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Localism works

With possibly the last party conferences before the next General Election about to start, the LGA will be urging manifesto writers to listen to our local communities and let them shape the political agenda, rather than looking for top-down solutions to the challenges we all face.

You can find out more about our lobbying work and events at the conferences in this month's edition of **first** (p12).

Elsewhere in the magazine, we look at how the summer's events – including weak concrete in schools and the issuing of s114 notices – underline the need for a sustainable, long-term financial settlement for local government (p11).

The LGA has published some guiding principles on equality and diversity in employment and skills, designed to support councils' work on economic inclusion (p16).

And we have updates on changes to our communications improvement support for councils (p15), our work with existing combined authorities and emerging county devolution deal areas (p19), and our new transformation programme (p20).

The LGA is run by its members for our members, and you can find out more about the councillors representing you on our governance structures, including changes to some of our policy boards (p22).

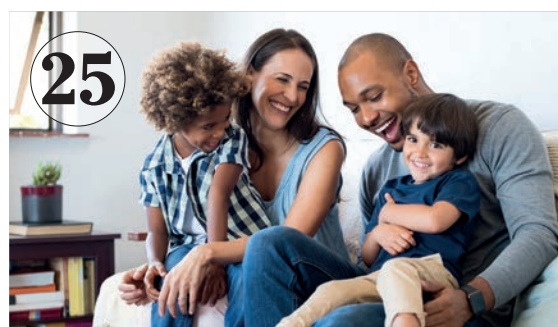
Councillor Shaun Davies
is LGA Chair



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Planning fee delays ‘costing £5 million a week’

Taxpayers will continue to subsidise planning services by almost £5 million a week until the Government finalises measures to increase fees to cover the cost of processing applications, the LGA has warned.

The Government has committed to increasing planning fees in England by 35 per cent for major applications and 25 per cent for minor and other applications, laying the regulations in Parliament before the summer recess.

These now need to be voted on by both the House of Commons and the House of Lords before they can come into effect.

As **first** was going to press, the LGA was calling on the Government to urgently make parliamentary time to introduce the fee uplift, ahead of the Commons and Lords going into recess for three weeks on 19 and 21 September respectively, for the autumn political party conferences.



Planning fees currently do not cover the true cost of processing planning applications, with 305 out of 343 local authority planning departments operating in a deficit totalling £245.4 million in 2020/21.

LGA modelling has shown that, to ensure all councils in deficit are able to balance the books, fees would need to be increased by 57 per cent – far higher than the proposed increase – highlighting the need for councils to have the flexibility to set fees at a local level to cover their individual costs.

However, any delays to the proposed increase would mean further costs placed on the taxpayer.

Cllr Darren Rodwell, LGA Planning

Spokesperson, said: “While this will not resolve all the capacity challenges within planning departments, nor prevent a significant national funding shortfall, it is vital the Government does not delay introducing the fee uplift, or taxpayers could be faced with a cost of subsidising the planning system to the tune of almost £5 million a week.

“Only by giving councils the flexibility to set planning fees at a local level can they cover their full costs relating to planning.

“This would help to future-proof the sector and ensure planning departments can continue to support the delivery of much-needed new homes, including the affordable homes and infrastructure that the country needs.”



National body needed on RAAC – LGA

The LGA has reiterated its long-standing call for a national lead body to raise awareness of the use of a collapse-prone concrete in schools and other public buildings.

Thousands of pupils in England and Wales had a disrupted start to the new term this month after the Department for Education changed its risk assessment for reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) in August.

It announced that school buildings made from RAAC should close immediately until safety work was undertaken, following concerns that the lightweight concrete could fail without warning.

The limited durability of RAAC – used widely from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s – has long been recognised, and the LGA has been warning of the risk in schools since 2018.

Cllr Shaun Davies, LGA Chair, said: “The LGA

has been calling since 2020 for a lead body at a national level to raise awareness of the use of RAAC, provide access to technical expertise in identifying it, and conduct research so there is a better understanding of how best to manage it.

“The LGA will continue to engage with the ongoing work by the Office of Government Property to widen out the identification and remediation of RAAC.

“The Government needs to ensure councils have the necessary funding and access to the right technical expertise as they now look to identify any buildings they are responsible for which may contain RAAC, and put in place plans to remediate them.”



Further information about RAAC

is available on the LGA's website at www.local.gov.uk/raac

Digital switchover scams warning

Criminals are exploiting the analogue-to-digital switchover to scam vulnerable residents who use health care telephony devices into giving out personal information such as bank details.

Approximately 1.8 million people use the devices nationally, but services reliant on the old landline system are being switched over to new upgraded landline services using digital technology.

The LGA is concerned that the transition has created new opportunities for criminals to target vulnerable residents – for example, by using phishing emails, fake websites or phone calls to trick them into providing personal information.

It is warning that scams could increase as the 2025 switchover date approaches, after recent reports of criminals calling residents with health care devices claiming that they need to hand over bank details as part of the switchover or they will be disconnected.

The digital switchover is free and councils and home care alarm providers will never ask for personal or financial details over the phone.

Councils are already taking steps to crack down on switchover scams, with Staffordshire County Council and Halton Borough Council among those taking action.

The LGA is also calling on the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology to



coordinate the multiple bodies involved with the switchover and help with raising awareness to ensure residents are prepared.

Cllr Heather Kidd, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "We are very concerned by a rise in criminals taking advantage of the digital switchover to trick vulnerable residents into giving out personal information such as their bank details.

"Councils will always act swiftly with the police where any incidents are reported, but we also urge people to be vigilant and help to raise awareness of this crime."

High homeless rates among Afghans

More than a fifth (22 per cent) of Afghans who had been living in bridging hotels in England and Wales have presented to councils as homeless, an LGA survey has found.

The Government gave a deadline of 31 August for all Afghan nationals to have moved out of hotels and find their own permanent accommodation.

However, the LGA had warned that some would end up facing homelessness because of a shortage of homes and the short timescale for them to leave.

Councils responding to the survey were taking a range of measures to help Afghan families, including matching them with properties in their area or providing them with temporary accommodation.

LGA Chair Cllr Shaun Davies said: "It is wrong that some families have had to leave Home Office-funded hotels only to then end up having to move into temporary accommodation.

"With record numbers of households already living in temporary accommodation and an acute shortage of housing across the country, this is adding huge pressure onto councils on the ground, and disruption and distress for families, some of whom are particularly vulnerable."

The LGA is calling for a joined-up approach, across central and local government, to the cumulative pressures from all asylum and resettlement programmes, which includes urgent solutions to pressing housing needs across all the schemes that welcome new arrivals to the UK.



Children's social care budgets 'buckling'

Years of funding reductions have left council budgets "buckling" under soaring costs for children's social care, a group of five leading children's charities has warned.

The Children's Services Funding Alliance found councils in England increased their spending on children's services by £800 million in 2021/22 – an 8 per cent increase on the previous year.

Yet, despite this increase, spending on early intervention services has fallen by 45 per cent in the past 12 years.

The alliance, which consists of Action for Children, Barnardo's, The Children's Society, National Children's Bureau and the NSPCC, found that 81 per cent of the recent increase went on crisis-intervention services, a rise from

the 67 per cent seen a decade ago. Of this additional spending, £4 in every £5 went on late-intervention services, it said.

Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "It is absolutely vital that, in the upcoming Autumn Statement, the Government adequately funds children's services so councils can meet rising demand and ensure children and their families get the support they need, as soon as they need it.

"Significant additional funding for all councils, not just for those chosen for the Department for Education's pilot and pathfinder schemes, can be wisely invested in stabilising the current system to ensure strong foundations on which to build future reform."

Voter ID 'stopped some people voting'

The Electoral Commission has called for the Government to ensure future elections are as accessible as possible in a new report on voter ID arrangements.

Its report found that those who were living with disabilities and/or in deprived communities were more likely to have been put off from voting in May's local elections because of ID requirements.

As **first** was going to press, Levelling Up Minister Rachel Maclean told MPs the Government would now review the voter ID scheme.

The commission has recommended that the kinds of ID acceptable at polling stations should be widened, and more support provided for council election teams to deal with the greater administrative burden a General Election could bring.

Cllr Shaun Davies, Chair of the LGA said: "It is of concern to councils and their returning officers that a number of people were not aware of ID changes and left unable to vote, particularly those living with disabilities.

"It is important that the Government takes on board recommendations from this report to broaden out the ID documents that can be accepted by polling staff.

"Council election teams are often small and so were reliant on help from areas without local elections to administer these changes last May.

"It is clear that, as we approach future elections, this will not be sustainable, particularly in a General Election.

"Councils will need support from government to recruit additional staff so they can manage increased demand."



Pothole repair funding 'down more in UK'

A devolved, long-term plan for local road repairs is needed to get investment back up to the levels of other leading countries, the LGA has said.

The Government currently spends 31 times more per mile on maintaining motorways than local roads, while spending on local road repairs has reduced by more than in other comparable industrialised nations, LGA analysis has revealed.

Figures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) show that £4 billion was spent on UK local road maintenance in 2006, compared with £2 billion in 2019.

Sweden, Denmark, the United States, Japan and New Zealand, increased spending by around half over the same period.

The LGA's latest residents' satisfaction polling found that only 34 per cent are satisfied with how well their local roads are maintained – the lowest since the survey began in 2012.

The LGA is calling on all political parties to commit to a 10-year programme where current funding for local roads and local transport infrastructure is boosted by devolving the equivalent of 2p of existing fuel duty.

Cllr Shaun Davies, LGA Chair, said: "The UK has fallen from the top to almost the bottom of the league when it comes to the amount we spend on repairing our local roads.

"Decades of reductions in funding from central government to local road repair budgets has left councils facing the biggest-ever annual pothole repair backlog.

"The Government should take this opportunity to work with councils to develop a long-term, fully-funded programme to catch up with the backlog.

"Ultimately, all local transport decisions should be devolved to councils, who are best placed to determine what is a priority for their areas."

COVID-19 booster programme to start sooner

The Government has announced that the COVID-19 winter booster programme will be moved forward because of concerns around a new variant, BA.2.86.

Those who are eligible for the booster vaccination include residents in a care home for older adults, all adults aged 65 years and over, and frontline health and social care workers.

The rollout of the vaccine has been brought forward, with vaccinations already beginning in England for adult care home residents and those with serious conditions that put them more at risk from complications from COVID-19.

The move is a precaution until



more is understood about the new variant.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board said: "It is clear that the success of the vaccination programme has allowed us to live with COVID-19.

"But the threat of new variants remains a concern, particularly for those who are more vulnerable in our communities.

"Councils and their directors of public health will again be doing all they can to work with NHS partners to support the take up of the booster vaccination rollout.

"As well as this, providers in the domiciliary care and care home sector are also being encouraged to communicate the benefits of the flu vaccine and COVID booster to care home staff, residents and those receiving homecare.

"If you are eligible, please do get vaccinated for flu and COVID-19 to protect yourselves and your families."

New homes standards 'could cost £18m'

Research by the LGA has found councils in England could face an extra £18 million to deal with new housing standards.

Under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act, the Government is introducing new standards for the professionalisation of the housing sector, which requires senior housing management staff to complete qualifications up to a certain level.

LGA research has revealed the changes are likely to cost councils £17.9 million in the first two years and then £3.7 million a year on an ongoing basis.

It says these additional costs need to be fully funded by government to prevent costs falling on over-stretched housing revenue accounts (HRAs).

The LGA is also calling for the implementation to be properly managed, with council housing management teams already facing significant workforce pressures, and for the Government to work with the LGA and qualification bodies on a comprehensive strategy, delivered to a realistic timetable.

In addition, local areas must be able to make their own assessments of roles in scope based on their individual workforce profile.

Cllr Linda Taylor, LGA Housing



Spokesperson, said: "Councils are fully committed to improving the quality of social housing, supporting housing staff and ensuring they receive appropriate training and can gain qualifications to help them in their roles.

"With costs to councils likely to be almost £18 million just for the first two years, it is essential that these new requirements are fully funded."

In brief

Permitted development

Plans to further expand permitted development rights to help deliver more homes risk creating "poor-quality residential environments that negatively impact people's health and wellbeing", the LGA says. A government consultation on the changes closes on 25 September. The LGA wants ministers to instead support its six-point plan for a generational step-change in council housebuilding and to give local government the powers and funding to deliver thousands of social homes a year.

Low-traffic neighbourhoods

The LGA has said councils are "best placed to make decisions with their communities", following the Prime Minister's order of a review of low-traffic neighbourhood schemes. Cllr Linda Taylor, LGA Transport Spokesperson, said: "As democratic organisations, councils continually review all kinds of services and schemes based on local circumstances. Therefore, a national review is unnecessary. Only with long-term certainty of funding and consistency of government policy can councils invest confidently in transport schemes and help meet the Government's own target of 50 per cent of urban journeys being walked, wheeled or cycled by 2030."

'Disappointing' decision to delay recycling reforms

New rules to ensure producers pay for the cost of recycling their packaging have been deferred from October 2024 to 2025, the Government announced over the summer.

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs said it had made the decision after 'extensive engagement with industry, and in light of the pressure facing consumers and businesses in the current economic context'.

The decision to delay was described as "disappointing for councils" by Cllr Darren Rodwell, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson.

He added: "It means we lose crucial momentum on ambitions to clean up our environment, while council taxpayers continue to pay for dealing with unnecessary and unrecyclable waste.

"Good packaging can be important

for keeping products fresh and intact. But everybody can see the unnecessary waste, across our shop shelves, delivered to our homes, and into our bins.

"For instance, the UK gets through six billion bags of crisps a year, but there is usually more packet than crisps. They are nearly impossible to recycle, and that is just one item.

"The delay means there will be another year of excessive packaging impacting our environment and climate change, and further uncertainties and delays causing councils real difficulties in managing their long-term waste contracts.

"It is crucial now that government, industry and councils all put the foot to the floor in planning full implementation from 2025, and that government extends EPR to cover other material types beyond just packaging."

Code of conduct

Almost two-thirds of councils in England (63 per cent) have adopted the LGA's Model Councillor Code of Conduct, either completely or partially, since its launch in 2020. The code was developed in consultation with councils, to protect councillors' democratic role, encourage good conduct, safeguard the public's trust in local government, and support the sector to aspire to high standards of leadership and performance (see www.local.gov.uk/local-government-association-model-councillor-code-conduct-2020). A recent survey shows good awareness of the code, with 97 per cent using it to inform reviews of their own councils' conduct codes, and 73 per cent saying it had been 'very useful' in this respect.

In brief

Social care workforce

The Government has announced a £600 million package over the next two years to boost the capacity of the social care workforce in England, including a £570 million workforce fund distributed to councils, and £30 million funding for local authorities in the most challenged health systems. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said he was pleased government had listened to the LGA's calls for this funding to be ring-fenced for adult social care and distributed to councils to help fund frontline services, but that councils need certainty that this money will continue.

Horizon Europe

The UK has concluded a deal with the EU to be part of the world's largest research collaboration programme – Horizon Europe. UK universities and research institutes conducting cutting-edge research have traditionally been big beneficiaries, but councils can benefit too. Cities such as Bristol, Glasgow, and London have previously acted as testbeds for innovative technologies, products or services, and for piloting new approaches on the ground. Areas that already have a clear vision and are willing to invest time and effort in contributing to one of Horizon Europe's 'missions', in particular those in relation to becoming a 'smart city' or delivering net zero climate goals by 2030, can find out more via the UK Government's national contacts at <https://tinyurl.com/yc4tw27r>

Sector support

Has your council received a peer review or other support and training from the LGA? If so, please help ensure our sector support offer continues to meet your needs by completing our survey at local.gov.uk/our-support/sector-support-survey. Our offer is underpinned by the 'sector-led improvement' approach and shaped by what councils tell us they need. Councils continue to reap significant benefits from engaging with our support and in 2022/23, 99 per cent of chief executives and 91 per cent of council leaders said our support had had a positive impact on their local authority.

Sports strategy to get extra 3.5m people active

An additional 3.5 million adults and children will be encouraged to improve their health and get more active following the launch of a new government initiative.

The National Physical Activity Taskforce comes as part of the Government's new sports strategy, which sets out a blueprint to improve the nation's health and fitness.

Intended to reach people of all ages and backgrounds, it aims to achieve 2.5 million more active adults and over one million more active children by 2030.

The latest Sport England Active Lives Survey indicates that a quarter of adults in England are currently deemed to be 'inactive', with more than 11 million doing less than 30 minutes of activity a week, while 53 per cent of children and young

people are not meeting official guidance of at least 60 minutes of activity a day.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE, former Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said councils have been working hard to prioritise public sport and leisure facilities, in spite of current financial challenges, and it was encouraging to see this was recognised by government.

However, more needs to be done to integrate sport and recreation services into health systems and to invest in sport and recreation at grassroots and community level.

"Embracing new ways of working at national and local level will be key to ensuring all communities have the same levels of access to achieve healthier lifestyles," he added.

Council-maintained schools outperform academies

Schools that stay with their council have continued to outperform those that converted to academies, research commissioned by the LGA has revealed.

A recent report analysing Ofsted inspections by school type has found 93 per cent of council-maintained schools in England were rated 'outstanding' or 'good' as of 31 January 2023, compared with 87 per cent of academies that were graded since they converted.

The LGA says this demonstrates why councils should be given powers to open new maintained schools, and is a reminder of the excellent track record of councils in school improvement and maintaining educational standards.

The report, by Angel Solutions, also found that since 2018, 72 per cent of council-maintained schools have retained their outstanding rating, compared with 60 per cent of outstanding academies that received inspections in their current form and did not inherit grades from their former maintained school status.

And while 57 per cent of academies that were an academy in August 2018 improved to good or outstanding, 73 per cent of maintained schools did so from the same starting point



Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Our research is a reminder of the superb performance of council-maintained schools, and yet further evidence of why councils should be allowed to open their own schools again."

"Councils want to ensure that every child gets the very best education and schooling in life. That is why it is vital they are given a central role in providing education and that government recognises councils as the excellent education partner they are."

Banning boycotts

New legislation could have far-reaching effects on councils' pensions and procurement functions

The Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill results from the Government's 2019 manifesto pledge to ban public bodies from imposing boycott or divestment campaigns against foreign countries and territories – singling out Israel as the focus of the legislation.

Proponents of the bill argue that this would prevent public bodies from setting their own foreign policy, while detractors describe it as illiberal and claim it could hamper action against other states, such as China.

In briefings and written evidence, the LGA has avoided the wider political issue underpinning the bill.

Instead, we have focused on the technical detail, examining how the bill may affect local authorities in practice – specifically as this relates to councils' pensions and procurement functions.

The effects on councils highlighted in our evidence have the potential to be far further reaching than one might expect.

Chief among our concerns are clauses 4 and 5, which could prohibit councillors from expressing legitimate opinions during pensions committee meetings and lead to vexatious legal action being brought against councils.

Clause 4 bans making statements in support of boycotts and prohibits public bodies from making statements that clearly indicate that they would engage in boycotts if it were legal to do so.

If a councillor says that they, as an individual, would support a boycott, then under the new legislation publishing this in minutes of meetings could constitute an offence.

Where the individual councillor's view is not supported by a pensions committee collectively, then it shouldn't be a breach of the law for them to express their views.

This could stifle appropriate and proper discussion at committee meetings about investments' risk factors:

geopolitical and territorial factors are relevant to the risk of making, or retaining, certain investments.

Clause 5 enables restrictions imposed by the bill to be enforceable via judicial review and restricts the court to only accept cases where the applicant 'has sufficient interest in the subject matter of the proposed application'.

The bill goes on to specify that such an applicant is someone 'affected by the decision in question'.

This is one of the most concerning elements of the bill. The LGA will be seeking clarifications and amendments to protect local authorities from uncertainty, and at worst, vexatious legal actions being brought simultaneously with potential enforcement action from the proper regulator.

Usually, judicial review is a last resort, but as currently drafted, it could potentially be the first that an individual could use to complain about a

decision or statement of a local authority.

This would put judges in the difficult position of having to establish whether there has been a potential breach of the law when there may have been no investigation by the proper regulator.

A lack of clarity around what constitutes 'sufficient interest' to make a complaint exacerbates the problem.

Does the applicant need to be a member of the pension scheme with a pension entitlement from the relevant authority? Or could being a local taxpayer in the pension fund's area be sufficient?

Under the current drafting, it seems all could be admissible.

Having produced a briefing on the second reading of the bill and provided both oral and written evidence to the bill committee, the LGA will continue to lobby on this legislation. We hope the concerns we have highlighted with government are considered in future drafts.



i See www.local.gov.uk/parliament to find out more about the LGA's work in Parliament



Engaging communities through leisure provision, Alliance Leisure sets course for growth

Alliance Leisure has a proven track record in transforming leisure facilities on behalf of local authorities, having delivered 220 developments representing more than £300 million of investment. And now, Alliance Leisure is gearing up for its next phase of growth with the promotion of marketing specialist John Leaver to its development board. The strategic move comes as the company prepares to deliver more than £500 million worth of leisure projects across the UK as the sector looks to align more closely with health and wellness and meet its sustainability targets.

The company's focus on innovation and driving positive change in the sector has been instrumental to its success. In his role as Marketing and Frameworks Director, Leaver will drive the marketing strategy to support Alliance's growth and maximise the potential of the UK Leisure Framework (UKLF).

Collaborating with Denbighshire Leisure Ltd, the UKLF has the potential to deliver up to £2 billion worth of leisure projects across the UK. The UKLF is a proven tool in bringing modern, inclusive and fit-for-purpose sports and leisure facilities to market, from ambitious new build and refurbishment schemes to smaller, but no less impactful projects such as 3G pitch installations and outdoor gyms.

"The leisure sector needs to adapt and align with health and wellness trends to cater to the changing needs of consumers.

"We recognise this shift and bring innovation to the traditional leisure market,



providing added value in affordability, cost certainty, risk reduction and speed of delivery," says Sarah Watts, CEO of Alliance.

"We work with local authorities and leisure trusts to develop sport and leisure facilities that deliver against a wide range of objectives from creating more active populations and better engagement with disengaged groups to contributing to the physical fabric of communities and providing a sense of civic pride."

Alliance has an extensive pipeline of projects coming up, which encompass a wide range of facilities, including spas, tenpin bowling, skateparks, fitness centres, soft play areas, climbing walls, outdoor pitches, swimming pools, waterparks and changing facilities. These projects will help clients transform their provision to meet their business objectives and get more people active, thereby helping to improve public health, create positive wellbeing within communities and reduce the burden on the NHS.

At the start of the year, the Government announced that more than £300 million will be injected into leisure and wellbeing developments, thanks to a number of successful Levelling Up Fund

(LUF) bids. The investment allocation is part of a total £2.1 billion round two 'levelling up' investment fund introduced to help tackle regional inequalities.

Alliance is delivering a number of LUF projects including building a new wellbeing hub in Caerphilly, Wales, after Alliance supported Caerphilly County Borough Council in its successful bid for £20 million. Procured through the UKLF, the flagship leisure and wellbeing hub will offer a range of facilities to support health, wellbeing and community cohesion. Alliance is also involved in the delivery of several other leisure projects made possible by the first round of LUF, including a £24 million new-build development on behalf of North East Derbyshire District Council, and Mablethorpe Leisure and Learning Hub which is due to open in the summer of 2024.



i To find out how **Alliance Leisure** can help you meet your business objectives, email info@allianceleisure.co.uk or visit allianceleisure.co.uk

Birmingham city centre

Budget pressures

Council finances are under strain from rising costs and demand for services



Councillor
Shaun Davies is
Chair of the LGA

Events over the summer have conspired to put local government finances back in the spotlight.

Amid warnings that other councils may follow Birmingham City Council in issuing a Section 114 notice – indicating that they cannot balance their budgets – the LGA has pointed to the increased demand for, and rising costs of, services such as children's and adult social care.

We know that councils in England face a funding gap of almost £3 billion

over the next two years just to keep services standing still.

Councils' ability to mitigate these stark pressures is being continuously hampered by one-year funding settlements, one-off funding pots and uncertainty because of repeated delays to funding reforms.

The Government needs to come up with a long-term plan to sufficiently fund local services – and its Autumn Statement, on 22 November, provides an opportunity to do this.

At a time when both a Conservative administration and Labour opposition want us to do more, there must be a full and frank discussion with government, and those who wish to form the next government, about council funding.

We also need recognition that the system is broken. The amount of

money that has been removed over the past decade or more is now resulting in well-led and well-managed councils facing the prospect of s114 notices.

If we want the country to have economic growth, that comes from local economic growth. If we want to have an answer for the national housing crisis, that starts with houses being built at a local level.

Local government can deliver public services faster, better and more efficiently – we just need to be empowered to do so with a new approach to funding and resources.

Meanwhile, I wanted to thank you and your teams for all the work you are doing to ensure the safety of your local schools and wider communities since the Department for Education changed its risk assessment for reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) in August.

Thousands of pupils in England and Wales had a disrupted start to the new term this month after RAAC – which can fail without warning – was identified at more than 100 schools. It has also been found in courts, hospitals and theatres.

The LGA has been highlighting the consequences for councils and their school estate with government, and working with officials on a cross-department basis.

Our Senior Vice-Chairman, Cllr Kevin Bentley, has written to Gillian Keegan, Secretary of State for Education, and we continue to call for the implications for councils to be a central focus as next steps are agreed on this worrying issue.

Help with RAAC

Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) is a lightweight form of concrete that was used in roof, floor, cladding and wall construction in the UK from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s.

It was used by some municipal architects primarily in offices and schools, but RAAC has been found in a wide range of buildings, not all of which are still in the public sector.

The limited durability of RAAC roofs and other RAAC structures has long been recognised. However, recent experience – which includes two roof failures with little or no warning – suggests the problem may be more serious than previously appreciated, and that many building owners are not aware that it is present in their property.



Further information about RAAC – **including government guidance for responsible bodies, safety briefing notices and technical reports, and guidance on identification and remediation** – is available on the LGA's website at www.local.gov.uk/raac

Putting localism on the agenda

The autumn conferences are an opportunity to influence party manifestos

The party conference season is just around the corner and the LGA is once again gearing up for a busy time in the political calendar.

This year, we have organised receptions and debates at four of the upcoming conferences – Liberal Democrat, Conservative, Labour and, for the first time, the Green Party.

We will also be hosting the LGA's Independent Group Conference on 24-25 November.

The Liberal Democrat conference will take place in Bournemouth (23-26 September), the Conservatives in Manchester (1-4 October), the Green Party in Brighton (6-7 October) and Labour in Liverpool (8-11 October).

This could potentially be the last set of political party conferences before a

General Election, which must occur by the start of 2025.

Each conference therefore provides the LGA with an invaluable opportunity to influence internal party discussions.

With the cogs of the manifesto writing process already beginning to turn, we will be making the case that this is a moment to listen to our communities and let them shape the political agenda.

Our range of conference events will make clear that this is the time for localism to be put firmly at the top of the agenda, rather than top-down solutions.

We will hold a series of drinks receptions at each conference to give local government leaders and other attendees the opportunity to network.

We will also host debates where our councillors and other stakeholders



LGA events at the party conferences



Liberal Democrat Conference

Bournemouth, 23-26 September

- **LGA Liberal Democrat Group local government reception**
Sunday 24 September, 7.45pm to 9pm
Bayview Suite, Bournemouth International Centre
Speakers include: Cllr Joe Harris, Leader of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group; Cllr Prue Bray, Deputy Leader of Wokingham Borough Council; and Sir Ed Davey MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats (invited)
- **LGA debate**
'Make It Local: council housing revival'
Monday 25 September, 1pm to 2pm
Meyrick Suite, Bournemouth International Centre
Speakers include: Helen Morgan MP, Spokesperson for Housing, Communities and Local Government; Cllr Darren Sanders, Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness, Portsmouth City Council; and Cllr Emily Davey, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames.
Chair: Cllr Heather Kidd MBE, Shropshire Council.



Green Party Conference

Brighton, 6-8 October

- **LGA Independent Group local government reception**
Friday 6 October, 6pm to 7.15pm
Brighton Centre
- **LGA debate**
'Make It Local: unlocking socially just transitions through local government'
Saturday 7 October, 9.00am to 10.15am
Brighton Centre
Speakers: Cllr Johnny Denis, Chair of the Association of Green Councillors; Cllr Caroline Jackson, Deputy Leader of the LGA Independent Group; and Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle, former Green Party Leader and LGA Vice-President.
Chair: Cllr Marianne Overton MBE, Leader of the LGA's Independent Group.



will discuss the big issues facing local government.

Our panels will be made up of senior councillors, representatives from the Government and the Opposition, as well as members of prominent think tanks and stakeholder organisations.

Attendees, as always, will be invited to participate and engage with our expert panel on key issues.

Each of our events will focus heavily on the LGA's Make It Local campaign (www.local.gov.uk/make-it-local), launched by Cllr Shaun Davies, Chair of the LGA, at our annual conference in July.

The campaign highlights the importance of local leadership and its unique ability to impact lives and communities in a targeted and effective way.

Whatever the outcome of the next General Election, we know that ministers will only be able to tackle current and future challenges if they reset the relationship between national and local government.

That's why Make It Local calls for the empowerment of local government, urging central government to foster stronger partnerships with councils across the country.

The campaign also calls for a change in Whitehall culture, where the belief that 'one size fits all' must be replaced by a recognition that the best approach is often determined by local contexts and that policy decisions should be steered by those who work in our frontline services.

To further empower local government, the campaign calls for government to build greater momentum behind existing devolution deals and to set out a clear pathway for all council areas to follow when ready.

Undoubtedly, the issue of government funding and resources will be raised in each of our conference events.

The LGA is adamant that government must put an end to opaque and fragmented funding regimes, characterised by one-year funding settlements and one-off funding pots, and instead opt for a unified and collaborative model of multi-year settlements.

We are looking forward to discussing these issues with you at our political party conference events this autumn, as we continue our drive to put local government, and its future, at the top of the political agenda.



For the latest updates on the LGA's activities at the party conferences, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament/party-conferences-autumn-2023.

See next month's **first** for conference reviews



Conservative Party Conference

Manchester, 1-4 October

- **LGA Conservative Group local government reception**
Sunday 1 October, 3.30pm to 5pm
Trafford Room, Midland Hotel
Speakers include: Cllr Abi Brown, LGA Conservative Group Deputy Leader; and Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
- **LGA debate**
'Make It Local: empowering local government with added freedoms and flexibility from government to deliver efficient public services'
Monday 2 October, 10.30am to 12.00pm
Charter 4 Suite, Manchester Central Convention Centre
Speakers include: Lee Rowley MP, Minister for Local Government and Building Safety; Thomas Pope, Deputy Chief Economist, Institute for Government; and Cllr Colin Noble, Chair of the LGA Conservatives Manifesto Working Group and former Leader of Suffolk County Council.
Chair: Cllr Abi Brown, LGA Conservative Group Deputy Leader



Labour Party Conference

Liverpool, 8-11 October

- **Association of Labour Councillors annual reception**
Sunday 8 October, 8pm to 9.30pm
Hall 2H- Secure Zone, ACC Liverpool
Speakers: Cllr Shaun Davies, LGA Chair
- **LGA debate**
'Unlocking prosperity with a New Local Deal'
Monday 9 October, 4.10pm to 5.25pm
Meeting Room 18, ACC Liverpool
Speakers include: Cllr Nesil Caliskan, Leader of the LGA Labour Group (tbc); Dr Arianna Giovannini, Deputy Director of the Local Governance Research Centre at the Department of Politics, People and Place, De Montfort University; and representative of the shadow levelling up, housing and communities' ministerial team (tbc).
Chair: Cllr Shaun Davies, LGA Chair

A three-pin plug to drive the current on EV infrastructure



Perran Moon,
Chief Marketing
Officer, Believ

The pace of installation of electric vehicle (EV) charge points continues to be slow. Only 12% of the Government's ambition of having 300,000 EV chargers operational by 2030 have been installed so far.

But the threat of global warming is now existential – and turning our back on carbon reduction initiatives should be out of the question.

So what is holding back the current rate of progress?

Tripping the circuit

Large-scale funding grants such as the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund have suffered multiple delays and have proven difficult for local authorities to access; currently the process from application to a decision is taking far too long. It means local authorities are waiting or wasting precious time wading through red tape when they could be putting new charge points in the ground.

To mitigate these lengthy delays we should cut out public funding altogether. Charge point operators, like Believ, offer a fully-funded solution, helping local authorities plan, install, maintain and upgrade their charge point infrastructure at zero cost to the taxpayer. Such a process means that public funds are not wasted in areas where the private sector is happy, willing and able to pick up the tab for public access EV charging infrastructure, rather than the taxpayer; it's faster, cheaper and many times more efficient. It also provides earlier access to vital local authority revenue streams, through bay fees or profit share schemes, offered by charge point operators.

We can help free up local authorities to spend their time on other transport issues affecting their communities. And with financial backing from Liberty Global (the



parent company of our delivery partner Virgin Media O2), and Zouk Capital (administrators of HMRC's Charging Infrastructure Investment Fund), our fully-funded proposition, complete stock of all speeds of chargers, and capacity to deliver at scale and pace is the solution local authorities have been asking for to accelerate EV charging infrastructure across their communities.

Our approach is one of considered collaboration, carefully balancing the needs and nuances of residents, local businesses, and local authorities with a mission to help deliver cleaner air for all.

EV accessibility

If infrastructure is one half of the solution, the second is charging affordability.

Presently, those who use public access charging, whether for personal use or work, have to pay 20% VAT, when private domestic charging is subject to only 5% VAT. It is unjust that those without access to a private driveway or home charging facilities must pay an additional 15% VAT to keep their EV on the road.

Only the Government can harmonise those tax laws, and they may be wise to do so. If all EV charging were subject to the same 5% tax rate, people from socially

deprived areas and small businesses dependent on their cars and vans to make deliveries would feel driving an EV was more affordable and so be more inclined to switch away from petrol and diesel.

To encourage this, Believ is working with ChargeUK, the collective voice for charge point operators in the UK, to lobby for a flat 5% VAT rate so those using publicly accessible chargepoints are not paying the price for not having a driveway.

EV vehicles themselves will also need to become more affordable. More incentives are needed to accelerate the pace of change.

In London, with the expansion of ULEZ, the local government has introduced a scrappage scheme for non-clean-air-compliant vehicles: a £2,000 grant for a car; £21,000 for small businesses replacing three vans; and £27,000 for charities scrapping three mini-vans.

A national scrappage scheme, along similar lines as the very successful scheme launched in 2008, whereby private car companies match-funded government support, could see the rapid removal of the most polluting vehicles from UK roads, replaced by cleaner, greener EVs, with all the resultant benefits of reductions in CO2 emissions and improved air quality.



Supporting improvement

The LGA is taking a new approach to communications support

Over the past eight years, LGA communications improvement support – which includes communications peer reviews and bespoke training – has become a highly regarded programme by member councils.

Earlier this year, feedback found that 94 per cent of leaders and chief executives who had received communications support from the LGA, were ‘satisfied’ or ‘extremely satisfied’ that the support had had a positive impact on their authority.

Since 2019, 129 local authorities have received at least one form of direct communications support from the LGA.

This figure does not include ad hoc support, such as media relations advice, reviewing strategies or speaking at events, which takes place in addition to specific projects.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, LGA Senior Vice-Chairman, has been on both sides of the LGA’s communications peer review process and believes it can provide unique expertise and perspective for councils.

“What the LGA provides, in a way no other organisation can, is the right people, with the right levels of communications knowledge and experience, to provide exactly the right level of insight, challenge and support for a council undertaking a peer review,” he said.

Services provided by communications improvement support:

- communications peer reviews (three-day) and health checks (one-day)
- advice and counsel to our member authorities – bespoke support, often around issues of reputational risk
- crisis communications cohort
- combined authorities’ communications network
- regular best practice events, seminars and webinars
- training for elected members – for example, on strategic communications, social media and media relations
- online best practice resources
- research and surveys
- corporate and place narrative support
- communicating in a political environment training.

“Clear, engaging communication is integral to local government; setting a plan, delivering on it”

“As well as professional communications and marketing advice, the role of member peers in the process is key, enabling councils to view their communications through a political lens and helping build the understanding of how their communications are being received by residents, businesses and partners.”

During negotiations for the 2023/24 improvement grant with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the department indicated it would no longer fund the LGA’s Communications and Community Engagement programme.

To meet the needs of our member councils, we had to produce a new financial plan.

The new funding model includes securing income through other sources, strategic partnerships, and recovering costs for some of the support we provide – such as communications health checks and peer reviews.

Cllr Shaun Davies, LGA Chair, has been part of peer teams on many reviews across England and Wales and is passionate about good communication.

“I am a huge fan of the LGA’s improvement work and I’m very pleased that we have found a way to continue to offer communications support and explore the provision of new services to our membership,” he said.

“As part of this, we will be continuing to support communications linked to children’s services, which is a priority for me and for many councils.

“Clear, engaging communication is integral to local government; setting a plan, delivering on it, telling people about the outcomes, giving them the opportunity to have their say and be listened to are all dependent on excellent communication.”



To find out more about the [LGA’s programme of communications support](https://www.local.gov.uk/our-site-communications-support-offer), please visit www.local.gov.uk/our-site-communications-support-offer, or you can contact our team directly to discuss your requirements by emailing Matt Nicholls (matt.nicholls@local.gov.uk) and Clare Robinson (clare.robinson@local.gov.uk)

Economic inclusion

The LGA has set out guiding principles on equality and diversity in employment and skills



Councillor **Satvir Kaur** is Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board and Councillor **Martin Tett** is Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board



Councils and the LGA have long made the case that greater local leadership of public services has the potential to make us all more prosperous and united by tackling the regional and local inequalities that unfairly hold back communities.

There is a both an economic and social case for this, because while we are one of the biggest and strongest economies in the world, we are also one of the most unbalanced.

The Government's 2022 White Paper, 'Levelling Up the UK', states that 'not everyone shares equally in the UK's success. While talent is spread equally across our country, opportunity is not'.

Economic inclusion is essential for building strong and resilient communities, reducing inequality and poverty, and promoting economic growth.

Councils, as leaders of place, can play a key leadership role in supporting

economic inclusion, both as employers and enablers of economic growth.

This important role includes supporting everyone – regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, caring responsibilities, 'children in care' or offending background – to achieve their full potential in education and employment.

The LGA's Work Local campaign sets out our ambition to work with government to unlock talent by spreading opportunity to all parts of the country (see www.local.gov.uk/work-local).

This is critical for the economy and local areas, as significant skills gaps are predicted by 2030.

LGA analysis of the employment and skills landscape has also revealed that equality and diversity are not completely reflected in jobs, skills and training opportunities – stark

inequalities are prevalent for both people and places.

We know that many councils are already working hard to tackle these inequalities. However, more remains to be done to address longstanding and systemic issues to ensure a more inclusive and equitable local economy.

So, last autumn, as part of the LGA's Work Local and levelling up ambitions, we set out to better understand the challenges of employment and skills inequalities for people and places; and explore how the role of councils in supporting equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in employment and skills could be advanced to help unlock talent and level up local areas.

To build on our initial research and evidence base, we hosted a series of roundtables between December 2022 and January 2023, to hear directly from local government.

The roundtables explored how councils are working to improve equality and diversity in employment and skills outcomes to encourage economic inclusion for their communities.

The discussions provided a snapshot of the challenges and how these are being addressed. 'Equality, diversity and inclusion focus group: thematic summary', available at www.local.gov.uk.

Moving on Up

East Sussex County Council

East Sussex County Council, like most councils, has seen an exceptional rise in homelessness in recent years. Some of this was due to the pandemic, with a shrinking local economy and employment. More recently, the cost-of-living and Ukraine crises have further exacerbated homelessness in the county.

Many of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness are unemployed, underemployed or earning significantly lower wages and, with limited rental housing stock available, this makes it a challenge to find suitable accommodation.

The council's response has been 'Moving on Up', a programme of bespoke employment support for individuals in housing settings or at risk of homelessness. The objective was to help residents develop skills, explore employment and, if a job was secured, move into independent accommodation.

The programme offered a combination of: bespoke mentoring; mini-interventions and learning tasters, as stepping stones to work; access to the Department for Work and Pensions' sector-based work academy programme; a job-matching

service; a 'moving on' incentive payment, to cover deposits and furniture (average £2,500 each); and help with accommodation searches.

Over 12 months, 450 people were referred onto the programme. All were given referrals into training programmes or direct support through Moving on Up. Within a year, 39 found jobs with embedded training, 20 people had moved into independent accommodation, 161 had participated in short learning interventions, and 103 who progressed to formal learning earned level 1-3 awards and qualifications.



[local.gov.uk/publications](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications), provides details of the conversations.

The roundtables identified several themes that underpin councils' ability to support greater inclusion across their employment and skills programmes. These included: the specific needs of individuals and lack of data; fragmented funding; digital connectivity; transport connectivity; the role of employers and businesses; and partnership working.

Building on our analysis and discussions with the sector through the roundtable events, we have now published a paper setting out six guiding principles to realising economic inclusion in employment and skills, and the key role we would like to see councils play.

The 'LGA guiding principles underpinning equality, diversity and economic inclusion in employment and skills' are:

- Economic inclusion strategies, action plans and initiatives informed by data on individual needs and local labour market intelligence can be more effective.
- Investment in infrastructure is vital to fully achieve economic growth and inclusion in people and places.
- Local government should

foster collaborative internal and external partnerships to maximise economic growth and inclusion.

- Local government should assist businesses and employers to support good work practices to maximise economic inclusion in local areas.
- Local government should promote workforce equality, diversity and economic inclusion as an employer.
- Local government should monitor and evaluate progress to ensure economic inclusion is achieved for everyone.

In practice, this might look like: promoting equal access to sustainable employment or skills opportunities; creating job opportunities for all to benefit from; ensuring council workforces better reflect local communities; assisting businesses to provide training and skills opportunities for everyone; and promoting policies that help create a more inclusive and equitable local economy.

Taken together, and building on the excellent work already under way in many places, councils can help people to achieve their full potential and create the conditions for inclusive and sustainable local growth.

Careers in the creative industries

Coventry City Council

The Creative Employability Programme, managed and delivered by Coventry City Council, worked with young people to develop a welcoming and inclusive space for those who use the council-run Job Shop.

The programme – funded by the National Lottery Community Fund – delivered creative industry-focused employment skills.

This gave young people an opportunity to explore their own creative practice, gain insight into the industry, and explore opportunities.

Many young people are either excluded from or struggling to achieve their aspirations in the Coventry labour market, and need personalised mentoring support to address additional barriers created by the pandemic, including increased mental ill-health, low confidence, isolation, discrimination and low income.

The challenge was to make existing services delivered by the council and local partners more accessible and attractive to young people.

The Creative Employability Programme gave young people the opportunity to work with a mentor from Arty-Folks, a local community-based project, to design, develop and create a piece of art.

Wraparound support included employability skills, confidence and motivation, team building, effective job search, and self-employment support.

The supervised programme led to referrals into further support, as identified by the young people working with job coaches and local delivery partners, including to training providers and careers advice.

Most of the young people progressed into education or training in the creative industries, including one who was given the opportunity to run a creative workshop on the project. Five participants signed up for a programme with Imagineers, a local arts education project, and some are now studying art-related courses at university.



For more information, please see 'LGA guiding principles underpinning equality, diversity and economic inclusion in employment and skills' at www.local.gov.uk/publications. The LGA will be hosting a webinar on 'The role of local government in supporting economic inclusion: unlocking talent to level up' on 3 October. The event will reflect on learning from the LGA's recent work on economic inclusion, look at good practice case studies on how the sector is tackling some of these inequalities, and host a Q&A session with a panel of expert speakers. To book your place, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events

The LGA's Liberal Democrat Group is looking to appoint to the following posts:

National Lead Peer to lead our improvement work from a political perspective, working closely with the group's office and overseeing the group's improvement, support and mentoring offer to its council groups and councillors.

- One post, two-year contract, 90 days a year, £348 per day.
- Interviews on 24 October in London.

Regional Peer(s) to report to and support the National Lead Peer with the group's improvement work across the country, taking responsibility for a number of regions or geographical areas [either option tbc].

- One or two posts, two-year contract, 30 days a year, £348 per day.
- Interviews on 25 October in London.

For more details and to apply, please visit
www.local.gov.uk/lga-lib-dem-group

The deadline for completing our application form and sending your CV to terry.stacy@local.gov.uk is
5pm on Friday 6 October 2023.



These posts are open to Liberal Democrat councillors on LGA member councils. For informal discussions, please contact **Terry Stacy**, Head of the LGA Liberal Democrat Office, on 07940 502683.



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Driving devolution

The LGA supports existing combined authorities as well as councils working on new devolution deals

By 2030, the Government has said that every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at, or approaching, the highest level of devolution, and a simplified, long-term funding settlement.

To help with this ambition – set out in the 2022 White Paper, ‘Levelling Up the UK’ – the LGA works with all its member authorities to ensure they have the right skills to collaborate successfully and, if wanted, to develop potential new devolution deals.

The LGA’s regional teams are the first contact for this support (see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-principal-advisers-and-regional-teams).

There is also activity under way to ensure that combined authorities have a clear understanding of what they can access from the LGA, and how it can be developed to make it specific to their needs.

There are currently nine combined authorities, excluding the Greater London Authority, which comes under different legislation. They are Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, North of Tyne, South Yorkshire, Tees Valley, West Midlands, West of England, and West Yorkshire.

Each has a mayor who is accountable for ensuring the combined authority works in partnership with its constituent local councils.

The Government has given each devolution deal area an amount of funding and so, together, the constituent councils and the combined authorities must develop plans on how they can allocate the money and bring in new funding to help their local area prosper for the good of local people.

These nine will soon be joined by



new deal areas that are currently in development – including East Midlands Devolution Partnership, York and North Yorkshire, Norfolk County Council Deal and Suffolk County Council Deal.

The new areas have been allocated funding for a deal and have the initial legislative processes completed. They are waiting for finalisation of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, currently before Parliament, to allow completion of all the necessary legal processes to become a fully functioning mayoral combined authority or county deal.

The Government is also working closely with several other areas that have expressed an interest in having deals and it is hoped that these will all be announced soon.

In addition to its work with fledgling devolved areas, the LGA continues to support all existing areas through six officer-led network groups – on human resources, governance and scrutiny, communications, finance, housing and planning, and workforce and skills.

“The LGA works with all member authorities to ensure they have the right skills”

Over the past six months, the LGA has commissioned the Leadership Centre to work with each network and carry out a review to help each group identify its purpose, how they want to work in future, the challenges that they face or will be facing, areas where more support is needed, and how to integrate the developing and emerging deal areas. This piece of work will conclude soon and a feedback session is due to be held in the autumn.

i If you would like to know more about the combined authority officer-led networks or have any thoughts or ideas that you want to share with **Jenni French**, the LGA’s Programme Lead on Devolution Support, please email jenni.french@local.gov.uk

Transforming services

The LGA has launched a new transformation programme for councils



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

Current local government challenges and drivers for change present councils and councillors with a unique opportunity to redefine their role in communities.

By embracing innovation, strategic resource management and community engagement, local authorities can transform services to reflect the evolving needs and aspirations of the people they serve.

To help councils with this, the LGA has launched its Transformation programme, offering tools, resources and support at every stage of your transformation activity, whatever service you are looking to transform.

Our aim is to ensure that councillors and officers have the skills and knowledge to stimulate meaningful change for their workforce and community.

The programme is being delivered through three areas of work: learning and skills; peer support; and tools and resources.

In respect of learning and skills, our series of transformation masterclasses and workshops will provide development opportunities for councillors and officers.

Our masterclasses will shine a light on specific themes and highlight

notable practice from councils to guide participants through the process of delivering transformation and change programmes.

They will focus on various methodologies and practical guidance, with time built in for roundtable discussions. Participants will be able to share ideas and discuss the application and scaling of notable transformation practices.

Our workshops will enable pairs of councillors and officers to learn from successful transformation projects and participate in an action learning set across three sessions.

The workshops will offer support to the councillor/officer pairs on their council's transformation plans and introduce them to transformation skills such as behavioural insights.

The peer-support offers use the LGA's ability to convene colleagues in the sector to learn and network with each other.

Our transformation experts will provide targeted capacity and guidance to councils as they share their skills and experience in areas such as governance, service transformation, and

culture change, for up to a maximum of 10 days of support.

Further to this, our matching service links councils with a council peer who is working on a similar transformation journey. They will offer support, act as a critical friend, and empower you to achieve your goals. This offer is open to both officers and councillors.

Our transformation panel will provide a safe space where councils can bring their formative transformation plans to a selection of peer experts, who will give constructive challenge to inform the next stage of their transformation strategy and implementation.

Our tools and resources offer will include the development and promotion of our website as the go-to place to find information, notable practice, and

“Workshops will enable councillors and officers to learn from successful projects”



Peer support: investing in our own improvement

It was wonderful to see so many of you at the LGA's Annual Conference and Exhibition in Bournemouth in July.

The commitment, resourcefulness, innovation and empathy evident across the local government sector never fails to amaze me.

I particularly enjoyed facilitating an Innovation Zone session, alongside Peter Fleming OBE, that celebrated the essential role of officer and member peers in supporting councils to improve.

This includes the invaluable role they play in delivering the cornerstone of the LGA's local government support programme – corporate peer challenge.

The 'LGA corporate and finance peer challenge: annual report 2022/2023' (see www.local.gov.uk/publications) clearly demonstrates how corporate peer challenge (CPC) is helping to provide reassurance to local leaders, inform organisational change, and support service transformation across the sector.

Key highlights include: delivery of more than 100 CPCs, finance peer challenges and CPC progress reviews; and deployment of 262 officer and member



peers who have delivered more than 1,285 days of challenge and support to councils through the CPC programme.

This demonstrates a significant investment by the local government sector in its own improvement.

All respondents to the annual peer challenge impact survey said that the process of preparing for and participating in the CPC has had a positive impact on their council.

All peers who responded to our survey said that taking part in a peer challenge

had a positive impact on their own learning and development.


As Chair of the Improvement and Innovation Board, I'm proud of these achievements. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all LGA peers for the tireless work they do to support councils.

The current year (2023/2024) is proving to be another busy one for peer challenge delivery.

We remain committed to working alongside councils to continue to strengthen the CPC process as a tool for improvement and assurance. This includes new training sessions for LGA peers to reflect the new approach.

Alongside CPCs, we are also now offering finance and governance peer challenges in a bid to provide greater assurance on struggling councils.

I am confident that, together, we will continue to support councils through robust, strategic and credible challenge.

 To find out more about the [LGA's sector support programme](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support), please visit www.local.gov.uk/our-support

“Council peers will offer support, act as a critical friend, and empower you to achieve your goals”

resources to support transformation programmes and projects.

The Transformation and Innovation Exchange is an online self-assessment tool and resources hub for local government (currently in beta version). Working with the sector, we are embarking on a process of ensuring that the tool meets current needs.

We are also developing a Transformation Capability Framework to establish a common standard of 'what good looks like' in terms of transformation activities, skills, roles, training and qualifications, across different council types.

Several workstreams of the new programme are now open for councils to get involved in, so please use the link below to find out more about all aspects of our transformation offer.

 Find out about our [Transformation programme](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/transformation) at [local.gov.uk/our-support/transformation](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/transformation). If you have any questions, please email transformation@local.gov.uk

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A member-led organisation

The LGA has made some changes to its policy-making boards

The LGA is a politically led, cross-party organisation that works on behalf of councils to ensure local government has a strong, credible voice with national government.

We aim to influence and set the political agenda on the issues that matter to councils so they can deliver local solutions to national problems.

We also provide 'sector-led improvement' – a range of practical support, on a free-of-charge and/or subsidised basis, to enable local authorities to exploit the opportunities that this approach to improvement

provides. At the core of all this are our elected members, who provide direction and oversee the policy work of the LGA through its Executive Advisory Board (EAB) – see below and right.

Our governance structures are led by a senior group of members from each of the four political groups (Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Independent), with seats on the EAB and the organisation's policy-making boards allocated in line with the political balance of the parties following May's local elections.

Ahead of the start of the LGA's political year on 1 September, the EAB

agreed changes to our policy boards to strengthen our response to some of the pressing issues councils face around the economy and climate change.

Consequently, responsibility for the economy has transferred from the former Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport (EEHT) Board to the LGA's Resources Board.

The EEHT Board has become the Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board, with an increased focus on climate change/net zero, as well as responsibility for all aspects of planning, local transport, housing and homelessness services.

LGA EXECUTIVE ADVISORY BOARD Board of Directors (LGA Board)



Cllr **Shaun Davies** (Lab, Telford & Wrekin) was elected Chair of the LGA in July. He previously served as Chair of the LGA's Resources Board and, from 2022, as LGA Senior Vice-Chair and Labour Group Leader. He first became a councillor in 2011 and has been Leader of Telford & Wrekin Council since 2016.
shaun.davies@telford.gov.uk



Cllr **Kevin Bentley** (Con, Essex) became Senior Vice-Chairman and Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group in July, having previously chaired the LGA's People and Places Board. He was elected to Essex County Council in 2009, has been its Leader since 2021, and also serves on Colchester City Council.
cllr.kevin.bentley@essex.gov.uk



Cllr **Nesil Caliskan** (Lab, Enfield), an LGA Vice-Chair, was first elected in 2015. She became the first woman and ethnic minority Leader of Enfield Council in 2018, and of the LGA's Labour Group in July 2023, and is Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Care at London Councils.
cllr.nesil.caliskan@enfield.gov.uk



Cllr **Joe Harris** (Lib Dem, Cotswold) has been Leader of the LGA Liberal Democrat Group and Vice-Chair of the LGA since July 2021. He was first elected to Cotswold District Council in 2011, aged 18, and has led it since 2019. He is also a member of Gloucestershire County Council.
jo.harris@cotswold.gov.uk



Cllr **Marianne Overton** MBE (Ind, Lincolnshire) is an LGA Vice-Chair and has been Leader of the LGA's Independent Group since 2011. She is Leader of the Lincolnshire Independents, Leader of the Opposition on North Kesteven District Council, and sits on Lincolnshire County Council.
cllr_marianne_overton@n-kesteven.gov.uk



Cllr **Bev Craig** (Lab, Manchester) is an LGA Deputy Chair. She was first elected to Manchester City Council in 2011 and became its first woman and openly gay Leader in 2021.
cllr.bev.craig@manchester.gov.uk



Cllr **Georgia Gould** (Lab, Camden), a councillor since 2010, is an LGA Deputy Chair, Leader of Camden Council, and Chair of London Councils.
Georgia.Gould@camden.gov.uk



Cllr **Michael Payne** (Lab, Gedling) is an LGA Deputy Chair, Deputy Leader of Gedling Borough Council, and a member of Nottinghamshire County Council.
cllr.michael.payne@gedling.gov.uk



Cllr **Izzi Seccombe** OBE (Con, Warwickshire), elected in 2001, became Warwickshire's first female Leader in 2013. An LGA Deputy Chairman, she was previously Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group and Vice-Chairman from July 2019.
cllrseccombe@warwickshire.gov.uk



Cllr **Morris Bright** MBE (Con, Hertsmere) is an LGA Deputy Chairman. Elected in 1999, he was Leader of Hertsmere Borough Council and is Executive Member for Public Health and Community Safety at Hertfordshire County Council.
morris.bright@hertfordshire.gov.uk



Cllr **Abi Brown** (Con, Stoke) is an LGA Deputy Chair, Chair of the Improvement and Innovation Board, and LGA Conservative Group Deputy Leader. First elected in 2010, she was Leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council from 2019 to 2023.
abi.brown@stoke.gov.uk



Cllr **David Fothergill** (Con, Somerset), a former Leader of Somerset County Council, has been Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board since 2021 and is an LGA Deputy Chairman.
david.fothergill@somerset.gov.uk



Cllr **Bridget Smith** (Lib Dem, South Cambridgeshire), an LGA Deputy Chair, is Leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council and a Lead Member on the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Combined Authority.
cllr.BridgetSmith@scambs.gov.uk



Cllr **Caroline Jackson** (Ind, Lancaster) is the Green Party Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness at Lancaster City Council, and an LGA Deputy Chair.
cjackson@lancaster.gov.uk

Other Executive Advisory Board members



Cllr **Louise Gittins** (Lab, Cheshire West and Chester) is Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board. She was first elected in 2011 and became Leader of Cheshire West and Chester in 2019.

louise.gittins@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk



Cllr **Satvir Kaur** (Lab, Southampton) is the new Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board. First elected in 2011, she became the first Sikh woman to lead a council when she became Leader of Southampton City Council in 2022.

Councillor.S.Kaur@southampton.gov.uk



Cllr **Darren Rodwell** (Lab, Barking and Dagenham) is Chair of the LGA's new Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board. He has been Leader of Barking and Dagenham Council since 2014 and is an Executive Member of London Councils.

darren.rodwell@lbbd.gov.uk



Cllr **Pete Marland** (Lab, Milton Keynes) is Chair of the LGA's Economy and Resources Board. He has been Leader of Milton Keynes Council since 2014 and on the board of Local Partnerships since 2020.

peter.marland@milton-keynes.gov.uk



Cllr **Martin Tett** (Con, Buckinghamshire) is Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board. He has been Leader of Buckinghamshire Council and its predecessor county council since 2011, having joined the council in 2005.

Martin.Tett@buckinghamshire.gov.uk



Cllr **Andrew Cooper** (Ind, Kirklees) is Leader of the Green Group on Kirklees Council, and a balancing member of the Executive Advisory Board.

andrew.cooper@kirklees.gov.uk



Cllr **Heather Kidd** MBE (Lib Dem, Shropshire) is the new Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board. Elected in 1996, she is a former Leader of the former South Shropshire District Council and sits on Shropshire Council.

heather.kidd@shropshire.gov.uk



Cllr **Liz Green** (Lib Dem, Kingston) is Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, and an LGA peer mentor. A former Leader of the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, she now chairs its Planning Committee.

liz.green@kingston.gov.uk



Cllr **Tony Saffell** (Ind, North West Leicestershire) is Planning Portfolio Holder at North West Leicestershire District Council, and an EAB balancing member.

tonyc.saffell@nwleicestershire.gov.uk



Cllr Sir **Stephen Houghton** CBE (Lab, Barnsley) is Leader of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council and Chair of the LGA's Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities.

cllrstephenhoughton@barnsley.gov.uk



Cllr **Sam Chapman-Allen** (Con, Breckland) is Chairman of the District Councils' Network and has been Leader of Breckland Council since 2019.

sam.chapman-allen@breckland.gov.uk



Cllr **Tim Oliver** (Con, Surrey) is Chair of the County Councils Network, Leader of Surrey County Council, and a former Leader of Elmbridge Borough Council.

tim.oliver@surreycc.gov.uk

Wales and regional



Cllr **Rob Stewart** (Lab, Swansea) represents Wales, is Deputy Leader of the Welsh LGA, and Leader of the City and County of Swansea.

cllr.rob.stewart@swansea.gov.uk



Cllr **Graeme Miller** (Lab, Sunderland), representing the North East, has been Leader of Sunderland City Council since 2018 and is Chair of the North East Combined Authority.

cllr.graeme.miller@sunderland.gov.uk



Cllr **David Baines** (Lab, St Helens) is Leader of St Helens Borough Council, Deputy Mayor of Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, and represents the North West.

cllrdbaines@sthelens.gov.uk



Cllr **Marc Bayliss** (Con, Worcestershire) represents the West Midlands, and is Cabinet Member for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills at Worcestershire County Council.

mbayliss2@worcestershire.gov.uk



Cllr **Matthew Hicks** (Con, Suffolk) represents the East of England, and is Chair of the East of England LGA and Leader of Suffolk County Council.

matthew.hicks@suffolk.gov.uk



Cllr **John Hart** (Con, Devon) was first elected in 1989 and has been Leader of Devon County Council since 2009. He is Chair of South West Councils.

john.hart@devon.gov.uk



Cllr **Nick Adams-King** (Con, Hampshire) is Chair of South East Councils, Executive Lead Member for Universal Services at Hampshire County Council, and Deputy Leader of Test Valley Borough Council.

nick.adams-king@hants.gov.uk



For more information about the LGA's policy boards, including membership and meetings, please visit www.local.gov.uk/about/our-meetings-and-leadership

Are officers in your council up for the LG Challenge?

Now recruiting its 12th cohort, the LGA is looking for **10 contestants** to participate in the Local Government Challenge 2024, in which the best and brightest local government officers compete in real-life challenges, hosted by five local councils around the country.

Nominate an officer in your authority to apply.

The application deadline is 12pm on Friday 29 September.

Problem solvers who are passionate about delivering the best for the residents they serve, LG Challenge contestants will come up with innovative solutions to the challenges faced by local government. With the £10,000 Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship awarded to the winner, contestants have an opportunity to make a real and long-lasting impact in their area.

Find out more and watch last year's challenge films:

local.gov.uk/lg-challenge

lgchallenge@local.gov.uk

[@lgchallenge](https://twitter.com/lgchallenge)



Keeping children with their families



Dr Jo Casebourne
is Chief Executive of
Foundations

Earlier this year, we published findings showing that family group conferences can keep children out of care, to instead live safely at home with their families.

A family group conference (FGC) is a family-led meeting in which the family and friends network comes together to make a plan for the child.

This might mean extra support for the parents to continue safely raising their child or identifying relatives or friends who can step in as the child's kinship carer.

We found that more than 2,000 children a year could avoid going into the care system if FGCs were rolled out across England, with a saving of £150 million within two years.

Consequently, we're recommending that FGCs are provided for all families before care proceedings begin.

Despite statutory guidance recommending the use of family group conferencing since 2014, too often FGCs are not provided or happen too late to divert children away from the care system, as highlighted in last year's Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

This is a landmark study: the evaluation, run by children's charity Coram, was the first randomised control trial (RCT) of FGCs in the UK, and the largest in the world.

The strength of the RCT model of evaluation – where people are randomly assigned to programmes or service-as-usual – means that we can confidently say that it is family group conferencing that led to the improved outcomes we saw.

The results from this study provide the most robust evidence to date of the positive impact that FGCs have for children and families at the pre-proceedings stage.

Although RCTs are common in other fields, they are a relatively new approach to evaluation in children's social care.

The successes of this trial and positive findings pave the way for future research of this kind, which will strengthen our



“Too often FGCs are not provided or happen too late to divert children away from the care system”

knowledge about what works to improve children's outcomes. Interventions and programmes that are widely used and promoted in policy should be evaluated for impact to ensure that they offer the best support for children and families.

Robust findings will enable us to make the case to local and national government for interventions that are most likely to make the most difference to improving children's lives.

At Foundations, our mission is to generate and champion actionable evidence that improves services to support family relationships. We have a commitment to only say things work if they have evidence of impact.

When it comes to FGCs, there is still more work to be done to address evidence gaps on their effectiveness at different points in the children's social care system, for example as part of targeted early help, or support provided for a child in need.

We will continue working in this area: strengthening family networks is one of our new strategy's key priority areas.

But now we know that family group conferences are a cost-effective intervention that can keep children out of care, local authorities should introduce them at pre-proceedings stage, where they are not currently doing so.

We continued the conversation this month by bringing together key players in the sector to hear from Foundations, including: the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing; the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families; and an FGC lead. Let's use these findings to follow the evidence!



Foundations is the national and independent What Works Centre for Children & Families; see www-foundations.org.uk

Positive changes to shadow cabinet



Councillor **Nesil Caliskan** is Leader of the LGA's Labour Group

With the next General Election moving closer, Labour Leader Sir Keir Starmer has used his recent reshuffle to set out a shadow cabinet that is bursting with talent.

His top team looks like a government in waiting and a stark contrast to the tired, divided and out-of-touch cabinet led by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

I warmly welcome Angela Rayner to the role of Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (LUHC).

Angela has seen first hand the value of local services and the impact of austerity with her background as a care worker and as a convenor for UNISON, and has long been

an ally to Labour local government. At the most recent TUC conference in Liverpool, she committed Labour to introducing a bill to ban zero-hours contracts and repeal anti-strike laws within 100 days of a new government.

This would be a transformative change in workers' rights, affecting those who are looking after the most vulnerable residents in our communities.

Matthew Pennycook, Sarah Owen, and Paula Barker will continue their great work after being reappointed to the shadow LUHC team. I look forward to them continuing to offer ambitious housebuilding policies such as the return of local housing targets and a rapid acceleration of the building of social housing.

The arrival of some familiar local government faces is exciting, with LGA Vice-Presidents Mike Amesbury and Florence Eshalomi offering their skills and experience as Shadow Minister for Building Safety and

Homelessness, and Shadow Minister for Democracy, respectively.

These appointments reflect Labour's commitment to empowering local government.

Labour's five missions will build wealth from the community up and reduce inequalities, while its Take Back Control Bill will move power from Whitehall to town halls, where local people can make local decisions.

At a time when the country is crying out for change, it is clear that Starmer is laser-focused on making the case to the British people as to why the Labour Party should form the next government.

"Labour's five missions will build wealth from the community up and reduce inequalities"



Councillor **Shaun Davies** is Chair of the LGA

Feedback and finances

It may already seem a long time ago, but I hope you had a chance to recharge your batteries over the summer, ahead of what promises to be another challenging and rewarding year in local government.

Earlier this month, it was a pleasure to welcome so many of you to the LGA's London headquarters for our member briefing day and for the first 2023/24 meeting of the LGA's Executive Advisory Board (EAB).

The briefing day provided important induction support to new and continuing board members, and an introduction to changes to some of our policy boards and their remits, designed to strengthen our response to key issues for councils around the economy and climate change.

The EAB reviewed progress on our plans for a Local Government White Paper, the work of the LGA's Civility Steering Group, and our lobbying priorities for the coming months.



The latter reflect continuous feedback from our member councils about the most pressing issues, current and anticipated, facing local government – including financial and service pressures, workforce capacity, asylum and resettlement, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, housing and homelessness, special educational needs and disabilities, children's services, and adult social care.

With the autumn party conference season about to start, we will use our debates and receptions at the Liberal Democrat, Conservative, Green and

Labour events to put localism on the agenda (see p12).

And with councils in England facing a funding gap of almost £3 billion over the next two years because of increasing demand for services and the rising costs of providing them, we continue to campaign for a sustainable, long-term financial settlement.

The Government needs to come up with a long-term plan to manage this crisis – and this will be key to our submission to the Chancellor as he prepares to set out his Autumn Statement on 22 November.



Councillor **Kevin Bentley** is Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group

Recovering the costs of fly-tipping

Ahead of the Conservative Party Conference in October, the LGA Conservative Group has been working hard to bring together our manifesto publication to launch at the conference.

This document will highlight our key asks of the Conservative Government ahead of the next General Election, with the aim of getting some of these included in the King's Speech on 7 November.

For those of you who are interested in seeing our manifesto, please do come along to our conference reception, which will take place on 1 October at 3.30pm in the Trafford Room at the Midland Hotel.

I also wanted to use my **first** article this month to highlight one of the recommendations for which we intend to seek the support of government.

I know that for councils that are responsible for the collection of fly-tipping and the removal of litter, the fines that are currently in place simply don't cover the removal and cleaning costs that are incurred.

"It is only right that council budgets are **not penalised** by the actions of criminals"

We will therefore be asking the Government to give councils the powers to set their own fine levels for fly-tipping, littering, and graffiti offences, with these decided by local councillors.

This proposal will give councils the powers they need to ensure that they can fully recover the costs that they incur.

It is only right that council budgets are not penalised by the actions of criminals who cause havoc on our environment.

While recognising the recent uplift in fine levels from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, we believe we can go further!



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

Showcasing councils at party conference

As you sit down to read this issue of **first**, the Liberal Democrats will be gathering for their autumn conference in Bournemouth, with a packed agenda looking at a range of issues with local government at the centre.

For example, urgent action is needed to tackle the housing crisis, and we will be showcasing our councils' work in this area at our LGA fringe meeting on reviving council housing (see p12).

"We want to see a massive increase in the **number of social rented homes** being built"

We want to see a focus on massively increasing the number of social rented homes being built, penalties for developers sitting on land that has planning permission, and additional powers for councils to force them to install infrastructure upfront.

We will also be showcasing Liberal Democrat-run councils' work on turning around children's services and schools, and discussing the party's plans to invest in our children's future.

Building on the magnificent work that our councils have been doing to address the climate emergency and tackle climate change, we will be looking at what more can be done to get to grips with the crisis in nature that is affecting the biodiversity of our communities.

We will be celebrating the key role that our councils' armed forces champions play during our debate on 'A fair deal for the Armed Forces community'; highlighting the great work councils such as Portsmouth and Colchester have done over many years.

And, following the leading role we played at the LGA in campaigning against the Government's voter ID scheme, we will be supporting the party's plans to scrap voter ID requirements.



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

The issues that matter to residents

The shocking news of fatal flooding in Libya is heartbreaking and there will be much we want to do to help.

Here, councils are as busy as ever, with big changes nationally and locally.

As elections loom, our Independents remain well connected with each other and with our residents, creating a strong and gathering momentum for the LGA Independent Group.

Our recent members' day was exciting, with determination to tackle the tasks ahead. All our members are invited to join our thinktanks to help shape solutions that work (see www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent).

Our first-ever 'weekender' for our 42 Independent council leaders, group executive and LGA board members is in Warwick from 20- 21 October.

And our annual group conference will take place from 24-25 November (venue to be confirmed); our ever popular 'Next Generation' programme commences from 17-18 November.

"We are working to keep planning local and **oppose uncontrolled permitted development rights**"

We are together working on key issues that matter to our residents.

For example, the by-election response to the recent expansion of London's ultra-low emission zone (ULEZ) was not an 'anti-green' vote but against the way it was implemented: without alternative public transport, little money for a belated scrappage scheme and not phased in.

Clean air and water remain central to our quality of life.

We are also working to keep planning local, and we oppose the Government's further increase of uncontrolled permitted development rights.

I will be representing you at the Welsh LGA's annual conference, and the Green and Plaid Cymru party conferences, and look forward to seeing you there.

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



Sara Masters is
Director of Projects at
The Cares Family

Building social connection

The need for social connection has never been more important.

Recent figures from the Campaign to End Loneliness show that the number of people who are chronically lonely has risen by half a million since the first year of the pandemic, with 7 per cent of the population now saying that they are always or often lonely.

These numbers underscore the crisis of social disconnection we are experiencing in the UK, which is at once a personal crisis, a public health crisis and a political crisis, and one that simply cannot be ignored.

At The Cares Family, we bring people together across generations, backgrounds

and experiences to build community and connection both locally and nationally.

As part of my work speaking to local government partners across the country, I have heard unease at the social disconnection in the communities in which they work and live and their strong desire to make a change.

Our response has been to detail what it is we do that creates meaningful connection. Through in-depth conversation with colleagues, the people we work with and external partners, we have identified 10 techniques that we practise that underpin authentic and reciprocal connection – where people bring their ‘true self’ to their interactions with others, and each person feels the benefit.

To bring those techniques to life and inspire connection, we have created ‘Ripple Effect’.

Working with partners, including City of York Council, we have developed a programme that creates a practical learning space making real our 10 techniques. This is designed specifically for local government teams and their partners to explore what working in this way would mean for them and their communities, and how to turn this into a workable plan to create meaningful connection where they are.



Ripple Effect is free and open to any local authority that is passionate about, and committed to creating, meaningful connection.

More than ever, we need to bring people together.

Local government is a linchpin for socially connected communities and of fundamental importance in making this urgent need a reality.



You can find out more about **Ripple Effect** by visiting www.thecaresfamily.org.uk/ripple-effect or emailing rebecca.rieley@thecaresfamily.org.uk

Data literacy in local government



Councillor Shahid Younis
(Con) is former Executive
Member for Corporate
Strategy, Insight and
Change at Wokingham
Borough Council

Data has emerged as a powerful asset that can revolutionise decision-making and transform governance.

Councillors hold a significant responsibility to represent and serve their constituents. To fulfil this duty effectively, they must harness the power of data and develop data literacy skills.

Data literacy is the ability to read, work with, analyse and communicate with data. It empowers all levels of people to ask the right questions, build knowledge, make decisions, and communicate meaning to others. We can use Socrates’ six-step scholastic approach to boost data literacy in local government, encouraging insightful questions and critical thinking for better engagement with data and informed decision-making.

First, clarify the problem you are trying to resolve. Begin with the end in mind. Clearly articulating a problem helps decision-making, resource allocation, and effective communication.

Second, challenge assumptions – about data sources, quality, security, biases, conclusions, and interpretations. This approach fosters better data understanding and informed decision-making.

Third, councillors should meticulously examine data evidence, including sources, patterns and assumptions, to foster transparency, adaptability, and accountability.

Fourth, explore perspectives. Most problems faced by councillors are complex and require exploring diverse perspectives in data analysis. By considering different angles, stakeholders and scenarios, this approach enhances decision-making and

inclusive governance.

Next, consider the broader implications of data decisions, to encourage long-term thinking, ethical considerations, and effective decision-making aligned with community needs.

Finally, question the questions – question both data, relevance and the framing of questions. This approach promotes critical thinking, clarity and improved decision-making.

Data literacy is not about being a data expert; it’s about having the skills to ask the right questions and interpret data with confidence.

It plays a vital role in ensuring efficient governance, so should not solely be integrated into councillor induction programmes – councillors ought to receive training from data professionals on using this progressively crucial resource effectively.

With the ongoing influence of big data on governance, data literacy remains pivotal for enabling effective leadership and enhancing services to residents.



The LGA is providing **free introductory data training** for councillors on 25 and 28 September, see www.local.gov.uk/events

Housing an island



Councillor Darren Sanders (Lib Dem) is Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness at Portsmouth City Council

A decent home is a basic right. But, as we know, providing one is tough.

In Portsmouth, the housing market has failed. Being Britain's only island city and the third most densely populated part of the country means space is at a premium.

Between February 2020 and November 2022, the number of properties to rent fell

by 45 per cent, while average rents increased 55 per cent.

In 2022, house prices rose by more than the average for the South East while wages did not.

We resolved to change all this, using the old liberal principles of treating people as individuals and putting them at the heart of what we do.

Our first plank was more homes people can afford. For many, that means a council home. The previous administration left us no plan to build them. We set one up: 750 homes have been or will be built, with more to come.

We set up Britain's biggest council-

funded programme of buying back Right to Buy homes. The £100 million, five-year scheme has delivered more than 550 homes so far, with another 100 in the pipeline.

We also encouraged housing associations to help us. A former prison designated for private flats now has two-thirds social homes, most at social rent levels.

The second plank was homelessness. One team deals with statutory homeless and rough sleepers and, by the end of the year, we will have one strategy for both.

We bought three ex-student blocks to give rough sleepers safe, secure accommodation. We are now using some of the 'buy-back' homes to get people out of B&B accommodation.

We have a dedicated team enabling homeless people to access the private rented sector – the fastest way of getting a home in Portsmouth.

But the most important aspect was changing the approach.

Instead of demonisation, every homeless person is treated as an individual, with a tailored approach. The multi-agency, cross-party group that oversees what we do has bought into that and the service is better too.



i Cllr Sanders will be discussing council housing at an LGA debate at the Liberal Democrat Autumn Conference on 24 September, **see p12**



Alastair Mumford is Programme Director at the MCS Foundation

The retrofit challenge

Access to funding, innovation and collaboration are key as local authorities across the country race to decarbonise housing.

Our homes are responsible for nearly a fifth of all UK carbon emissions. We will need dramatic action to make them more energy efficient if we are to address the climate and cost-of-living crises.

The scale of the challenge to do that is huge: the UK has the leakiest housing stock in Western Europe.

But councils are already leading the

way, developing replicable business cases to deliver insulation and renewable energy installations (known as retrofitting) on a mass scale.

At a recent workshop arranged by net zero charities Ashden and MCS Foundation, local councils from across the South West shared the innovative work they are undertaking to improve consumer awareness and to address skills shortages in retrofitting – both key barriers to growth in the sector.

For example, the West of England Combined Authority is funding a one-stop-shop retrofit advisory service for homeowners. This will provide support and advice to homeowners throughout the process of upgrading their home.

Devon County Council has supported an offer of free online home energy plans, as well as in-depth and tailored property energy efficiency assessments for homeowners.

These advice services, run in partnership with communities, help ensure consumers' trust in the retrofitting process, and support retrofit demand.

On the supply side, councils in Somerset are offering free retrofit training for local construction businesses to address skills gaps, and are linking residents to nearby businesses through a green directory, helping build a sustainable local supply chain.

There are still hurdles to overcome as councils, communities and businesses take on the retrofit challenge.

A stop-start, disjointed funding landscape, for which government has to take responsibility, doesn't help.

But with innovation, collaboration, and grant funding from organisations such as the MCS Foundation, local councils can make progress towards getting homes insulated and renewable energy installed at a mass scale.

i MCS Charitable Foundation's mission is to accelerate the widespread adoption of renewable energy and low carbon technologies, see www.mcscharitablefoundation.org

The Paddington Bear mace

Between council meetings and civic parades, council maces are normally locked away in the clerk's office.

But not the 140-year-old, metre-long silver Mace of Bangor City Council; it enjoyed a VIP trip to London over the summer.

Earlier this year, it was in such a bad state of disrepair that it was unsafe to process it beyond taking it out of its box to sit carefully before the Mayor of Bangor at formal council meetings.

We'd almost agreed that we had nowhere near enough money to professionally restore the mace when I remembered that the royal jeweller Wartski was founded in Bangor in 1885. At the outbreak of

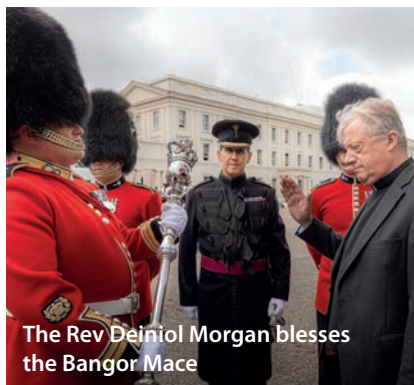
World War II, Mr Isadore Wartski was Mayor of Bangor and would have processed behind the same mace. Wartski's agreed to repair it – a magnificent and generous gift – and I had the honour of collecting it from London.

The King's footguards, the Welsh Guards – who are Freemen of the City of Bangor – heard the mace was in London and insisted it be taken to their regimental headquarters opposite Buckingham Palace to be paraded and saluted by a unit of full tunic-and-bearskin Guardsmen, led by their Regimental Adjutant, Lt Col Guy Bartle-Jones.

The mace was also blessed by the most senior chaplain to the Household Division, Lt Col The Rev Deiniol Morgan, who remembered the mace from his days as a minor canon at Bangor Cathedral.

It's like a Paddington Bear tale of the little mace heading off to London and ending up at the gates of Buckingham Palace. I was half expecting to find a marmalade sandwich tucked inside its case.

Cllr Mark Roberts (Ind),
Bangor City Council



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Cllr Mark Roberts with the Bangor Mace
outside royal jeweller Wartski

20mph in Wales

I recently submitted a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to the Senedd about the funding given to each Welsh council for reducing the speed limit on restricted roads from 30mph to 20mph, due to be introduced in Wales on 17 September.

I have major concerns about the implementation of these 20mph zones and would appreciate readers' views. It seems the Senedd has decided once again – why did they not ask the voters in a referendum?

If you have any views or would like to see the response to my FOI request, please email me

at kevinetheridge58@icloud.com.

Separately, having sat on the LGA's People and Places Board for two years, I would like to pay tribute to Cllr Kevin Bentley for the impartial way he has chaired its meetings, calling representatives of all political parties in to speak and give their views.

Kevin is an inspiration, and his last meeting was a major success with many tributes paid to him. We shall all miss you Kevin, and best wishes for the future.

Cllr Kevin Etheridge (Ind),
Leader of the Independent Group,
Caerphilly County Borough Council

Devolving power

If it means a transfer of power from Westminster, then I'm fully in favour of devolution. However, I'm not convinced about the setting up of new authorities, which will be seen as an extra tier of expensive bureaucracy by voters at a time when local government is facing financial difficulties.

Why can't they simply transfer control to existing councils, which, after all, are closer to the people?

Cllr Tim Mickleburgh (Lab),
North East Lincolnshire Council

? **Do you have any views you want to share about any aspect of local government?** Please email your letters to karen.thornton@local.gov.uk. Letters may be edited and published online

Changing hands



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



Almost half the contests held over the summer resulted in a seat changing hands.

The Conservatives continue to be the main loser, but it was by no means one-way traffic, with defeats inflicted on both Labour and the Greens.

Liberal Democrats enjoyed most success, making six gains, four of which were from the Conservatives.

There were two Conservative gains from Labour. The first was in Swindon's St Margaret and South Marston ward, which Labour won last May, when it also took council control. This time, the Conservatives won by 25 votes.

In early September, there was a repeat outcome in Broadland's Thorpe St Andrew North West ward. Labour won this ward in an October 2022 by-election and won all three ward seats last May.

But just weeks after that success, one of the Labour councillors – elected by just 33 votes – resigned citing work pressures. Voters sometimes punish parties for early resignations and the Conservatives benefited.

There was a third Conservative success, in Spelthorne's Ashford Town ward, where the Green elected in May resigned his seat in July.

Both Labour and the Greens tipped the balance by winning Conservative seats elsewhere.

In Plymouth's fifth by-election of the year, Labour defended St Peter and Waterfront, with former local MP Alison Raynsford (formerly Seabeck) elected, while former Liberal Democrat Stefan Krizanac took the Plymstock Dunstone seat under new colours.

Results last May suggested it was unlikely the Conservatives could defend a vacancy in Dudley's St James's ward. Then, Labour had a winning margin of more than 300 votes, but, on a reduced turnout, that was reduced to 100 at this by-election.

Labour also had success in Derbyshire's Swadlincote South division, which returned Labour in 2013 but favoured the

Conservatives thereafter. The absence of a Green this time made Labour's task easier.

But Labour is making a habit of undermining favourable headlines by incurring losses. Another example saw Independent Jackie Young take Middlesbrough's Ayresome seat, vacated by Labour's Antony High just a month after being elected last May.

In East Sussex, it was the Greens' Anne Cross who benefited when the Liberal Democrats withdrew their nominated candidate in the Heathfield and Mayfield division. A Liberal Democrat gain in Meads ward a week later resulted in the Conservatives losing control of the county.

This was a good week for the Liberal Democrats, who also took Norfolk's Freebridge Lynn division from the Conservatives, overcoming a 45-point majority.

Another gain, where Labour won by

just 21 votes last May, saw the perseverance of Liberal Democrat Ryan Priest finally pay off in Dudley's Cradley and Wollescote ward.

Further Liberal Democrat gains from Conservatives came in Somerset and Shropshire, with a 13-point swing in the former's Castle Cary ward dwarfed by a 31-point swing that led to an eight-vote Liberal Democrat victory in the latter's Worfield division.

There was a further Liberal Democrat gain, from Isle of Wight independent party Vectis. Despite not contesting in 2021, Liberal Democrat Sarah Redrup polled almost half the votes in Wootton Bridge.

i Only results where a seat changed hands are shown here. For the full list of results, please visit <https://www.lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections/>

Local by-elections

Broadland, Thorpe St Andrew North West

CON GAIN FROM LAB
6.6% over Lab Turnout 29.5%

Derbyshire, Swadlincote South

LAB GAIN FROM CON
24.5% over Con Turnout 13.1%

Dudley, Cradley and Wollescote

LIB DEM GAIN FROM LAB
21.9% over Lab Turnout 26.7%

Dudley, St James's

LAB GAIN FROM CON
5.7% over Con Turnout 16.9%

East Sussex, Heathfield and Mayfield

GREEN GAIN FROM CON
23.1% over Con Turnout 24.8%

East Sussex, Meads

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
8.7% over Con Turnout 39.4%

Isle Of Wight, Wootton Bridge

LIB DEM GAIN FROM VECTIS
18.5% over Con Turnout 35.1%

Middlesbrough, Ayresome

IND GAIN FROM LAB
2.7% over Lab Turnout 20.9%

Norfolk, Freebridge Lynn

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
7.5% over Con Turnout 23.8%

Plymouth, Plymstock Dunstone

LAB GAIN FROM CON
4.7% over Con Turnout 32.0%

Shropshire, Worfield

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
1.0% over Con Turnout 25.6%

Somerset, Castle Cary

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
27.8% over Con Turnout 28.3%

Spelthorne, Ashford Town

CON GAIN FROM GREEN
9.5% over Ind Turnout 25.0%

Swindon, St Margaret and South Marston

CON GAIN FROM LAB
1.1% over Lab Turnout 24.7%

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local authorities with
sustainable regeneration



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