggle to afford such investments.

However, since 2005, Exeter City Council has been a proud partner of Lendology, a social enterprise that supports 15 councils to arrange affordable loans for the retrofitting of private homes.

Recent clients in Exeter have included a couple in their 30s whose newly purchased 1950s property was in need of modernisation. Thanks to Lendology loans, they were first able to install insulation and later solar panels.

Their home's energy performance certificate is now set to rise from E to C, and energy use is projected to drop significantly.

It is just one of many successes we've achieved with Lendology over the years.

The scheme is important, not just to our climate goals, but our social justice policy platform too, with Lendology's loans



being available to people in a range of financial circumstances.

In 2021/22, borrowers' average household income was £20,180; 46 per cent were in receipt of benefits; and 29 per cent either did not know their credit rating, or described it as 'fair', 'poor' or 'very poor'.

There can be no excuse for councils to ignore the scale of the UK's retrofitting challenge or dismiss private homes as out of scope.

Affordable lending – and Lendology in particular – is a great option for any council wanting to support its residents to improve their finances and their health, and do their bit for the climate emergency.

i To find out more, visit lendology.org.uk



Richard Blakeway is the Housing Ombudsman

Don't neglect housing management



Does your authority periodically withdraw services from an individual resident?

It may seem an odd question, but that's what we found one council doing.

The resident had complained about water running down their walls, but council staff's concerns about the resident's behaviour led to them being informed that 'all services' would be withdrawn for a year.

Senior management were unaware, and recording was poor.

Practically, what this action meant, given councils' statutory responsibilities, is unclear, but the risk of detriment is obvious.

It speaks to my concern that housing management has been neglected, given the other serious pressures councils face, leading staff to make irrational decisions in difficult circumstances.

Issues of housing quality are now to the fore and councils are rising to the challenge of damp and mould.

But the issues go far wider than damp and the scale of the challenge will intensify given our ageing social housing stock.

Nor can housing management be isolated from other council services. At the centre are people and communities and,

increasingly, very vulnerable households.

There are many dedicated officers, and some visionary leadership among councils to develop new homes. Yet it is also critical to ensure core management services are working as they should.

Ultimately, the physical quality of homes will only be improved by unprecedented investment, public and private, into new homes and repairing old ones. Given the scale of challenges, this requires government support.

But it also requires quality of service and data on which to plan.

Quality of service requires timeliness, reliability and respect, especially in repairs, which can erode trust and confidence among residents without it. Our Complaint Handling Code can help landlords recover when things don't go right first time.

Quality of data brings us back to council staff threatening to withdraw services – how good is your information and what don't you know? Our latest Spotlight report offers comprehensive guidance to get this right.

Both will require effective leadership, culture and procedures. Complaints are a barometer of these, so make use of them.

i **Richard Blakeway is speaking on the importance of housing quality** at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth on Tuesday 4 July – see www.local.gov.uk/ conference to book your place. For more on the Housing Ombudsman, please visit www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/



Councillor **Sarah Courtney**
(Lab) is Cabinet Member for
Towns, Tourism and Voluntary
Sector at Calderdale
Metropolitan Borough Council



Positive role models

One of the things that surprised me the most after I became a councillor was being spoken about as a 'community leader'.

It's not a context I'd thought about in the months leading up to my first election, nor in the journey that had taken me there.

My first experience of governance was in a local infant school.

In 2009, I was asked if I'd consider being a governor by a friend of mine. She was a parent governor at the school, which had an above-average number of children with lesbian parents, but no representation from that community on the governing body.

Life got in the way and by the time I was co-opted onto the board, a couple of years later, there were other lesbians, but I joined anyway, learned what it was about and found I'd been firmly bitten by the governance bug.

Later, I joined the Labour Party to help campaign in the 2015 General Election and I didn't take much persuading to stand for a seat on the local town council in a by-election a couple of years later.

I had to take a few moments to decide how 'out' to be in my campaign literature and was fairly guarded.

I had to think about how safe it would feel to be open about my sexuality within my political group, my council, and the wider community – but if it didn't feel safe for me, how would it feel for other people to be able to live their lives fully, being their authentic selves?

By 2018, when I first stood in Calder Ward for a seat on Calderdale Council, I was happily mentioning my partner, Tamsin.

Well, reader, I won that seat with a resounding majority – it does include Hebden Bridge and parts of Todmorden, so the acceptance of my sexuality shouldn't really have come as a big surprise.

I think that gave me a lot of confidence about how open I could be about being a lesbian in my public life and in the community leader role that had been gifted to me.

An important aspect for me is being able to bring the topic of equality, diversity and inclusion into the room, into meetings, having it on the agenda, even if informally.

Many members of the LGBTQ+ community are extraordinary.

We are also ordinary, just like other people in that we may be people of colour, we may face communication problems, or have disabilities, and we also have to put out the bins and sweep the floor.

As former Batley and Spen MP Jo Cox said: 'We have far more in common than that which divides us.'

Being a community leader also comes with responsibility and I strive to be a positive role model.

For me, part of that means showing tolerance and acceptance of all people, whether I agree with their viewpoint or not, while also feeling confident to discuss and gently challenge things I disagree with.

With so much division in our society, in the mainstream press and on social media, I believe we need to listen to each other. I aim to help people and communities communicate with each other and help foster unity and trust.

“Being a community leader comes with responsibility”

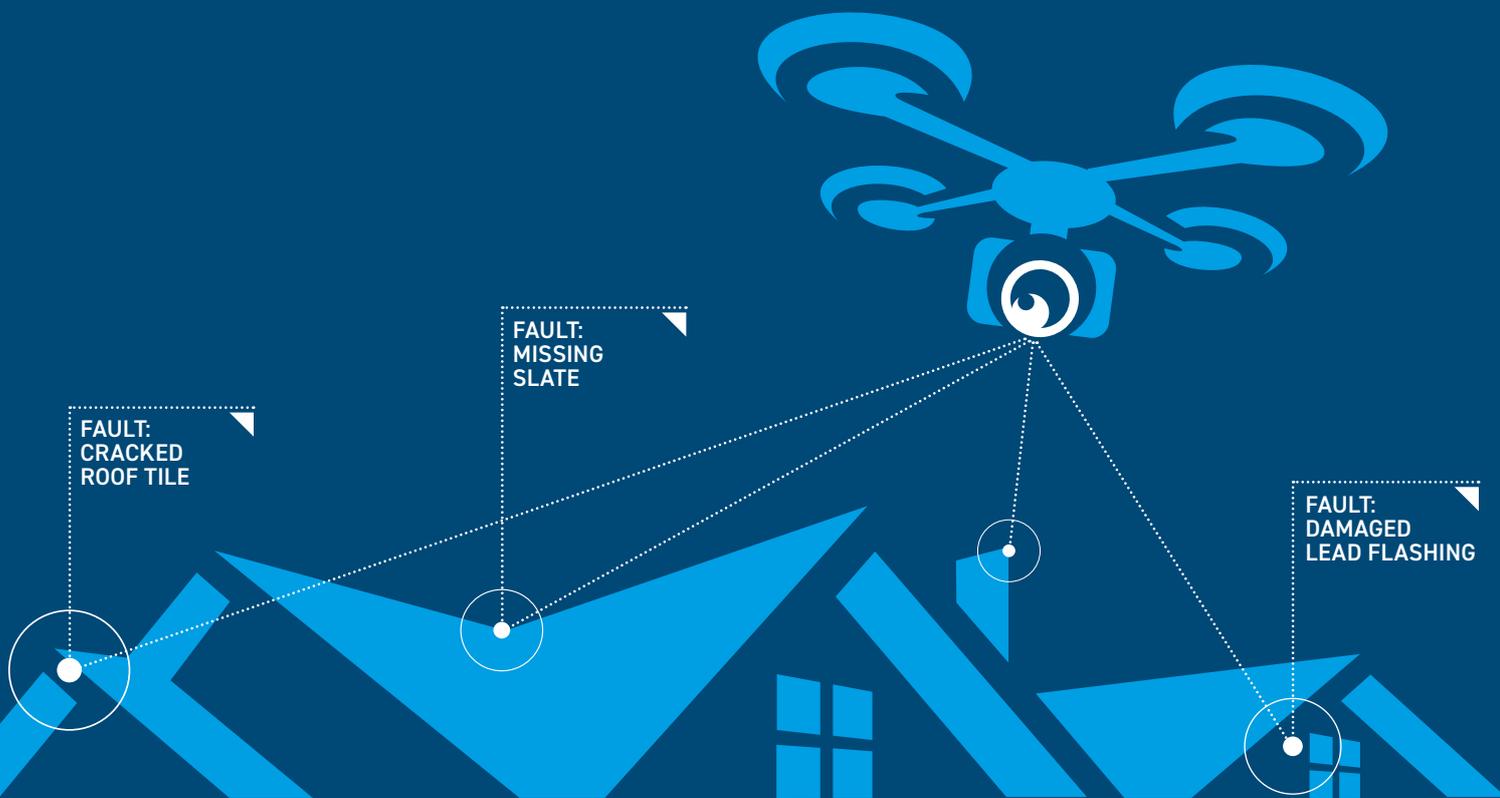


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ELECTIONS

Swings and competitions



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



These latest by-elections, which include some county contests held on 4 May, largely support the general pattern of voting seen in the main local elections.

The headline, however, sees two Green gains from the Liberal Democrats – making three such outcomes in recent months. This compares with just four gains over the Liberal Democrats and its predecessors in the previous 40 years.

In the small sample of county by-elections, the average fall in Conservative support – about 11 percentage points from 2021 – is in line with voting in the 4 May elections.

That is not true for either Labour or the Liberal Democrats, with the latter posting a better performance for the by-elections. This is reflected in the results, with the Liberal Democrats capturing three Conservative seats but Labour only one.

Brentwood Conservatives will have anticipated defeat in South Weald ward, given a mere 25-vote margin of victory last time out, but probably not the 19-point swing against the party that brought defeat. Elsewhere, Surrey Conservatives are in retreat generally and could not defend the normally safe Walton South and Oatlands division.

In 2021, the Conservative majority was more than 30 percentage points in Suffolk's Felixstowe Coastal ward, with Liberal Democrats and Labour close together. Although the Greens fielded candidates at both elections, Labour's withdrawal gave the Liberal Democrats a clear path to victory.

Labour's sole gain, Durham's Chester-le-Street East division, was also assisted by party competition. The Greens did not field a by-election candidate, despite winning more than a fifth of the vote in 2021. Although the Conservative share dropped only five points, this could not withstand the large fraction of Green voters

probably lending support to Labour's cause.

Labour's Tony Randerson was first elected for North Yorkshire's Eastfield division when it was part of Scarborough District Council, transferring to the new unitary council in May 2022 and winning three-quarters of the vote there.

Subsequently, he resigned from Labour, citing dissatisfaction with the national party's leadership, and contested his own vacancy with no declared political affiliation – and was re-elected with almost half the vote, while Labour's official nominee finished third.

And so, to those Green gains from the Liberal Democrats.

In previous contests in Worcestershire's Malvern Chase, the Greens received only about a 10 per cent vote share – little to suggest a by-election upset. But this time, following three recounts, three votes separated their winner, the appropriately named Malcolm Victory, from the Conservatives in second.

St Albans held a whole-council election in 2022 as new boundaries were implemented. In St Peters, the Liberal Democrats stood two candidates, the Greens one, with all three elected.

In the 2023 May elections, however, the ward saw the two parties unusually contest the single Green vacancy, but Simon Grover was re-elected nevertheless. Weeks later, Juliet Voisey reprised that result and produced another surprising gain.

Voters in Stroud have a long-standing relationship with the Greens, electing them



“Greens have made three gains from the Lib Dems recently”

in small numbers from the mid-1980s, but 2021 saw 14 elected.

Although Painswick and Upton ward chose three Conservatives previously, the gap between the bottom of that slate and

the best-placed Green was just 151 votes. Despite fielding the ward's county councillor, the decline in Conservative support eased the way for the Green's Gary Luff to post yet another victory.

Local by-elections

Brentwood, South Weald

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON

33.7% over Con Turnout 37.3%

Durham, Chester-le-Street East

LAB GAIN FROM CON

23.1% over Con Turnout 17.3%

North Yorkshire, Eastfield

ND GAIN FROM LAB

20.3% over Lib Dem Turnout 22.4%

St Albans, St Peters

GREEN GAIN FROM LIB DEM

6.5% over Lib Dem Turnout 22.8%

Stroud, Painswick and Upton

GREEN GAIN FROM CON

13.8% over Con Turnout 42.8%

Suffolk, Felixstowe Coastal

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON

8.3% over Con Turnout 36.2%

Surrey, Walton South & Oatlands

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON

1.8% over Con Turnout 42.6%

Worcestershire, Malvern Chase

GREEN GAIN FROM LIB DEM

0.1% over Con Turnout 39.9%

i Only elections where a ward changed hands are shown here. For more details on these and other recent elections, please visit www.lgafirst.co.uk/ local-by-elections

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