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February finances

The recent announcement of an extra £600 million for local government is positive, but the financial pressures on councils remain front and centre of our work at the LGA (p5, p24).

Our Budget submission highlights how empowering councils and providing long-term sustainable funding would help the Government deliver its own policy priorities, including for economic growth (p10).

It's Children's Mental Health Week from 5-11 February, and we have a review of our think pieces on what we can do to improve the system for the benefit of our children and young people (p12).

Cultural and leisure services provide vital social and economic support to residents, and the sustainability and health benefits of these services will be among the issues discussed at our annual culture, tourism and sport conference on 5 March in South Shields (p14).

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Councillor Shaun Davies
is LGA Chair



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‘Extend support for vulnerable households’ – LGA

The LGA is calling on the Government to extend the Household Support Fund, amid warnings that six million of the poorest people in the UK would need to more than double their income to escape poverty.

The warning comes from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), which says in its annual report that a sustained fall in poverty has not been seen in two decades, and that the number of people considered to be living in very deep poverty has risen in that period.

Its analysis of official data shows that more than a fifth of people in the UK were living in poverty in 2021/22, including around two in every 10 adults and about three in every 10 children.

This means around 14.4 million people in total, including 8.1 million working-age adults, 4.2 million children and 2.1 million pensioners, were living in households below 60 per cent of the median income after housing costs.

The Government launched the Household Support Fund in September 2021 with £500 million to help vulnerable households with winter essentials such as food, clothing and utilities. The funding is distributed by local authorities in England, and to the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.



It has been extended twice, and is due to expire at the end of March.

Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "We have long called for a sufficiently resourced national safety net for low-income households and those who cannot work, as the JRF report recommends, allowing councils to target vital local welfare support to the most vulnerable.

"Given demand for this support remains at record levels, councils are united in the

view that the Household Support Fund must be extended for at least another year.

"Ultimately, councils want to shift the focus from providing crisis support to investing in preventative services that improve residents' financial resilience and life chances.

"However, without an urgent extension of the Household Support Fund, there is an immediate risk of more households falling into financial crisis, homelessness and poverty."

Encouragement for measles vaccination

Council leaders and their directors of public health across England and Wales have been urgently calling on parents to ensure their children have had both doses of the MMR vaccine.

The calls come in light of a recent rise in the number of cases of measles as well as a large outbreak of the infection in the West Midlands, where there has been more than 200 confirmed and over 100 probable cases since last October.

This is a region of the country where take up of the MMR vaccine is lower than the national average, with councils and directors of public health warning this



potentially puts children at greater risk of complications from measles.

The UK Health Security Agency has declared a national incident, signalling a major public health risk. Around 3.4 million under-16s

are believed to be at risk of getting the virus, with about 85 per cent of children vaccinated compared with the more than 95 per cent vaccination rate needed to ensure the population is protected.

Measles spreads easily between people who have not been vaccinated – it's more infectious than COVID-19 – and it can be a very serious illness.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board said: "Councils are supporting local and national NHS vaccination campaigns to make sure people know how important it is for their family to be protected.

"Vaccination provides the best protection for our children, and we strongly encourage parents and carers to check their children are up to date with their MMR vaccinations."

Local government recruitment drive

LGA Chair Cllr Shaun Davies (pictured) visited Stockton-on-Tees last month, to promote a pilot of a new recruitment campaign for local government.

The campaign aims to encourage people to 'make a difference' where they live with a council

career, highlights the variety of roles on offer, and challenges preconceptions about the sector.

The pilot, running in the North East of England, is supported by major advertising on billboards, radio and social media.

• See p18 to find out more



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Ministers press councils on reserves

The LGA has warned that reserves "can only be spent once" in response to calls from ministers for councils to use them in response to current funding pressures.

Announcing an additional £600 million for councils in 2024/25 (see left), Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary Michael Gove emphasised that all funding in the local government finance settlement "should be used by local authorities to deliver the frontline services on which our communities rely, rather than to be put aside for later use".

Mr Gove said his department would "continue to monitor the level of local authority reserves".

At the LGA's annual finance conference in January, Local Government Minister Simon Hoare noted that reserves overall have increased since the pandemic and that they are "there to be used".

However, in its submission ahead of the Budget on 6 March, the LGA has reiterated that drawing on reserves is not a sustainable solution to current budget pressures.

In his letter to Chancellor Jeremy Hunt, LGA Chair Cllr Shaun Davies said: "Use of reserves may provide a degree of resilience over the short term, but this is only temporary, as reserves can only be spent once."

"If councils use reserves repeatedly to offset recurrent pressures, they rapidly find themselves still having to address unfunded pressures, but now also with depleted reserves."

"Furthermore, not all councils have seen reserves growth, while others have seen growth from a very low base. Councils should be provided with additional recurrent funding rather than encouraged to use their reserves."



Additional funding announced for social care

Councils in England are to receive an extra £600 million in the financial year 2024/25, of which £500 million will be for adult and children's social care services.

The funding will trigger an extra £25 million for public services in Wales.

As part of the terms for the extra cash, Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary Michael Gove said councils will be required to produce new 'productivity plans' by July, setting out "how they will improve service performance and reduce wasteful expenditure to ensure every area is making best use of taxpayers' money".

The LGA has warned that councils in England face a £4 billion funding gap over the next two years. An LGA survey in December found that almost one in five council leaders and chief executives feared they were at risk of issuing Section 114 reports because they cannot balance their budgets.

While the extra funding will help ease

some of the financial pressures councils face in 2024/25, they will still need to raise council tax, and many will need to make cuts to local services to plug funding gaps.

Cllr Shaun Davies, LGA Chair, said: "We welcome that the Government has acted on the concerns we have raised and recognised the severe financial pressures facing councils, particularly in providing services to the most vulnerable children and adults through social care services and delivering core frontline services to communities."

"We will continue to work with the Government to achieve a sustainable long-term funding settlement and updated distribution mechanisms, as well as legislative reform where needed, so that local government can play its full part in delivering inclusive prosperity and growth through investment, to support people, places, and the planet."

• See p10, Budget submission, and p24

In brief

New LGA CEX

Joanna Killian has been appointed as the LGA's new Chief Executive, and will join from her current role as Chief Executive of Surrey County Council in March. Cllr Shaun Davies, LGA Chair, said:



"The experience, skills and insight Joanna brings to the LGA will be a huge asset for the organisation and our membership. Her local government expertise, networks and knowledge developed in previous high-profile roles – both in councils and the private sector – will be invaluable in ensuring the LGA continues to be a strong and united voice for local government in the debates that matter. The LGA's political group leaders and I are all delighted that Joanna will be joining us soon."

Flood resilience

The Commons' Public Accounts Committee has warned that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is not providing the necessary leadership and support for local authorities to address the UK's level of long-term flood resilience. In a new report, it says the Government "does not know if it is making the UK more resilient to flooding", and that flood protection will be provided for "at least 40 per cent fewer properties than planned", according to Environment Agency forecasts. The LGA continues to call for government to enable urgent acceleration of local adaptation action as part of the National Adaptation Programme.

Innovation Zone

Applications close on 5 February for councils wishing to showcase their new ideas and solutions to some of the biggest challenges facing local government in the Innovation Zone at the LGA's annual conference in Harrogate from 2-4 July. Each year, the zone showcases the outstanding, innovative work of councils across a range of service and policy areas. For more information email innovationzone@local.gov.uk and visit www.local.gov.uk/innovation-zone-2024 to apply.

First workforce pathway for care staff

The Government has announced a new 'care workforce pathway', providing the first national career structure for adult social care staff.

The plans set out defined roles and funding for professional development, including more than £50 million to support 37,000 staff on a new Level 2 Adult Social Care Certificate qualification, to be rolled out from June this year.

There is also more than £20 million for apprenticeships, plus subsidised training places and a new digital leadership qualification.

The LGA called the pathway a "positive step", but continues to call for a dedicated workforce strategy for social care and parity with comparable roles in the NHS.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Developing a dedicated pathway for people to work in adult

social care is a positive step, alongside funding for new qualifications and apprenticeships, which we hope will help tackle serious recruitment and retention challenges in this vital profession.

"However, for the pathway to make a meaningful impact, people who work in social care should have parity of pay and terms and conditions with the NHS for comparable roles.

"Similarly, while helpful, the measures announced stand alone and without a solid framework.

"We therefore continue to call for a dedicated workforce strategy, to promote, protect, support and develop careers in social care.

"This will strengthen the wellbeing and recognition of those who work in this essential vocation, and benefit the people who draw on care."



'Stigma' around HIV remains

People living with HIV continue to report a high level of satisfaction with their care service and treatment, but levels of stigma remain high, a new survey has found.

The UK Health Security Agency's 'Positive Voices Survey 2022', completed by 4,618 people living with diagnosed HIV, found that most (91.7 per cent) were satisfied with their current treatment plan.

However, one in 25 respondents reported having been verbally harassed because of their HIV status in the past year, and a similar proportion felt that family members had made discriminatory remarks.

One in three reported low self-esteem because of their HIV status; one in seven worried about being treated differently from other patients by healthcare staff; and almost half

(45.1 per cent) reported feeling ashamed about their diagnosis.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "It is good that people living with HIV are pleased with the level of care they have been given. This is a testament to the hard work and dedication of staff working in council-commissioned sexual health services and their partners.

"However, it is clear that more needs to be done to tackle the high levels of stigma that remain around HIV, which could potentially lead to people being deterred from accessing the support they need.

"We acknowledge we need to reach out to underserved groups, while also developing effective campaigns across the board to raise awareness and reduce stigma."



‘Unprecedented’ demand on sexual health services

Sexual health services are reaching breaking point, with more than two-thirds of council areas seeing increased rates of gonorrhoea and syphilis since 2017, the LGA has warned.

It is calling on the Government to provide extra funding so local sexual health clinics can meet rising demand, and to publish a long-term plan to help prevent and treat sexually transmitted infections.

LGA analysis of new figures for England show that almost all council areas (97 per cent) have seen an increase in gonorrhoea diagnoses, with 10 local authorities seeing rates triple.

The biggest increases were in Wigan, Dorset, Somerset, Devon, and Torbay, and the highest rate of diagnoses was in Lambeth.

Additionally, 71 per cent of areas have seen increases in cases of syphilis, with the largest increases in Middlesbrough, the Isle of Wight, Darlington, and Redcar & Cleveland.

Demand for sexual health services has continued to grow, with nearly 4.5 million consultations carried out in 2022, up by a third since 2013, and diagnostic tests up 13 per cent, to 2.2 million.

As **first** was going to press, councils were still waiting for publication of their 2024/25 public health grant allocations.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "These statistics show that local sexual health services are grappling with unprecedented increases in demand. The Government needs to ensure sexual health funding is increased to levels that match these stark increases.

"Investment in sexual health services helps to prevent longer-term illness and unwanted pregnancies, reducing pressure on our NHS and improving the health of people across our communities."

In brief

‘Extend family hubs’ – LGA

The Government has announced that ‘family hubs’ – providing one-stop shop services for families and children aged 0-19, and up to 25 for those with special educational needs and disabilities – are now open in 75 council areas in England. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board said: "It is good news that new family hubs are open for people who need them and this is testament to the hard work of councils. Family hubs represent an important opportunity for councils to support families and to help them gain access to a range of vital services in their communities. We'd now like to see this scheme extended to all councils so these transformative benefits can be felt across the country."

Ofsted listening exercise

Ofsted has published a formal response to the recommendations set out by HM Coroner in a Prevention of Future Deaths report, following the inquest into the death of headteacher Ruth Perry. It includes new policy on pausing inspections, training to recognise and respond to signs of distress in school leaders, and simple processes for providers who have concerns about inspections. Ofsted will also conduct a comprehensive listening exercise across the sectors in which it works. The LGA will continue to work with Ofsted to make sure appropriate processes for raising and responding to concerns are in place.

Women's health

Health Secretary Victoria Atkins has announced a range of women's health priorities for 2024, as part of the Women's Health Strategy. These include: tackling problem periods; expanding women's health hubs, with the aim of establishing one fully functioning hub in every local area this year; more research into women's health; and improved support for domestic and sexual abuse victims. Additionally, £50 million has been announced for research to tackle maternity disparities.

Review to inform new libraries strategy

Ministers have confirmed that a series of recommendations from an independent review of libraries will be taken forward in a new government strategy, due to be published this year.

The review, led by former journalist and government adviser Baroness Sanderson of Welton, was commissioned in September 2022 to seek views and develop innovative ideas on how to improve public libraries across England.

The Government response to her review welcomes recommendations for an expanded library membership, closer work with the British Library, improvements to the branding and visibility of libraries, and the establishment of a national data hub.

Arts and Heritage Minister Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay has also committed to hosting a series of cross-government roundtable meetings every year, to help address the challenges facing libraries, and to consider the ways in which public libraries can be recognised and included in future government policy work.

Cllr Liz Green, Chair of the LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "Libraries are a key public asset that provide extra services in providing community spaces. This review includes thoughtful proposals, which – if implemented – will go some way to contributing to the smoother delivery of library services and collecting accurate reports of their impact on communities."

In brief

Pothole repairs

The LGA has called for five-yearly funding allocations for council road repairs, in response to AA figures that show pothole-related incidents have reached a five-year high, and a plan from the Pothole Partnership, which represents road users. Cllr Darren Rodwell, the LGA's Transport Spokesperson, said: "Councils are doing all they can to tackle the £14 billion backlog of road repairs, including learning from and adopting innovative techniques. Greater, long-term and year-on-year consistency of funding for the maintenance of all parts of our highways will help them achieve this."

Pathways to planning

The LGA's graduate programme for planners, Pathways to Planning, is now accepting applications from candidates and councils in England. The programme offers councils access to a diverse pool of graduate planners, a £5,000 educational bursary, and a recruitment campaign delivered at no cost. To register for workshops in February and March, email pathways.planning@local.gov.uk and visit pathwaystoplanning.org for more information. The deadline to register your council is 31 March.

Home addresses

The LGA has long called for councillors to be able to request that their home addresses are not made public on the register of interests. The Government agreed with this in principle in its 2022 response to recommendations from the Committee on Standards in Public Life; however, no progress has been made since then. The LGA recently raised this with the Government because of rising community tensions. In response, Local Government Minister Simon Hoare MP highlighted a 2019 letter from his predecessor, Rishi Sunak, that suggested council monitoring officers should be sympathetic to requests from councillors for their home addresses to be redacted from the public register of interests. The LGA continues to lobby for legislative change on this issue.

'Wraparound' care a struggle for councils

Local authorities are struggling with the delivery of 'wraparound' childcare amid significant funding and staff recruitment challenges, says an LGA-commissioned report.

'Insight into wraparound childcare', published by the charity Coram Family and Childcare, explores the views of parents, sector experts and local authorities on current provision of before and after-school childcare.

The research follows the Budget 2023 announcement of £289 million over two years, from September 2024, to enable local authorities to support the expansion of wraparound childcare to all primary school-aged children.

The report highlights problems with making sure parents have access to childcare that meets their needs, staff recruitment, the complexity of accurately mapping local supply and demand, and the significant funding pressures facing local authorities.

Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Local authorities work hard to ensure this is a success and want to continue to work closely with central government to make improvements to the programme. However, they are under significant pressures and are having to target their teams in areas that need immediate focus, meaning some local areas have not been able to prioritise wraparound care."

"The shortages highlighted in the report



reflect the wider complications of this area and the lack of central focus on wraparound care.

"Despite the scheme being announced last April, there has only recently been further information from the Government on how local authorities should focus more widely on this, as well as the funding required to support local authorities to implement this programme."

"It is vital that local authorities have long-term, sustainable funding to enable them to support providers, schools and families to deliver and access wraparound provision."

Fly-tipping incidents down

Council enforcement actions against fly-tipping went up and the number of incidents went down last year in England.

New statistics show fly-tipping fell 1 per cent in 2022/23, down from 1.09 million incidents in 2021/22 to 1.08 million.

However, the LGA has reiterated its call for bigger fines for fly-tippers to discourage offending, and for manufacturers to provide more 'take back' services for old household goods when they are replaced.

In 2022/23, 60 per cent of fly-tips involved household waste, albeit the number of incidents was down 3 per cent, from 671,000 in 2021/22 to 653,000.

Local authorities carried out 536,000 enforcement actions in 2022/23, up 6 per cent from 507,000 in 2021/22. But while the average court fine has increased, from

£466 to £526, the number of fines issued has decreased by 17 per cent.

Cllr Darren Rodwell, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson, said: "Fly-tipping is inexcusable. It is not only an eyesore for residents, but a serious public health risk, creating pollution and attracting rats and other vermin."

"This decrease in fly-tipping is positive, and a testament to the hard work of councils."

"We continue to urge the Government to review sentencing guidelines for fly-tipping, so that offenders are given bigger fines for more serious offences to act as a deterrent."

"Manufacturers should also contribute to the costs to councils of clear up, by providing more take-back services so people can hand in old furniture and mattresses when they buy new ones."

Heating our homes

Supporting an affordable switch to decarbonised heating

Against a backdrop of soaring energy prices and an urgent need to transition to net zero, a Commons committee inquiry into the changes needed to deliver energy efficient homes across the UK couldn't come at a more pressing time.

The UK has some of the worst insulated housing stock in Europe.

Statistics reveal that, on average, UK homes are losing three degrees of heat in just five hours. In comparison, German homes lost only one degree, and Norwegian homes a mere 0.9 degrees.

Last month, Cllr Paula Widdowson, a member of the LGA's Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board, represented the LGA at an evidence session held by the Commons' Energy Security and Net Zero Committee.

Also giving evidence were Dan Norris, Metro Mayor for the West of England, and Fay Holland, Senior Energy Policy Adviser at Energy Systems Catapult, an independent research and technology organisation.

Committee Chair Angus Brendan MacNeil MP emphasised the importance of prioritising households grappling with high heating costs as we head through a bitter winter.

The LGA reiterated its case for a locally led approach to net zero, showcasing successful partnerships and initiatives across regions like the West Midlands, Cornwall, and Newcastle, and groundbreaking innovations such as the Eden Project, where a three-mile-deep borehole can supply 35,000 homes with energy.

Cllr Widdowson shed light on the challenges faced by her own council, City of York, where innovative projects like a solar farm on a former waste site are stymied by inadequate grid connections. The local network operator estimates a cost of more than £9 million simply to



connect the proposed solar farm to the grid – something that still would not happen until 2034.

During the session, we emphasised that warm homes mean healthier, happier people and a more productive economy, highlighting the broader benefits of retrofitting homes.

The urgency of climate action is apparent, with more than 300 councils declaring climate emergencies, and local government uniquely positioned to facilitate inclusive and trustworthy changes.

However, a short-term focus and poorly designed initiatives at the national level hinder local authorities' efforts.

The current approach is fragmented, with 60 per cent of UK emissions still lacking a tangible plan to deal with them, and councils grappling with an overly complicated multi-scheme approach, hindering progress.

With local government in England facing a £4 billion funding gap, proper financing is vital; but fostering a more effective partnership between central and local government and supporting local climate action would be more

efficient and offer significant cost savings compared to national approaches.

This has been demonstrated in a report from Innovate UK and consultants PwC, which highlighted that a national approach to hitting net zero would cost £195 billion with a £444 billion return, while a locally led strategy would cost £58 billion and yield an £825 billion return.

The challenge now lies in bridging the gap between central and local government, ensuring each council can harness its strengths to accelerate climate action.

With fewer than 10 spending reviews until 2050, the time to initiate a collaborative process is now.

We will continue to work with the committee and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to best support householders to properly insulate their homes and in the transition to sustainable heating sources.



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

Budget for the future

Investing in councils can drive economic growth



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

Ahead of the Budget on 6 March, I have written on behalf of the LGA to Chancellor Jeremy Hunt about the financial challenges faced by our member councils.

Despite welcome new funding in the 2022 Autumn Statement and last month's announcement of an extra £600 million (mainly for social care), a combination of sharply increasing cost and demand pressures means that the sector is in a parlous financial position.

In my letter to the Treasury, we set out how much-valued services, frequently focused on the most vulnerable in society, are under pressure and at risk, and how additional government support is needed to ensure local financial and service sustainability.

But we also highlighted and demonstrated the support and value that councils can provide in delivering the Government's Budget and wider policy objectives.

As locally rooted bodies with a democratic mandate, councils have the legitimacy to work with residents and across public services to find ways to best meet communities' needs, to drive change and make services better.

At the LGA, we think there is a compelling case for the Government to invest in councils to capitalise on these strengths, and that there are also gains to be had from empowering councils for no or only minimal cost.

Public services can be delivered faster, better and more efficiently at a local level.

Crucially, investing in and empowering councils can drive economic growth, and lead to better value for money for public spending. Council services can act to prevent more costly demand passing to other public sector bodies such as the NHS.

The LGA's Budget submission letter spells out the significant challenges facing councils up and down the country in setting balanced budgets for 2024/25 without affecting local services.

The fundamental challenge is that cost and demand pressures are rising faster than funding.

Our analysis shows that by 2024/25, cost and demand pressures will have added £15 billion (28.6 per cent) to the cost of delivering council services since 2021/22.

“Councils do not have enough funding simply to stand still”

Despite increased funding in both 2023/24 and 2024/25, we estimated in October 2023 that the sector was facing a funding gap of £2.4 billion in 2023/24 and £1.6 billion in 2024/25.

We have not revised this analysis following the Office for Budget Responsibility's projections at the 2023 Autumn Statement: were we to do so, we would anticipate a greater funding gap in 2024/25 as inflation and wages are forecast to be higher than in our October model.

These funding gaps relate solely to the funding needed to maintain services at their current levels. The

implication here is that councils do not have enough funding simply to stand still.

For example, increases to the National Living Wage (NLW) alone will add more to the cost of adult social care than councils can raise if they increase their council tax rates to the maximum 5 per cent before a referendum is required.

That leaves a reduced amount of funding to address the impact of NLW increases on other parts of the local government workforce, and the impacts of inflation, demand pressures and other cost drivers across all services.

In addition, there are individual service areas with cost and demand dynamics that are exerting higher cost pressures – particularly children's social care, home-to-school transport for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), adult social care, and homelessness services.

Councils have made huge efforts over recent years to manage their budgets.

Innovative actions such as transforming the way services are delivered through greater digitalisation and introducing shared service arrangements, alongside taking tough decisions over the range of services provided, have ensured that councils have been able to manage their financial pressures and to continue to deliver core services.



But the scale of pressures absorbed by councils, including a 24 per cent real terms reduction in core spending power from 2010/11 to 2024/25, means that financial resilience in the sector is at an all-time low.

Despite councils' best efforts to protect services, their financial challenges are having a marked impact on provision, with funding increasingly concentrated on fewer people, growing concerns over the quality and scale of service provision, increasingly unsustainable workforce challenges, and reduced spend on preventative services.

While the LGA's letter sets out the need for additional financial support, it also draws attention to the benefits and value for money that investment in councils can bring to the delivery of key national government policies.

There are three core areas where the LGA feels there is strong evidence for this: driving economic growth; delivering better life opportunities while protecting the public purse; and conveying power and understanding place to improve public services.

Councils play a wide role in promoting growth and prosperity, directly affecting local economic activity through designing and delivering policy, deploying skills and capabilities, and developing key relationships, especially as they take on the functions of local enterprise partnerships (LEPs).

All councils would benefit from

“Financial challenges are having a marked impact on provision”

clarity on a joined-up, longer-term approach to funding, building on the Government's Funding Simplification Plan; and from Whitehall departments adopting a 'devolution first' principle, entrusting councils with the powers and funding to deliver for their communities.

For example, councils need a long-term national commitment to support a council house building renaissance and improvements in existing stock.

Long-term certainty on powers and funding could help councils deliver an ambitious build programme of 100,000 high-quality, climate-friendly social homes a year. It would also improve the public finances by £24.5 billion over three years, including a reduction in the housing benefit bill and temporary accommodation costs.

Investment in council services is proven to lead to better outcomes and life chances for residents.

But in addition, there is also strong evidence that high-quality council services prevent demands and pressures being passed onto other public service providers,

often requiring far more costly forms of intervention.

For example, research for the 2022 Independent Review of Children's Social Care estimated the societal cost of adverse outcomes for looked-after children at £9 billion per year, while the 'Big Five' children's charities found that a failure to invest in children's social care now will lead to approximately £1 billion in additional costs to the Government over the next 10 years.

Councils have unrivalled local knowledge and sit at the heart of dense networks of public, private and third sector bodies. This means that further empowering councils and organising and delivering public services locally through them can deliver huge benefits.

For instance, devolved models for delivering net zero are more efficient and effective. Innovate UK modelled interventions in heat, buildings, and travel, and concluded local targeted action would hit net zero by 2050 while saving around £140 billion, returning an additional \$400 billion in co-benefits.

The LGA's Budget submission calls on the Government to:

- provide funding for councils that reflects current and future demands for services
- provide multi-year and timely settlements to allow councils to plan and make meaningful financial decisions
- ensure that funding is sufficient to recruit and retain appropriate numbers of skilled staff
- ensure that any new policy on the NLW is matched by funding to cover the cost
- adopt a renewed focus on prevention to address existing and future demand for services such as social care and homelessness support.

But it also asks the Chancellor to look beyond the financial challenges faced by local government and recognise the sector's huge policy offer.

Investment in councils has the potential to reduce costs falling on other public services and to support the more efficient delivery of key government agendas such as economic and housing growth.



This is an edited version of the LGA's [2024 Budget submission to the Chancellor](https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/spring-budget-2024-lga-submission), which can be read in full at www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/spring-budget-2024-lga-submission



Councillor **Louise Gittins** is Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board

Young minds

Thoughts on improving children and young people's mental health

The LGA is delighted to have heard from so many talented and interesting contributors over the past few months on how we can change the system and improve the situation for children and young people's mental health.

Since last September, we have been publishing a series of 'think pieces' from a range of stakeholders, people with lived experience, researchers, and experts in mental health, including, more recently, David Johnston, Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing.

We hoped the conversation would bring new and different ways of looking at the challenges we face, while providing opportunities for consensus across different partners, commentators and organisations.

We have seen this, and more – including a challenge to system leaders and policy makers to make a change for children, young people and families. We heard that, for many, the system is not working, with rising numbers of young people needing support from health services.

However, we also heard a lot of good practice and areas that can be built on. I was struck by the core themes and similarities emerging from the think pieces, which are areas for all system leaders to consider as we move forward.

From our contributors from the NSPCC Board for Change, we heard about the importance of engagement with young people who have accessed the system and know what works

and what doesn't. There were also frustrations about the difficulty in accessing mental health services and the need for young people to be better understood by all practitioners who work with them.

Another contributor highlighted the importance of young people having the freedom to choose and influence their experiences with mental health services' treatments, and the need for services to provide that opportunity for them.

Education emerged as a common theme, reflecting how it can be both a protective factor and a negative impact on some young people.

There was a suggestion that schools could become part of a culture of wellbeing; a new look at the curriculum could result in a more supportive environment, and interventions in schools – such as the expansion of mental health support teams – could make a significant improvement to children's mental health.

There was agreement on the importance of early intervention and prevention; unfortunately, we heard that this early support was sometimes challenging for young people to access.

Support outside of schools is equally important for young people – for example, in early support hubs, and for the youngest children through perinatal and infant mental health support.

Partnership and cross-system working underpin the success of



services and are the way to ensure young people can feel supported, receive timely and effective help, and thrive.

Although there are some challenges in the existing systems, all contributors from different backgrounds – be that local authority, education, NHS, or voluntary sector – highlighted how better joint working is one part of the solution for supporting holistic and person-centred care.

The importance of family networks and the environment in which young people grow up, such as the impact of financial pressures on them, were also shared by some contributors.

“Education emerged as a common theme, reflecting how it can be both a protective factor and a negative impact on young people”

i To read the **LGA's children's mental health think pieces** in full, please visit www.local.gov.uk/CYPmentalhealththinkpieces. It is **Children's Mental Health Week** from 5-11 February, see www.childrenmentalhealthweek.org.uk



“Better joint working is one part of the solution for supporting person-centred care”

Seeing mental ill health as a systemic issue and ensuring access to some basic factors – including healthy food, good sleep, sufficient financial provision and technology – can help to improve the mental health of young people in society.

International colleagues are experiencing similar challenges to those we are seeing in England.

They provided useful insights into what they are doing to tackle this – in Norway, ensuring that local areas have the flexibility to work on health promotion, rather than a clinical focus; in Austria, tackling the imbalance in access to diagnosis and therapies across regions and communities; and in the Netherlands, tackling the system around the young person instead of focusing solely on individual needs.

We heard calls for: addressing the

children’s mental health challenge as a slow disaster that requires a trauma response; ensuring that young people have access to good-quality work and affordable housing; valuing play among young people and the importance of leisure and cultural facilities; and looking differently at how we prevent and treat eating disorders.

As Chair of the Children and Young People Board at the LGA, I would like to thank the contributors to our think-piece series and encourage people to read and share their views.

The board is developing a task and finish group to look at the topic of children’s mental health, and how we can do more in this space, support councils, and continue to make clear asks of, and offer support to, central government.

Mental health professionals in schools

The LGA has briefed MPs on the Schools (Mental Health Professionals) Bill, a private member’s bill that, if enacted, would require schools and academies to provide an education mental health practitioner or school counsellor.

The LGA has long called for school-based counselling to be available and fully funded by the Government in all state-funded secondary schools and academies, to help support rising numbers of children and young people reporting mental health issues.

This should be alongside the expansion of mental health support teams (MHSTs) in schools.

It is essential that a range of professionals can support children and young people’s mental health needs.

While the MHSTs are an essential part of the support landscape, an interim evaluation has shown that there are some young people that they do not support – for example, those with moderate or complex needs. Exploring other ways to help these young people, such as through counsellors, is important.

We also need to ensure that children and young people can access high-quality mental health support outside of school.

Many children and young people face challenges accessing support for their mental health. Patchy implementation of policies has also fuelled a postcode lottery in provision, meaning that children and young people do not get a consistent offer of support.

The mental health needs of children and young people were rising even before the pandemic, but these have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

In 2022, NHS data found that one in six children and young people had a probable mental health disorder, an increase from one in nine in 2017.

This has had a significant impact on the system, with a 53 per cent rise in children presenting to councils with mental health needs in 2022, compared with 2018, and a 77 per cent increase in referrals for specialist mental health services in 2021 compared with 2019.

LGA-commissioned research published last year found that, while there has been a raft of successive policies and strategies to improve mental health outcomes for children, there has been a missed opportunity to significantly ease pressure on the system by increasing the availability of preventative and early intervention support.



See www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses for the **LGA briefing on the Schools (Mental Health Professionals) Bill**

Embracing **change**

Cultural and leisure services provide vital social and economic support to residents



Councillor **Liz Green** is Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board



In a world constantly evolving, where change is the only constant, the importance of understanding and celebrating the impact of our services cannot be overstated.

Local government is one of the biggest single investors in arts, culture, tourism and heritage. Councils spend more than £1 billion directly on cultural services; approximately \$650 million annually on libraries, and \$430 million on museums, heritage and the arts.

Around 8.9 million people make 165 million visits to our leisure centres, which are also relied on by three-quarters of grassroots sports clubs.

We have 7.6 million people using our libraries, making more than 40 million visits, and 33 per cent of all adults use library websites at least three or four times a year.

These are valued and much-loved, visible community services.

If we lose them, then we store up trouble for the health and wellbeing of our residents in the future, hinder our local economies from growing, and take away a vital route to learning skills for those who don't learn best in an educational setting.

However, LGA analysis shows that councils in England face a \$4 billion funding gap over the next two years just to keep services standing still.

As councils face one of the most challenging budget-setting cycles in their history, we need to come together to work out how we can continue to

deliver these much-valued services, supporting our residents and our local businesses to thrive.

We need to do things differently, locally and nationally.

The LGA's lobbying secured \$63 million for the Swimming Pool Support Fund, but further funding is unlikely to arrive any time soon. We are, therefore, looking at how else we can support the sector.

Two areas have emerged – improving sustainability and, thereby, reducing running costs; and making the impact of our services go further by reaching those who can benefit most from them.

Reaching the **less active**

Significant research shows that the most effective preventative measure for ill health and wellbeing is being active. Yet, despite the evidence, the level of physical activity in England is continuing to decline.

Both Sport England's and the Government's strategies call for greater collaboration and innovation between councils, professionals, different sectors and organisations to encourage more people to be active and reap the benefits.

Specifically, the Government's new sports strategy calls on councils to work with their partners to develop local plans that go beyond traditional leisure venues to encourage people to be active in their everyday lives.

However, the underlying reasons for an individual being inactive are varied and complex, and may include lack of access to, and awareness of opportunities, individual motivation;

and prohibitive costs. Therefore, the solutions are not straightforward.

Councils' wide-ranging responsibilities, across public health, social care, education, planning, reducing carbon emissions, and sport and leisure services, put them in a unique position to be able to provide services and experiences that are rooted and driven by the community, based on genuine need that has been identified

through consultation and local strategies.

The LGA's new guide, 'Reaching the less active', makes the case for tackling physical inactivity and supporting the less active; sets out how councils can identify and support the less active; suggests opportunities for innovative, creative and lower-cost ways of delivering activities; and provides case studies and examples from councils.



You can download '**Reaching the less active**' for free at www.local.gov.uk/publications/reaching-less-active-guide-public-sport-and-leisure-services

Building on the existing five routemaps in the LGA's Sustainability in Council Services hub (see www.local.gov.uk/sustainability-council-services), we are developing new routemaps for culture and for leisure, to support councils to become intelligent commissioners and improve sustainability within their culture and leisure services.

To help services maximise their impact, our latest LGA publication, 'Reaching the less active' (see panel, below left), draws on the evidence base showing that the most effective preventative measure for ill health and wellbeing is being active.

People who are active are likely to have less time off work through illness or poor mental health and they are able to manage long-term conditions more effectively, reducing pressure on social care and NHS acute services. Delivering physiotherapy in community settings rather than clinical ones has also been shown to reduce missed appointments by up to a third.

These two changes are within our gift, but what about the wider system in which these services operate?

Devolution may sound abstract



when considering that culture and leisure are already fully devolved services, allowing us to demonstrate local leadership.

But significant opportunities still exist, such as devolution of the skills funding needed to support the pipeline of talented people who sustain and nurture the cultural and creative sector, or the shift to place-based investment approaches from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's arms-length bodies.

We have commissioned a series of think pieces to explore how devolution can strengthen and support councils' work in these areas.

We will be discussing these issues further with leading experts and councils at the LGA's annual culture, tourism and sport conference on 5 March in South Shields.

As well as an unrivalled opportunity to network with colleagues from across the country, delegates will get the chance to breathe some fresh sea air in the walking tours showcasing South Tyneside's fantastic culture, tourism and sport services, which are benefiting the local community.



To find out more about the **LGA's culture, tourism and sport conference** and book your place, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events



LGA Annual Culture, Tourism and Sport Conference

Tuesday 5 March 2024, South Shields

Join us at this year's national conference, where we will explore how councils are embedding sustainability and inclusion within their cultural and leisure services, focusing on promoting positive change, within the context of local budget pressures.

Delegates will discuss the latest developments, challenges and opportunities facing councils and will have the chance to visit key local attractions, including the National Centre for the Written Word and the Sunday Times Beach of the Year 2022.

Confirmed speakers include:

Huw Edwards, Chief Executive, ukactive

Kate DeRight, Director, Spectra

Richard Hunt, Strategic Lead – Visitor Economy, Suffolk Growth Partnership

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



Community engagement

The LGA and partners have gathered examples of innovative practice

It has never been more important for councils to engage effectively with residents and communities.

The experience of highly challenging local government finances, the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased cost of living has shown how vital it is that councils maintain open channels of communication, and opportunities for engagement.

Councils are increasingly aware of a degree of 'consultation fatigue' in many communities. This challenge, in addition to that of engaging with hard-to-reach groups, has encouraged councils to fundamentally re-examine and seek innovation in how they undertake community engagement.

The LGA, the think tank New Local, and consultancy TPXimpact have been working together on a project

to capture and celebrate examples of innovative community engagement in local government.

We hope that these examples of notable practice (see right) will be translated to other local contexts and inspire those who are delivering projects and programmes where communities need to be engaged.

Over the past few months, we have heard inspiring stories of communities, councils and partner organisations bravely moving beyond traditional methods of engagement to find new ways of listening to, and involving, residents.

In councils of all sizes, tiers, regions and political make-ups, underrepresented groups and seldom-heard communities are being brought closer to decision-making and given new

“Councils are aware of a degree of ‘consultation fatigue’ in many communities”

opportunities to shape the places and services that matter to them.

We are struck by how often this action begins with a spark of creativity and courage from a councillor or council officer, which then inspires others to embark on a journey of change.

We have collected a set of case studies and short videos describing some notable examples of innovative community engagement from across England – see right for summaries of some of these, and www.local.gov.uk/innovation-community-engagement-examples-notable-practice for more on these and other case studies.



A community's experience of the rising cost of living

Cheshire East Council had traditionally relied on formal, conventional and digital methods to canvass the views and needs of residents. Often these resulted in self-selecting groups of residents having their say, while others were heard less clearly.

For example, council officers struggled to reach digitally deprived people, such as rural residents without broadband access, or people in poverty who could not always afford mobile data packages.

In 2021, the council adopted a new corporate plan, which included commitments to “listen, learn and respond to residents, promoting opportunities for two-way conversation”, as well as “[developing] the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents”.

This encouraged officers to pursue a

refreshed approach to consultation and engagement, empowering them to explore new participatory methods.

The council worked with Positive Money UK, a not-for-profit advocacy group, to run a representative ‘People’s Panel’ on the cost-of-living crisis.

Recommendations for action, developed by residents who authentically represent the local population, are now informing the council’s response to the cost-of-living crisis.

One success has been the fact that many of the recommendations were in line with the vision set out in the corporate plan and the aspirations of councillors.

Council staff were pleasantly surprised by how much the People’s Panel acted as a catalyst for further engagement, as panel members continued the conversations

with others in their communities.

Council officers felt the atmosphere at the workshops was more interactive and respectful than typically seen at public meetings hosted by the council.

The exercise was also well received by the wider public, thanks in part to an extensive promotional campaign and online survey. Residents have generally welcomed the council’s commitment to do more and to have better engagement.

Inspired by the success of the People’s Panel, the council is developing plans to adopt participatory methods in other areas. These include: subject-specific panels; a citizens’ assembly pilot; a standing or year-long assembly/panel, exploring a range of issues; and procuring an external facilitator on a long-term contract to work with multiple exercises.

Engaging with young people post-pandemic

West Berkshire Council had adopted a predominantly passive engagement strategy; seeking to inform residents through newsletters and engagement teams. As a result, the same demographic groups (for example, those aged 55-75) often replied.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the council’s engagement officer noticed that more people, from different groups, including children and young people, were replying and interacting with information – probably driven by people being at home with more time on their hands.

The council wanted to capture this engagement and established a new post to do so, funded for one year.

It ran a series of engagement initiatives with young people, including a youth council for secondary schools and a participatory budget for primary schools, and launched a children’s book on what councils do.

The events sought to approach engagement in a fun way, which could help children learn underdeveloped skills, such as teamwork and confidence building, while also providing an opportunity to teach the children (and their parents) about the council’s responsibilities.

The officer’s role has ended, but another team has already taken the principles learned from these small-scale, but different, approaches to engagement and integrated them into work reviewing their inclusion and diversity strategy.

The total cost for the projects was less than £30,000 – and £66 for a gazebo to help with going out into the community.

Reducing unemployment and deprivation

Seeking to identify ways to close gaps of employment, deprivation and engagement in one of Bolton’s most deprived areas, Bolton Council provided funding and significant freedom of action to a housing association – as the best-embedded organisation within the community – to experiment with forms of engagement where traditional approaches had failed.

Key to the new engagement programme was the freedom to invest substantial time in building relationships, and a light-touch approach in terms of reporting outcomes to give innovative approaches time to embed and have an impact.

New approaches have created increased trust and engagement from local residents with council and housing association services.

Co-designing the seafront

Torbay Council needed to construct new sea defences at two beaches. The original design met substantial public opposition, demonstrating significant community ‘buy-in’ to the seafront’s appearance.

The council paused the project and commissioned new designs, created using co-design and consultation principles.

The new design programme was not only an opportunity to create defences that had community buy-in and were aesthetically improved, but also a learning opportunity for the council on better ways to undertake community engagement and achieve buy-in.

Focusing on strengths

Having learned during the COVID-19 pandemic that some communities were stepping into frontline service delivery without the necessary skills, Stroud District Council focused on building community capability.

Through projects such as the extension of the community hubs programme and the implementation of a community engagement board on climate change, the council has developed strong relationships with communities and other partners.

Increasingly, community voices are being brought into the decision-making process, while the council’s mindset has shifted to one of enabler, not consuler.

Local government recruitment

North East councils are piloting a new advertising campaign



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

Working in local government has never been more valued or important, given the hundreds of essential services provided every day by councils and combined authorities to keep our communities running.

Local government is a great place to grow a career in a wide variety of challenging, but equally rewarding, roles – whether it be caring for families, protecting children from harm, ensuring your favourite takeaway or restaurant is safe, or keeping our streets clean.

Yet more than nine in 10 councils are experiencing staff recruitment and retention difficulties as demand for services continues to rise, highlighting the vital need to attract more people into the workforce.

To help attract new talent, the LGA has launched a new local government recruitment campaign, which is being piloted by local authorities in the North East of England.

The campaign aims to encourage people to 'make a difference' where they live with a career in local government, highlights the variety of roles on offer, and challenges preconceptions about the sector.

Part of the LGA's Sector Support Offer (funded by the UK Government) – and co-produced in partnership with local government and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (Solace) – the campaign has been designed to complement local authorities' own recruitment activity, providing resources and assets that can be



Durham County Council arborists at work

© DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

"This recruitment pilot is another example of how North East authorities continue to work together and in partnership with each other. There are many varied and rewarding roles working for local government, and these are roles where people can and do make positive differences for local communities, residents and businesses."

Cllr Graeme Miller, Chair of the Association of North East Councils, North East Representative on the LGA Executive, and Leader of Sunderland City Council

customised with local information, logos and images.

The themes and branding were developed by professional agencies and tested in surveys and focus groups with 2,300 participants, as well as with council human resources and communications professionals across England.

The aspirational themes focus on 'making a difference', how careers in local government have a real social impact and change lives, and on work/life balance and the variety of career opportunities.

The North East pilot, which started in early January and runs into February, has been co-produced with local councils and the North East Regional Employers Organisation, to ensure it meets their needs. It is being supported by major advertising on billboards, radio and social media.

The pilot aims to enhance the

good work councils and combined authorities are doing in the region to attract talent by encouraging individuals to find out how they can have a role working in one of the hundreds of services used by and relied upon by communities every day, ranging from adult and children's services to planning, environmental health, libraries and leisure centres.

Subject to the pilot outcomes, the ambition is to expand the campaign to the rest of the country, inspiring people of different ages and backgrounds to see what difference they can make to their local area.



To find out more about the **national recruitment campaign for local government**, please visit www.local.gov.uk/development-national-recruitment-campaign-local-government

Attracting the **best talent**

Dorset is making recruitment more human-focused

© DORSET COUNCIL



Erin Lawrence is
Recruitment and
Attraction Lead at
Dorset Council

Recruitment applications have significantly reduced over the past few years in Dorset, particularly in our specialist and hard-to-fill roles.

We've been unable to fill qualified positions in our essential services, leading to long-standing unfilled vacancies, increased workload and risks to retention, as well as to our ability to provide effective and efficient services.

We hoped to address these challenges by promoting who the council is as an employer and the genuine positives about working in local government.

We also aimed to represent our community more accurately through inclusive recruitment practice as well as engaging with young people through an early careers strategy.

So, a small team was introduced to challenge the way we look at recruitment.

To define our employer brand and market Dorset Council as an employer, we introduced human-centric and inclusive practices, empowering managers through training, eliminating discriminatory language, and implementing social media marketing for recruitment.

We've created videos to promote vacancies and showcase our culture across the organisation, focusing on authentic stories and real people to share what it is like to work here.

Our recruitment social media strategy is focused on separate social media channels that both promote jobs, but more importantly showcase our success, achievements, our people, our diversity of jobs and our ways of working.

Our early careers strategy has been launched to introduce young people to careers in local government while also supporting our local young people with the skills and knowledge they need to enter the workforce.

We've moved away from using an external agency to recruit for our leadership posts, using our own knowledge and platforms to generate interest, leverage the selling points and reach out to potential applicants – appointing successfully first time on all five campaigns carried out in the past six months.

Our innovative recruitment strategies have led to some key achievements, including increased applications and reduced reliance on external channels, a 400 per cent increase in applications for hard-to-fill roles, and a 62 per cent reduction in recruitment advertising spend within six months by strategic use of job boards.

We have an enhanced social media presence, with a 40 per cent increase in followers across all platforms in the past six months, and tailored support for specialist roles resulting in a remarkable 400 per cent increase in applications on average.

We've made approximately £50,000 in savings over six months by managing processes internally, from promotion to interview coordination; and seen a 68 per cent reduction in

broader recruitment advertising spend by eliminating reliance on external job boards.

Navigating the balance between injecting a sense of fun and playfulness into our social media recruitment promotions while maintaining a responsible approach befitting a local authority is crucial.

Recognising our obligation to ensure content appropriateness and sensible use of resources, we've discovered that embracing this challenge can lead to compelling outcomes.

By actively leaning into creativity and leveraging cost-effective tools such as mobile phones, we've realised the potential to generate honest and suitable content.

Acknowledging the inherent risks in online content sharing, our commitment to embracing new methods in both work and council promotion has empowered us to effect positive change.

This innovative approach has proven to enhance recruitment effectiveness, with measurable results, offering valuable and transferable insights for other local authorities.



This is a summary of one of the many council case studies on the LGA's website. To view more case studies on **recruitment, workforce and other issues**, please visit www.local.gov.uk/case-studies. To find out more about **Dorset's approach to recruitment**, contact Erin Lawrence at recruitment@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Unlocking potential

The impact of the LGA's graduate programme is transformative



Rob Powell is Executive Director for Resources at Warwickshire County Council

In my role at Warwickshire County Council, I have been closely involved in the journey we have embarked upon through the LGA's National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP).

This initiative has proven to be a game-changer for the council and the future leaders who've joined us.

The NGDP provides an opportunity for councils across the nation to attract and recruit some of the most promising graduates, allowing us to invest in, and benefit from, fresh talent, while providing a launchpad for their careers in local government.

In the context of our strategic workforce challenges, it also makes good business sense.

Since partnering with the NGDP

in late 2020, Warwickshire has hosted four cohorts of outstanding graduates, and we're eagerly anticipating the next group, set to join us this autumn.

The vast majority have progressed into senior roles within the council and are flourishing.

Having embarked on my own career through a local government graduate scheme at Cardiff Council, which followed a summer National Student Sponsorship with Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council, I feel strongly about giving a new generation of aspiring leaders the same opportunities.

My time as a local government graduate was the foundation of my subsequent career, even though I spent 20 years away from local government.

The benefits of the NGDP extend far beyond the individual growth and development opportunities of the participating graduates.

We view this programme as a key component of our strategic workforce planning, fostering a pipeline of

future leaders and bringing fresh energy, innovation, diverse views and perspectives to our council each year.

One of the hallmarks of the NGDP is the exceptional calibre of potential leaders it attracts. These graduates bring not only outstanding credentials, but also great enthusiasm, innovative thinking and a keen desire to learn.

This brings real benefits to the high-level, strategic projects they work on during their various placements with us.

Participating in the NGDP also streamlines our recruitment process.

Drawing from a national pool of high-calibre graduates – carefully selected through a rigorous multi-stage assessment – ensures that, by the time we interview candidates, we are choosing from the very best.

While some councils operate their own graduate scheme, we've found that the NGDP offers us the flexibility to leverage national marketing campaigns, supplementing our local university connections to attract top-tier talent.

This strategic approach has proven successful, enabling us to tap into a diverse pool of candidates who bring varied perspectives and experiences as we build a more diverse and inclusive organisation.

Reflecting on just over three years with the NGDP, the benefits to us have already been considerable. Feedback from previous and current scheme participants, as well as colleagues who have worked with them, overwhelmingly points to a positive experience.

We are eagerly anticipating the arrival of our fifth cohort in autumn 2024, confident in our ability to offer graduates an enriching and fulfilling experience, as well as their ability to bring much to our table.

The NGDP is not merely a programme; it's a catalyst for transformation, enriching the present and shaping the future of local government. I encourage councils nationwide to seize this opportunity to collectively propel the sector to new heights by unlocking the full potential of the NGDP's talented graduates.



To find out how the NGDP could help your council build capacity and develop the future leaders of your workforce, please visit www.local.gov.uk/ngdp-councils or, for an informal chat with the team to find out more, email ngdp@local.gov.uk. **Council applications for NGDP graduates close on 29 February**



Lessons from a cyber attack

A new case study shares what was learned



Councillor **Hannah Norman** (Con)
is Deputy Leader of
Gloucester City Council

Just over two years ago, Gloucester City Council suffered a targeted ransomware cyber attack.

A new LGA case study chronicles how our council responded to, and recovered from, the attack – starting with the shocking discovery that we had been subjected to one, despite all the preparation and mitigations that had been put in place to prevent this from happening.

The case study draws out the experiences of key members of our staff, with the aim of providing an insight into what is involved in dealing with a major cyber incident. It also highlights the lessons that were learned from the attack, something we hope other councils can use to their benefit.

The initial attack came in the form of a single ‘spear-phishing’ email – a message modified to target a specific victim and that appears to be from a trusted source.

It was inserted into an existing email chain with a supplier, making it almost impossible to detect. Once in our system, the attackers spent about a month navigating our network

before stealing data and encrypting our servers with ransomware.

Before the attack, our council had invested millions of pounds in cyber security, systems, training, and exercises, including some designed to help staff recognise spear-phishing emails. However, this did not prevent the attack from happening.

We have therefore taken a fresh look at these areas, in light of the incident, and identified a number of learning points, which we have acted upon.

In recognition of the difficulty of spotting a targeted and sophisticated spear-phishing incident, our council has enhanced our email security with new systems.

We have also introduced a managed security information and event management system, so that any suspicious activity is now monitored and responded to in real time.

To prevent attackers from moving from server to server if they got inside our council’s systems, network segmentation has been introduced that prevents and logs unusual traffic inside our network.

As our cloud-hosted services were not affected by the attack, we have moved around 70 per cent of our services to the cloud, and will continue to assess where the best hosting is for our remaining on-premises servers.

Having robust backups and

understanding the restoration process is key to recovering from a cyber attack, and we carry out regular testing and reviews of our back-up processes and restoration procedures.

One of our main areas of learning was around the importance of having a specific cyber incident plan, incorporating a communications plan, rather than relying on more general business continuity plans or disaster recovery plans.

As the case study lays bare, the impact and duration of the attack and recovery was far more significant than the actions in the plans were intended for.

Our council now believes it is important to plan for the worst-case scenario and is aware that the emergency we are most likely to face is a cyber incident.

However, it was not something we were able to insure the council against specifically, as we were unable to access a suitable commercial policy.

Perhaps it is time that the sector explored alternative models to traditional insurance, such as pooling or mutualisation, which are being looked into by the LGA.



‘Gloucester City Council: managing a cyber attack’ can be downloaded for free at www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/gloucester-city-council-managing-cyber-attack

Is your council working on a transformation activity or programme?

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Keeping children safe from violence



Gail Gibbons is Head of Change, Children's Services & Health, at the Youth Endowment Fund

What works to keep children and young people safe from violence?

It's a question that is central to councils' strategies for child safeguarding, delivering on their Serious Violence Duty commitments and commissioning children's services. Yet it's a question that's seldom straightforward to answer.

Councils face the difficult task of having to assess the most effective means to support and serve children and families, while all the time having to strike a delicate balance between meeting the diverse needs of their communities, financial constraints, and the practicalities of implementing services in the complex lives of individuals and families.

At the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF), we are committed to working with councils to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence.

We do this by funding promising projects and using the most robust evaluation methods to build a better understanding of what works to prevent violence.

Just as we benefit from robust trials in medicine, we believe children and young people deserve support grounded in evidence. Our trials span a wide range of themes and issues, from family support programmes and trauma-informed training to testing multi-agency partnerships to prevent extra-familial harm.

But we know that none of this research will make a difference if it just stays on the metaphorical shelf. We need to help those who are responsible for implementing practices, commissioning services and setting policies to put this knowledge to good use.

Academic research reports aren't always the easiest to find, access and understand.

To overcome this, we run regular virtual and face-to-face workshops, where councils can learn about the latest evidence and – most importantly – discuss how it can be applied in practice.

We've also developed an online toolkit so that this information is easily accessible.

The YEF Toolkit summarises evidence from around the world about the



“We believe children and young people deserve support grounded in evidence”

effectiveness of different approaches to preventing serious youth violence.

It provides you with the 'best bets' – the approaches most likely to keep children safe and away from the criminal justice system.

For each approach, we rate its impact and the quality of the available research, and provide indicative costings.

When used alongside other evidence resources – from What Works Centres, such as Foundations and the Education Endowment Foundation – and combined with your local knowledge, we hope it can help you find the right solutions to keep children in your community safe.

So, what works to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence?

Our research shows that therapies, social skills training and sports programmes are all highly effective, reducing violence by up to 30 per cent in some cases.

Restorative justice, mentoring and

pre-court diversion show real promise too.

Cognitive behavioural therapy, for example, can be used with children demonstrating challenging behaviour and with those who are already in custody. Around the world, it has reduced levels of violent crime.

Social skills training helps children to consider consequences before actions, understand others' perspectives and use strategies for managing impulsiveness or aggression.

Similarly, sports programmes have been found to have desirable impacts on reducing aggression, promoting mental health, and responding to other behavioural difficulties.

There is still much to learn about what does and doesn't work, but what we do know is that violence isn't inevitable. When we focus on reducing it, we can reduce it.

Working together and putting the evidence into practice, we can help every child live a life free from violence.



The YEF Toolkit is a free-to-access resource and is available at: www.youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit

Flooding, finances and food waste



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

The past few weeks have been a whirlwind for local government, not least because of the announcement of the provisional finance settlement, but also because of the outstanding work that our colleagues across the sector have done in response to the flooding and damage caused by recent storms (including Henk, Isha and Jocelyn, as this edition of **first** was going to press).

From my end, I wanted to update you on the lobbying work that I and the LGA Conservative Group executive have been doing on your behalf in recent months.

First, we all know about the situation we face with financing adult social care and children's services. I remain

concerned that far too much of the precept we receive from our residents is becoming increasingly centralised into areas such as adult social care and children's services, when our councillors on the ground want to be sorting out the real day-to-day issues, such as the state of our roads.

Following the announcement of the consultation on the settlement, Cllr Tim Oliver, Chairman of the County Councils Network, and I visited the Treasury to lobby the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and we made it clear to him that the settlement failed to address several areas.

We're therefore pleased that government has listened and an additional £500 million has been released for local authorities with responsibility for social care and children's services.

On a different subject, several weeks ago, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced its

capital transitional costs funding to councils as they become responsible for weekly food waste collections.

Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen, Chairman of the District Councils' Network, and I have written to the Secretary of State questioning the formula that has been used to allocate this funding.

Particularly, we have asked for greater clarity on whether the formula considers the most recent inflationary and supply chain issues, which will undoubtedly create issues in purchasing the new caddies and vehicles needed to carry out weekly food waste collections.

"Far too much of the precept is becoming centralised into areas such as adult social care and children's services"



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

Invest local to save

After months of LGA and council warnings that growing funding gaps would lead to cuts in services, the Government announced last month that an additional £600 million will be included in the final local government finance settlement for 2024/25.

I welcome any extra funding. The LGA and its partners, including the County Councils Network and the District Councils' Network, worked really hard to get every additional pound that was announced by Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

However, in the next financial year, we have a funding gap of £1.6 billion just to 'stand still' and maintain current levels of provision that are already insufficient to meet rising costs and demand for vital services such as children's and adult social care, special needs home-school transport, and homelessness and housing.



Despite the £600 million announcement, almost two-thirds of that £1.6 billion pressure remains: councils will still need to raise council tax and many will have to make cuts to local services to balance their budgets.

That is why, with the Budget due on 6 March, the LGA continues to make the case for not just plugging the gaps in council finances but for long-term, sustainable investment in local government.

This is an invest-to-save proposal

that would help the Government deliver its national policy priorities, including economic growth and getting better value for money from public spending.

From building more social homes to reduce the record-breaking number of households in temporary accommodation to improving outcomes for looked-after children and young people leaving care, we know that public services can be delivered faster, better and more efficiently at a local level.



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

An admission of total failure

Just days before many councils set their most difficult budgets in years – and many months after the LGA warned that soaring demand for social care and temporary accommodation was posing an existential risk to council budgets – the Government has finally backtracked on its catastrophic provisional local government finance settlement for 2024/25 and announced £600 million in extra funding.

“An increasingly chaotic Conservative government has sole responsibility for pushing so many local councils to breaking point”

The bottom line is that this emergency handout is an admission of total failure from an increasingly chaotic Conservative government that has sole responsibility for pushing so many local councils to breaking point over the past 14 years.

Many local councils are caught in a doom spiral, forced to raid already stretched budgets for basic services to find millions of pounds to pay for growing crises in homelessness and social care that have their roots in Conservative policy.

The stupidity of announcing government funding allocations just weeks before the start of a new financial year leaves councils unable to plan properly for the future.

So while it would be churlish to do anything other than welcome extra funding, it is at best another stop gap – it puts another few coins in the meter, but it won't stop the lights going out in many councils this year.

Councils are crying out for the security and stability that only a new government can deliver. The only real solution is a General Election now.



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

TV dramas highlight government scandals

Do all government scandals need a television drama for people to take notice? ITV's 'Mr Bates vs The Post Office' horrified the public and triggered outrage.

I am delighted that the Post Office Horizon scandal victims will finally be exonerated and compensated – but why did it take a TV drama to do this?

Let's not forget the 'Lockdown parties at Downing Street' drama, which brought home to the public the contempt that the then Prime Minister Boris Johnson had for the public during the COVID-19 crisis.

It gets worse. We recently saw calls for the Windrush Compensation Scheme to move faster. This has dragged its heels in compensating the victims for the inhuman treatment they have received.

“I am delighted that the Post Office Horizon scandal victims will finally be exonerated and compensated”

Public inquiry after public inquiry has seen the Government promise to right the wrongs of what has happened. How many times do we need to hear this?

Victims of the infected blood scandal – viewed as the NHS's worst treatment disaster – have questioned why they haven't seen coverage similar to the Post Office injustice. The publication of yet another public report has been delayed again.

As I write this, the Grenfell Tower survivors were confronting executives from companies blamed for the disaster, after saying – in the wake of the Post Office scandal – that it was increasingly clear that “those in power have lost their moral compass”.

How long will this inquiry go on for, and how long before those responsible are brought to justice?



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

Tough decisions as costs rise

As Independents and members of smaller parties, we need to take important – sometimes life-changing – decisions on behalf of all our residents, including the most vulnerable.

I hear first hand the tough decisions our leaders are having to make in the face of increasing costs and local needs. Many councils are at breaking point, with the national picture being one of councils having record levels of debts.

“National government has squeezed us dry for many years and there is nothing left”

This is not because we are not up to the task.

It is because national government has squeezed us dry for many years and there is nothing left. Council tax cannot raise the funds where it is needed. Funds must be better devolved to our councils as they are.

I had the pleasure of joining our 'Next Generation' cohort in Warwick, an amazing group of motivated, dedicated and passionate future leaders. But there is less and less scope for them to democratically lead their places if we are strangled by national political agendas.

As we head towards a General Election, we need a grown-up relationship with central government that doesn't keep us dangling on a string waiting for the next one-year settlement.

We need long-term, real funding investment to allow us to plan and properly support our communities. We need more mutual respect and trust.

I was honoured to be part of the Jo Cox Foundation's recommendations on creating a more 'civil' democracy (see p29), where elected members and the public alike can create respect and trust by properly debating issues to get the best solutions.

Park homes could help solve the housing crisis



Councillor **Michael Hardware** (Con) is Portfolio Holder for Economic Development at Harlow District Council

Park homes are becoming increasingly popular, yet almost no councils make provision for them in their local plans.

This is despite park homes being an acceptable form of development in the countryside and outside settlement boundaries, very deliverable, sustainable, and affordable.

More park homes would contribute to housing supply numbers and make a valuable contribution to addressing the housing crisis. They would also increase diversity and choice of housing options in the market, and provide specialist housing for older people.

According to the House of Commons Library, there are 85,000 park homes on 2,000 licensed sites across the country. Also known as mobile homes, they are

modern, bungalow-style detached properties. Occupiers enjoy all the usual amenities, such as gardens, sheds and patios, and pay council tax.

But park homes are certainly different when it comes to planning – in terms of the local plan process, the planning system itself, and the approach to permitted development rights.

They count towards housing supply numbers and help address housing shortages, including releasing larger family homes back onto the market as people downsize.

In addition, sites for park homes can be developed more quickly than ones for traditional homes. This is because park homes are manufactured in factories and then transported to site. Off-site

construction also improves build quality and sustainability.

Park homes are largely open for anyone to buy, but they also offer an opportunity for councils to provide specialist housing for older people, which is rarely included within local plans.

The over-55s now make up the largest portion of the population, but very little is being done to provide them with viable and attractive housing options.

This means they tend to remain in their family homes, restricting the market and reducing mobility, as those family homes are desperately needed by younger people.

Councils are missing a fundamental opportunity by not including park homes in their local plans.



first is essential reading
for **councillors and chief
executives** in the LGA's **member
local authorities** and both the magazine
and wrapping are **fully recyclable**

**Local
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If you find these e-versions of **first** fulfil your need for information from the LGA, why not think about reducing our carbon footprint by unsubscribing from the magazine? Just email first@oscar-research.co.uk to let us know.



Councillor **Tom Bruce** (Lab) is Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Development at the London Borough of Hounslow

Action needed on conditions in asylum hotels

Hounslow has the second-highest number of asylum seekers living in hotels of any local authority area in the country.

In 2022/23, there were around 2,302 people seeking asylum in our borough, with nearly 70 per cent (1,591) living in hotels.

Late last year, the council's annual public health report exposed the stark reality of the unacceptable and unsafe conditions facing many asylum seekers living in such local, Home Office-funded contingency hotels.

'On hold, the lived experiences of asylum seekers in Hounslow's contingency hotels' presents an urgent call to action.

It exposes the grim reality of cramped living conditions, inadequate nutrition, limited healthcare access, and the overall lack of meaningful opportunities for those placed in hotel accommodation – where families struggle with poor-quality microwaved food in cramped quarters, sometimes for months or even years.

Impacts outlined in the report are both alarming and potentially costly, ranging from physical health issues – such as gestational diabetes because of poor nutrition – to severe mental health challenges such as depression and even suicidal thoughts.

The toll on mental health is evident, with adults experiencing distress and depression, while young children are deprived of safe spaces to play and develop. One disturbing case study highlights the plight of a withdrawn four-year-old child, who refuses to leave their hotel room and shows signs of clinical depression.

I commend the extensive work of our Public Health Director, Kelly O'Neill, and her team, who have highlighted the

impact that living in contingency hotels has on the health and wellbeing of asylum seekers.

To take no action would be a grave failing by us all.

Representing the voices of many who are often terrified to speak of their experiences for fear of the upshot on their asylum case, it is profoundly disturbing to read the findings of the report. What struck me most is the plea for humanity and compassion.

Many asylum seekers will eventually become citizens and neighbours, and it's our duty to support them in leading fulfilling lives.

The report exposes the flaws in the current immigration system, and a government-led contingency scheme that perpetuates misery and missed opportunities for vulnerable individuals, especially children.

Its 15 recommendations point towards a comprehensive approach to address the physical and mental health challenges faced by asylum seekers.

While the Government has announced the closure of 50 asylum hotels – none of which are in our borough – the Home Office is increasing capacity in asylum hotels in Hounslow. This means, in many cases, two unrelated people will be living in the same room.

These plans are unsustainable and,

“Many asylum seekers will become citizens and neighbours and it's our duty to support them”

frankly, a piecemeal approach. It's time for the Government to work with local authorities to provide asylum accommodation on a non-profit basis.

In a letter to the then Immigration Minister, Robert Jenrick, in November 2022 – and in a following letter in February 2023 – the council raised concerns about health and safeguarding issues, and the significant pressure on budgets in the absence of additional funding to meet the full cost of providing local services to asylum seekers. This is on top of existing urgent housing needs in the short and longer terms.

We look forward to hearing from the Home Office and working together on a longer-term plan – one that is fair, more effective and provides the funding needed for local areas to plan for demand within already stretched budgets and services.

i 'On hold, the lived experiences of asylum seekers in Hounslow's contingency hotels' is available at tinyurl.com/52z28u3d



Conditions at a contingency hotel

© HOUNSLOW COUNCIL

Markets at a crossroads



David Preston is Chief Executive of the National Association of British Market Authorities

Markets are recognised among the top factors for supporting vibrant and vital town centres.

Many high street brands started out on local markets. During the pandemic, markets – next to supermarkets – played a vital role in supporting communities with essential supplies.

They are part of local history and heritage, and are at the heart of communities, with a proven track record of supporting employment, retail, tourism, hospitality, and environmental and social inclusion policies.

Markets in 2024 are, sadly, at a crossroads. Some have recently benefited from government-funded programmes, with 55 towns each awarded £20 million endowment-style funds over 10 years to invest in local people's priorities.

For many others, it is a different picture, with little or no support.

Most UK markets are operated or controlled by local authorities, so their lack of funding, concerns over annual government financial settlements, and now fears of Section 114 reports, place discretionary services, such as markets, at high risk.

It is now vital that national and local government recognise and action the unique and positive role that markets can play in economic and community recovery.

The National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) represents 300 market operators.

While we have a strong local government connection, we also have members from the private sector, business improvement districts, community groups and local councils.

Many LGA member councils will have a past, present and, hopefully, a continuing interest in the markets industry that delivers 1,150 traditional markets in the UK, supplemented by many special-event markets, such as Christmas, artisan and continental markets.

In 2022, NABMA undertook a national survey of retail markets – the first since 2018 – to understand the health of the industry coming out of the pandemic, and to reflect upon the economic crisis



The launch of NABMA's Markets First campaign at Shrewsbury Market, winner of Britain's Favourite Market 2023

“It is important to link markets and trading opportunities to Job Centres”

and general difficulties faced by town and city centres, and the performance of their high streets.

It identified worrying trends, with stall occupancy and trader numbers down and falling. Only 8 per cent of traders are aged under 40 and just 40 per cent of markets have an annual surplus.

Over a two-year period, NABMA set an agenda to engage with government, partners, national associations that have high street interests, and the media, to create a national dialogue about the future of markets.

Our Markets First campaign, launched in April 2023, aims to share best practice, create forums for discussion, and provide resources to assist markets and market trading.

The NABMA campaign has five priorities: attracting and retaining traders; addressing the economic challenges faced by markets; demonstrating their wider community value; making markets and management more

professional; and improving relationships and communication with traders.

We ask the LGA and councils to:

- provide the strongest endorsement at the local level of the importance of markets, and their public support for #MarketsFirst. This is particularly important in a situation where 84 per cent of markets are operated by local authorities.
- actively promote market trading and their low-cost, low-risk entry for business start-ups, to attract new – and, particularly, young – traders. It is important to link markets and trading opportunities to Job Centres and other relevant government agencies.
- recognise the wider community role of markets. Many are filling gaps in local service delivery, providing a focus for NHS services, libraries, local authority help points, cooking schools, safer community teams, and local charities and support groups.



To find out more about **NABMA's Markets First Campaign** and its **National Retail Survey 2022**, please visit bit.ly/3vLtOsF or contact davidpreston@nabma.com



No place in politics: tackling abuse and intimidation



Su Moore is Chief Executive Officer of the Jo Cox Foundation

In February 2023, we launched the Jo Cox Civility Commission, dedicated to finding implementable solutions to the problem of abuse and intimidation of elected politicians (see **first** 682).

Since then, we've heard from more than 100 stakeholders, including those with lived experience of the issue, and expert organisations.

Among those stakeholders have been a significant number of local politicians.

Though the focus of our work was not on evidencing the problem of abuse, we heard many moving examples of how this issue is affecting not just your ability to do your elected role, but your lives, and those of your families.

Based on our stakeholder engagement, we have developed 28 recommendations that we believe, if adopted, will make a significant impact on this worsening issue of abuse.

These fall into eight categories: coordination and behaviour; social media; elections; local government; Parliament (Westminster and devolved administrations); political parties; political literacy; and police and security.

Two strong themes emerged on which we have focused key recommendations.

The first is a lack of central coordination about the problem. There are people and organisations working to address it, but to see real, transformative change, we are calling for the Government to implement and resource a central unit to look at the issue.

This would include coordinating existing initiatives, resourcing new solutions, and facilitating information sharing between agencies.

The second issue that echoed through our stakeholder conversations was the impact of political literacy, or a lack of it, on abuse.

Many people just don't understand what their elected representatives do and the responsibilities of different levels of government. This can lead to confusion, distrust, and in the worst cases, abuse.

We are calling for a number of initiatives that would tackle this, including introducing mandatory political literacy to the school curriculum, and public awareness campaigns about the roles of various levels of government.

We have designed the recommendations to focus on improving conditions for serving politicians, but also on tackling the root causes of this issue. Some can be implemented relatively swiftly, but we know that for others – including the political literacy recommendations – it will take longer to see their impact.

Among our recommendations, those that will be of particular interest to local politicians include:

- Extending the remit of the existing Operation Bridger security programme to support local politicians. There are examples of police forces who already do this well, giving an excellent case study of how it can be achieved.
- Provision of clearer written instructions about what abuse to report to the police, and the channels and methods of escalation if needed.
- Urging local authorities to pass motions affirming principles to address abuse and model good behaviour.
- Ensuring that local authorities make available security and wellbeing resources to local councillors.

We're thrilled to have published our call to action, but the real work starts now, as we push to ensure these recommendations are implemented.

Are you interested in supporting us? The more public support we have from those experiencing these issues, the stronger our case when pursuing our advocacy work.

Head to our website now – www.jocoxfoundation.org/commission – to read the call to action and sign up to endorse the recommendations.

i To find out more about the work of the **Jo Cox Foundation**, please visit www.jocoxfoundation.org. The LGA's **Debate Not Hate** campaign provides resources and tools for councillors, see www.local.gov.uk/debate-not-hate. See p30 for LGA guidance on safer canvassing

Safer canvassing

Canvassing is an integral aspect of the democratic process and a great way to campaign and engage with constituents.

It encourages voter registration, mobilises voters to participate and helps to ensure you know what issues are concerning your constituents.

The LGA is aware of concerns expressed by councillors and candidates regarding possible instances of harassment during canvassing activities and, in response, has published a new guide to safer canvassing.

'Seven principles for safer canvassing' complements other LGA resources for councillors, including our 'Councillors' guide to handling harassment, abuse and intimidation' (see www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-handling-harassment-abuse-and-intimidation).

The guide outlines seven principles for safer canvassing and offers some helpful, practical hints for canvassers. If you are a member of a political group, you may find it offers specific advice to its candidates, volunteers, and councillors. You should integrate its advice into the structure of canvassing activities.

The seven principles are:

- Be prepared, not scared. Regularly assess risks, seek available training and support, including advice from local police, parties, or council, and trust your instincts for personal safety during

canvassing to ensure a confident and secure approach.

- Focus on group safety. Whenever possible, canvass in groups or pairs for safety – and because it is more enjoyable. Inform others of your whereabouts if canvassing alone.
- Actively communicate with the team and set periodic check-ins. Share canvassing plans with the team and trusted contacts, establishing regular check-ins for safety.
- Use technology to make canvassing safer. Use available technological aids like wearable devices and tracking apps for mobile phones. Familiarise yourself with smartphone security functions beforehand and align technology choices with the risk assessment for canvassing.
- Be security aware. Try carrying only essentials and avoid going into residents' homes. When available, follow party 'do-not-knock' lists and update them if you encounter any problem.
- Keep a record. Maintain a detailed incident log and report any uncomfortable situations encountered while canvassing.



'Seven principles for safer canvassing: a guide for councillors and candidates' can be downloaded for free at www.local.gov.uk/publications

Sharing incident reports with both your party and the council/police ensures appropriate awareness and action.

- Prioritise aftercare and set emergency protocols. Offer team support after any experiences of abuse or intimidation, prioritising aftercare. Debrief sessions should encourage sharing experiences and seeking support, focusing on both positive and negative encounters. Periodically review emergency response procedures.

The guide also offers practical tips for how to engage safely with people while canvassing, and suggestions for including the seven principles in local canvassing strategies.

Tips include accessing training offered by your political party or council; seeking advice from the local police; adopting a 'buddy' system; establishing a code word with your canvassing partner to use if you or they feel unsafe; avoiding canvassing at night, where possible; and avoiding canvassing alone – but if you do so, make sure other people know where you are, when you plan to return, and when you have finished canvassing.

Perhaps most importantly, follow your instincts: if something doesn't feel right, remove yourself from the situation and reach out for help.

Canvassing is about listening and finding out people's concerns as well as how they vote. Most interactions with constituents are positive and rewarding.

Integrating safety into your local canvassing strategy from the start will make candidates and canvassers feel much more confident.



Changing face of local government



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



The face of local government in England is undergoing incremental yet quite radical change.

First, the creation of more single tier local authorities has reduced the total number of councils – from 341 in May 2019, to 315 now.

Fewer councils mean fewer councillors, reinforced by the tendency for the Local Government Boundary Commission to shrink councillor numbers in its periodic electoral reviews. Some 1,000 councillors have been ‘lost’ since 2019.

Those councils and councillors who remain are increasingly likely to be elected ‘en bloc’ once every four years rather than by thirds. Last year Amber Valley, Derby, Liverpool and Slough joined those ranks; this year Maidstone, North Hertfordshire, and Worcester can be added.

In a general election year, this May’s local contests will attract especial attention.

In most cases, they reprise elections that should have been held in 2020 but were held over until 2021. Councillors elected then have therefore only served three rather than the usual four years, and the political climate now looks very different.

In 2021, our estimate of the national equivalent vote at the local elections had the Conservatives 10 points ahead of Labour on 40 per cent to 30 per cent.

Now, one has to go back to the autumn of 2022, before the defenestration of Prime Minister Liz Truss, to find a single opinion poll that has Labour anything less than 10 percentage points in front.

That suggests big Labour gains among the more than 2,600 seats being fought across 107 principal councils. The two main parties are each defending nearly 1,000 seats, with 400 Liberal Democrats and more than 100 Greens also bidding for re-election.

Although elections by thirds tend to limit the scope for dramatic shifts in council control, it will be worth keeping an eye on some of the 27 authorities where either a change in electoral cycle or the implementation of boundary



changes mean all seats are up for grabs. In the West Midlands, the Conservatives took control of Dudley and of Nuneaton and Bedworth Councils in 2021. Both had been Labour for most of their existence since 1973, and the party will now be looking to restore that situation.

In each case, the substantial advantage the Conservatives currently enjoy is threatened by a whole council election. A similar situation pertains in Essex. Basildon has not been Labour controlled this century, but a handful of gains would leave the council hung.

Harlow, by contrast, was Labour for nearly 30 years until 2002 and then again between 2012 and 2021. A turnover of six seats on the notional results in the newly

redrawn wards would now put Labour back in charge.

What all four council areas additionally have in common is that they encompass parliamentary constituencies in which the Conservatives have built substantial majorities in recent years, but where Labour may now feel it has an outside chance at the General Election.

There are also elections in the ‘county unitary’ of Dorset for the first time in five years. The Conservatives defend nothing like the same high-water mark as in 2021, but will still be wary of being ambushed by the Liberal Democrats as their colleagues in neighbouring Somerset were in 2022. These results too may carry national level implications.

Local by-elections

Blaby, Glen Parva LIB DEM HELD 41.2% over Con Turnout 16.7%	Richmond upon Thames, Teddington LIB DEM HELD 43.3% over Con Turnout 33.8%
Brighton & Hove, South Portslade LAB HELD 39.2% over Con Turnout 21.8%	Salford, Quays LIB DEM HELD 22.2% over Lab Turnout 12.3%
Dorset, Littlemoor & Preston CON HELD 17.5% over Lib Dem Turnout 30.8%	Sheffield, Stannington LIB DEM HELD 24.4% over Lab Turnout 30.3%
Hackney, Cazenove CON GAIN FROM LAB 22.8% over Lab Turnout 31.9%	Tendring, Bluehouse IND GAIN FROM LAB 15.1% over Con Turnout 14.6%
Isle Of Wight, Ventnor and St Lawrence CON HELD 3.9% over Lab Turnout 22.4%	Wandsworth, Tooting Broadway LAB HELD 48.0% over Con Turnout 32.3%
Leicestershire, Blaby and Glen Parva LIB DEM HELD 41.4% over Con Turnout 17.0%	Warwick, Warwick All Saints & Woodloes LAB HELD 15.0% over Con Turnout 25.5%
Richmond upon Thames, Hampton North LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON 18.3% over Con Turnout 30.9%	

i For additional data on these and other recent by-election results, please visit www.lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections

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