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**T**he LGA continues to lobby government ahead of next week's Spring Budget on behalf of councils, and to highlight the continuing cost and demand pressures we face in local government (p4-5, p28).

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We hear from four women councillors ahead of International Women's Day on 8 March (p22), and from East Sussex about how its LGBTQ+ health and care needs assessment is helping improve local services for the LGBTQ+ community (p18).

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We also take a look at the future of public health (p16), and have an update on the LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign against intimidation and abuse of councillors (p19).

Finally, I look forward to seeing some of you at the LGA's next Smith Square debate on 7 March, on the risks and rewards of artificial intelligence, and councils' readiness for it (p9).

**Councillor Shaun Davies**  
is LGA Chair



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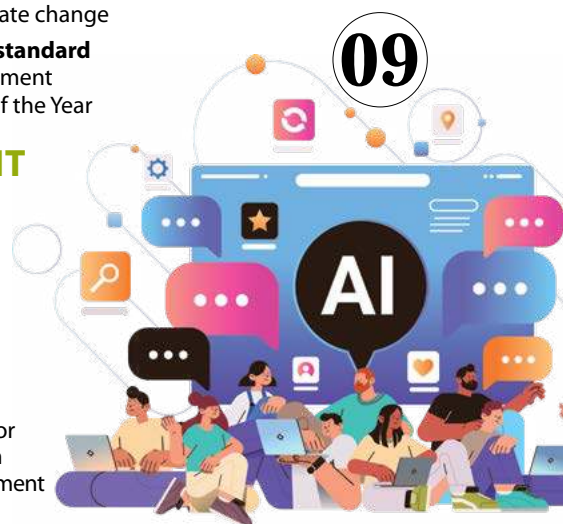
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## ‘Reform RTB to avoid losing social housing’ – LGA

The LGA is proposing reforms to the Right to Buy (RTB) scheme in England to prevent the year-on-year net loss of social housing stock.

Government figures show that for the last financial year, 10,896 homes were sold through RTB and only 3,447 have been replaced, resulting in a net loss of 7,449 social homes in 2022/23.

At a time of acute housing shortages, when more than one million people are on council housing waiting lists and councils are spending £1.74 billion annually on temporary accommodation, the LGA has set out reforms aimed at ensuring councils have:

- control over how and when monies raised through RTB should be used on the development, delivery or acquisition of new homes
- the power to protect a council’s financial investment in both existing and new social housing stock from a loss-making transaction
- flexibility to shape the scheme locally so it works best for a local area, its housing market and residents.

New LGA analysis shows that £7.5 billion has been handed out in discounts since 2012.

This will be further exacerbated following the Government’s confirmation that the maximum discounts available to tenants from April 2024 will increase in line with the consumer prices index (CPI) figure of 6.7 per cent, to £102,400 outside London and £136,400 in London.



Cllr Darren Rodwell, the LGA’s Housing Spokesperson, said: “We are facing a significant housing shortage in this country, which has pushed council budgets to the brink as they struggle to find suitable homes for an ever-increasing number of people.

“While Right to Buy can and has delivered home ownership for many, the current form does not work for local authorities, and many

of those most in need of housing support are simply unable to access secure, safe social housing.

“It is time for the Government to overhaul a system that has seen our social housing stock diminish significantly. If the Government adopts our proposals, this would allow councils to resume their role as a major builder of affordable homes.”

## Suicide prevention projects are ‘lifeline’

The ending of funding for suicide prevention projects could have “life or death consequences” in some areas, the LGA has warned.

It is urging the Government to use the Spring Budget on 6 March to extend funding for the projects in England.

A £57 million fund has helped provide vital support for those at risk of suicide and bereaved families, and to run awareness campaigns in local communities.

However, there has been no confirmation from the Department of Health and Social Care if the funding will continue beyond the end of this financial year.

In a series of case studies, the LGA has highlighted the vital work councils have carried out using funding from the suicide prevention campaign (see [www.local.gov.uk/case-studies](http://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies)).

In Essex, councils have worked with the NHS to

tackle the impact of high waiting times for treatment for depression, while in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin they have introduced a bereavement service for loved ones affected by suicide.

In Bournemouth, the council has worked with train operators and the British Transport Police in light of a cluster of suicides linked to the railways.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA’s

Community Wellbeing Board, said: “This suicide prevention funding has been a lifeline for many people. Councils have used it to provide fantastic support to those in their communities who have needed help the most.

“Without a commitment by the Government to extend this funding, these vital local schemes face an uncertain future, which could have life or death consequences for those who rely on them.”



## Councils' spending power up 7.5%

The final local government finance settlement has confirmed funding allocations for councils in 2024/25 will include a 7.5 per cent increase in core spending power.

This is up from an initial 6.5 per cent announced in the provisional settlement for England published before Christmas, as a result of an extra £605.6 million announced in late January.

The final settlement comes after the Commons' Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee published a report on financial distress in local authorities, citing much of the LGA's evidence and data and backing its call for government to address the financial crisis facing all councils.

Despite the additional funding for councils, many will still need to raise council tax this year and make further savings to local services to plug

remaining funding gaps, the LGA has warned.

Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA's Economy and Resources Board, said: "Significant challenges remain going into 2024/25 and beyond.

"The amount of funding available to councils is out of line with the requirements placed upon them.

"As well as needing to address this, any incoming government needs to give urgent attention to the entire system of funding local government to deliver vital local services, including reform and legislative change.

"With fair, sustainable funding and multi-year settlements, councils can plan ahead and help to deliver against national priorities such as economic growth, housing, net zero, support for families and children and improved health."

• See p28

## Time to bin excess packaging, say consumers

Seven in 10 people believe supermarkets and retailers use too much packaging, according to research by YouGov for the LGA.

Nine in 10 believe only recyclable material should be used, and that it should have clearer labelling.

Councils and the LGA are calling on all political parties to pledge to introduce the 'extended producer responsibility' scheme, which would shift the costs of dealing with waste from taxpayers to producers, with incentives to help reduce and recycle.

The LGA is also calling on ministers to ensure that councils continue to have the autonomy to run waste and recycling services in a way that suits the needs of their individual communities.

The LGA and YouGov polling also found that 85 per cent of people think companies should be required to reduce the amount of packaging they use; and that the public are 12 times more likely to think costs in reducing packaging should be met by the companies producing it, rather than the councils dealing with it.

Cllr Darren Rodwell, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson, said: "Public satisfaction with waste services remains high, it is something councils work hard to achieve

and we are pleased to see the public most trust councils to lead local waste services.

"Good packaging is essential for keeping products fresh and intact, and producers are doing more to reduce waste and support recycling.

"But everybody can see the levels of waste, across our shop shelves, delivered to our homes, and into our bins. Councils spend millions dealing with it."

The LGA supports packaging reforms where producers take responsibility, and it is "crucial that the costs are met and that councils continue to lead local waste and recycling services", he added.

• See p24



## In brief Audit backlog

The Government has published proposals to address the backlog in local audit, which include backstop dates for audited accounts to be published continuing until 2027/28. The number of outstanding audited accounts peaked at 918 in September last year and stood at 771 at the end of 2023. Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA's Economy and Resources Board, said: "It is good that these proposals have been published. The need to come to a pragmatic solution to the backlog is urgent. However, this must not lead to reputational damage for councils because of a problem not of their making."

## Childhood matters

A step change is needed in how government prioritises and invests in children, young people, their families and in public services, according to 'Childhood matters', a new report from the Association of Directors of Children's Services. Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People's Board, said: "As this paper highlights, current support and services for children and families are fragmented making it difficult to ensure that national and local partners are working together effectively. For all children to fulfil their potential, we would like to see a cross-government commitment to children, ensuring that every department plays its part in creating good childhoods."

## Families in poverty

More than 300,000 families with children are living in poverty despite their parents being in full-time work, research from Action for Children has found. Health and social care workers, shop assistants and construction workers are among those still in poverty despite being employed. Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA's Economy and Resources Board, said: "This report is a stark reminder of the challenges facing low-income families and other vulnerable households. Councils are trying to support those struggling with the cost of living, through providing vital crisis support and wider services, which help build residents' longer-term financial resilience."

• See p28

## In brief

### Early years

The Department for Education has launched a recruitment campaign to attract more workers to nurseries and early years providers. Councils and providers have warned there will not be enough places for all eligible children when the Government's expanded free childcare scheme is rolled out in April (see p12). Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said the announcement was a "positive step" towards addressing the issues. She added: "Councils have been working hard to support providers to increase their workforce, but many feel constrained by their inability to determine where new providers can be established."

## Social housing

**P**roposed reforms to social housing allocations would lead to the introduction of new local and UK connection tests to determine social housing eligibility and prospective tenants on higher incomes no longer qualifying for social housing. LGA Housing Spokesperson Cllr Darren Rodwell said: "With almost 1.3 million households on council housing waiting lists, and record numbers in temporary accommodation, this is symptomatic of our wider housing shortage. We are calling on the Government to use the Budget to grant councils the flexibilities needed to resume their historic role as a major builder of affordable homes." The consultation closes on 26 March. See [consult.levellingup.gov.uk](https://consult.levellingup.gov.uk)

## UK forum

**F**unding challenges, cost of living, the climate emergency, and digitalisation were among some of the topics discussed when the Northern Ireland LGA hosted the UK Local Government Association Forum in Belfast in February. Leaders of the LGA, the Welsh LGA, and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities attended. Cllr Shaun Davies, LGA Chair, said: "It's clear that councils have made huge efforts over recent years to manage their budgets, but this work is becoming increasingly challenging, and addressing how to meet these funding challenges was a key theme of this forum." • See p29

# Pavement parking ban 'should be extended'

**Powers to ban pavement parking should be extended across England to make streets safer, councils have said.**

Wheelchair users, older people, and parents with pushchairs are among those put at risk by having to navigate around vehicles mounted on kerbs, a study commissioned by the LGA has warned.

The investigation found that some vehicles cause "a complete obstruction to someone walking or wheeling", meaning they have "no option but to enter the carriageway to continue their journey". It recommended that pavement parking be banned across England, and urged the Government to "recommit to the principle that the function of the footway is to provide space for walking and wheeling".

A Department for Transport consultation on giving councils outside of London the power to prohibit pavement parking ended in November 2020, but no announcement has been made.

The LGA said a change in the rules is "long overdue" and would help councils protect older and vulnerable people from injury, as well as support national targets to increase levels of walking and cycling.

LGA Transport Spokesperson Cllr Darren Rodwell said: "Pavement parking is one of the



biggest complaints from pedestrians, but, three years on, councils outside of London still do not have the powers they need to tackle this scourge.

"If we are to meet the Government's ambition for half of all trips in England's towns and cities to be walked, wheeled or cycled by 2030, then it makes sense to give all councils the same powers as in the capital, making our streets safer and footpaths open for everyone."

## More support needed for vulnerable households

**T**he Government is being urged to extend the Household Support Fund (HSF) to help protect vulnerable households across the UK.

The fund provided £820 million for local welfare support over the past year, helping millions of households facing hardship to heat their homes, and buy food and other essentials.

More than eight out of 10 councils that responded to an LGA survey say that financial hardship has increased in their areas, just as vital local funding used to support vulnerable households is due to end. Nearly three-quarters of responding councils also said they expect hardship to increase even further over the next 12 months.

The Government has not confirmed if the HSF will be extended, leaving councils and

vulnerable people in limbo. This uncertainty is also impacting councils' ability to set their budgets for next year.

Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA's Economy and Resources Board, said: "The Household Support Fund has provided an essential lifeline for our most vulnerable residents, but our survey shows this help is needed now more than ever.

"Now is not the time to scale back support. Many at-risk households continue to face considerable challenges in meeting essential living costs, with demand for support greater than when the fund was first introduced.

"Without an urgent extension of the HSF for at least a year, there is a risk of more households falling into financial crisis, homelessness and poverty."

# Operations for children's rotten teeth up 17%

**There were more than 31,000 hospital operations last year to remove rotten teeth in children and teenagers – equating to 119 per working day, according to new official figures.**

The LGA says the numbers – up 17 per cent – highlight an alarming increase in the rate of childhood tooth decay.

It is calling for an increase in funding for oral health improvement schemes, which help councils to work with school children to improve oral hygiene – for example, via supervised tooth-brushing schemes.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "These stark figures reveal that a lack of access to affordable dentistry is having a worrying impact on the state of children's teeth.

"The fact that, because of the severity of the decay, on average 119 operations are taking place each working day to remove

decaying teeth in children and teenagers is concerning, and adds to current pressures on our health service.

"Untreated dental care remains one of the most prevalent diseases affecting children and young people's ability to speak, eat, play and socialise.

"We need to do all we can to reduce tooth decay in children. The Government should invest in council-run oral health improvement programmes, which can help introduce a good oral hygiene regime and prevent more serious problems from developing in the future."

Meanwhile, the Government has launched its dental recovery plan, which aims to increase access to NHS dentists.

Previous LGA analysis has shown that shortages in NHS dentistry are having a disproportionate impact on high-needs patients, particularly in more deprived and rural communities.

## Increase in public health grants

The Government has said its public health grant allocations to councils, published in February, will deliver a real-terms increase of more than 4 per cent over 2023/24 and 2024/25.

The LGA called the increase "positive", but stressed that the settlement still leaves local public health teams with limited resources for essential services such as sexual health services and specialist community public health nursing for the next financial year.

The latest LGA analysis shows that, in real terms, councils have seen an £858 million reduction in their public health grant since 2015.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Public health teams have faced an unprecedented period of pressures, with funding levels not keeping pace

with demand. Sufficient ongoing funding is needed to ensure local authorities can meet their statutory public health responsibilities.

"It is vitally important that the Government continues to address challenges that arise over the coming months and years. We will continue to make the case for multi-year settlements and for more long-term certainty around public health funding.

"An increased focus on prevention through an uplift to the grant is urgently needed, as well as a wider review of the adequacy of public health funding. This will support the Government's wider aims by improving health outcomes, reducing health spending, and putting social care and the NHS on a better footing for the long term." • See p16

## In brief

### Disposable vapes

The Government has announced it will ban disposable vapes as part of plans to tackle the rising number of young people taking up vaping. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "We're delighted that the Government has listened to the long-standing concerns of the LGA and councils. Single-use vapes blight our streets as litter, are a hazard in our bin lorries, and are expensive and difficult to deal with in our recycling centres. Their colours, flavours and advertising are appealing to children and are a risk to the health of young people. We look forward to working with the Government and others to enforce this ban and ensure plans for a smoke-free generation are a success."

### Drug services

Funding uncertainty is making it harder to deliver vital council-run drug services, MPs on the Commons' Public Accounts Committee have warned. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Councils report that it is proving difficult to plan to expand services because of long-term financial uncertainty, significant recruitment challenges, and the inability to offer longer-term contracts of employment. As this report recognises, these services need greater and more long-term funding certainty from government if they are to deliver the life-changing benefits we know they can."

### Daily mile

Every council in England has a school participating in The Daily Mile, which encourages children to run, wheel or walk for 15 minutes a day, according to LGA analysis. With the support of their local councils, Active Partnerships and Sport England, children in more than 8,000 primary schools and early years settings are getting involved. Elaine Wyllie MBE, who founded The Daily Mile in 2012, said: "I am very proud of what it has achieved and I am excited about our future ambitions. We have had the pleasure of working with many schools, teachers, and partners, such as the LGA, who have supported us in reaching two million children in England."



## Reforming social care

### Changing public perceptions about services

**Adequate and sustainable funding for social care is a necessary, but not on its own sufficient, condition to bring about the changes we need to ensure everyone who draws on care and support can live their best life.**

Alongside funding, we need a commitment to wider reform that tackles the most important issues.

Shifting the narrative around social care to something more positive is essential to reducing the invisibility of the sector and to helping the public think of the service as a benefit to society and a priority for investment.

Political action on care and support will not happen until the public understands the real value of social care in supporting people to live the lives they want to lead.

Adult social care has suffered, historically, from a low public profile. The LGA believes that this could be because many people do not know what adult social care is and how it operates.

Additionally, much of the national portrayal of social care is negative, with the service framed as being in 'crisis', or 'broken', or facing a 'tsunami of need' from 'vulnerable' people.

The care workforce is often similarly framed in negative terms – for example, 'unskilled', 'poorly paid' and 'suffering from burn out'.

During the LGA's annual Parliamentary Reception in the House of Lords at the end of January, social care was the big topic.

In discussions with MPs and Peers, we highlighted just how fundamental meaningful engagement is throughout the design and delivery of services.

Central to the LGA's – and councils' – approach is the principle that people with lived experience are an equal source of expertise and insight as other colleagues working in the system. 'Lip service' engagement will deter people from offering their time and expertise in the future.

We need to think of co-production as not just between the person who



draws on care and their social worker, but also at service level, and co-production's role in terms of designing and evaluating services.

In written evidence to the Commons' Public Accounts Select Committee's inquiry on reforming adult social care, the LGA underlined how reform must embed realism and co-production throughout the process.

The reforms that are needed to ensure people of all ages are able to live an equal life require a long-term approach.

Realism is needed so that lessons are learned from the past, and plans and public commitments reflect the reality of the immense pressures facing social care.

We need to be collectively ambitious and jointly agree what is achievable.

Any conversation about social care is incomplete without mentioning the Care Act 2014 – a landmark piece of

legislation that continues to command widespread support because of the way in which it was developed through meaningful consultation and engagement, including with people who draw on social care.

The LGA has consistently called for framing all social care reform around the Care Act 2014, placing its principle of wellbeing at the heart. Change must be centred on what best supports people to live the lives they want to lead.

The Government must work with the sector and people who use social care services to expand on their ambition and bring about the changes needed. The LGA will continue to play its part in paving a brighter future for social care.



To find out more about the **LGA's parliamentary work**, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/parliament](http://www.local.gov.uk/parliament)



# Artificial intelligence

## Is AI a friend or foe to local government?



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

**A**fter an explosion of interest in artificial intelligence (AI), generative AI tools such as ChatGPT are now household names because of their widespread availability.

The AI boom is driving a global debate on regulation centred on how to balance its risks and opportunities. In local government, a similar debate is taking place.

The ambition set out in the Government's National AI Strategy cannot be achieved without local government: our sector is a crucial part of the UK's AI-driven future.

The opportunities that AI presents can be exploited if we manage its risks effectively. AI offers a major opportunity to address many of the challenges we face.

Take adult and children's services, for example; AI has the power to

address the huge administrative burden on social workers, tackling backlogs, burdens, and barriers to recruitment and retention.

There is no AI without data. Fortunately for our sector, councils are data-rich environments.

It requires appropriate security, resident engagement and transparency, but, with this in place, AI can help us achieve better value and outcomes for our communities by making the most of our data.

We need to build and leverage our data foundations by investing the proper resources needed for success, and develop a data-centric culture to equip us for the future.

AI is already improving service delivery and resulting in cost savings. For instance, Derby City Council has introduced two digital assistants called Darcie and Ali to its websites and contact centre. They are handling more than four in 10 customer queries, double the expected performance, freeing up Derby's customer service team to give more specialised support.

Norfolk County Council's adult social service team is using machine

learning, a branch of AI, to collate data and evaluate if an older person is likely to fall over in their home – enabling a shift from reactive support to proactive, preventative support.

There are, of course, challenges. The results of AI must produce fair outcomes, data must be processed securely and ethically, and transparency must be prioritised.

The LGA, especially through its AI network, is supporting councils of all parties, tiers, and regions to address these issues, and think about skills and training, alongside procurement and commissioning (email [cyberanddigital@local.gov.uk](mailto:cyberanddigital@local.gov.uk)).

An AI-driven future cannot be achieved without local government. Our sector knows the best ways to serve local communities and is best placed to integrate new technology to deliver wider benefits.

That's why I hope you will join me at the LGA's Smith Square Debate on 7 March (see below) to hear more from academics, industry and central and local government about AI's risks and rewards, and how councils can – and are – preparing.

## Risks, rewards and readiness

The LGA's next Smith Square Debate will bring together a panel of expert speakers to discuss the risks and rewards of artificial intelligence (AI) for local government, and explore the readiness and appetite of local councils to integrate AI into their systems and service delivery.

This is a hybrid event for which you can book an in-person place, at the LGA's Westminster offices, or a virtual place. The event takes place on 7 March, from 5.15pm to 7.15pm, followed by networking.

To find out more and to make a booking, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)





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

# For the sector by the sector

## The LGA is strengthening its Corporate Peer Challenge offer for councils

**C**orporate Peer Challenge is a highly valued improvement and assurance tool that is delivered by local government for local government.

The fact that it is sector-led is what makes it unique, special and exclusive, and what makes it stand out from anything else available to local authorities.

Who else understands the challenges and opportunities facing councils better than fellow local government leaders and councillors, chief executives, directors, monitoring officers and section 151 officers?

Together, they volunteer their time as peers to deliver Corporate Peer Challenges (CPCs) and support improvement and assurance across the sector.

This is why CPC continues to be one of the most valued improvement and assurance tools we offer to all English councils, with feedback continuing to highlight just what a positive impact it can have.

In the 2022/23 evaluation of our peer support programmes, 100 per cent of respondents indicated that the process of preparing for and participating in a Corporate or Finance Peer Challenge (FPC) had a positive impact on their council, with 98 per cent stating they were satisfied with their CPC or FPC.

It is why, as Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board,

I am so committed to and passionate about CPC and why, over the past year, I have been working with fellow board members and sector colleagues to review, strengthen and develop peer challenge so it continues to meet the needs of the sector and government, and is the best it can be.

This drive to adapt and strengthen CPC is more important than ever.

The establishment of the Office for Local Government (Oflog) and a small number of high-profile cases involving challenged councils have led to an increased spotlight on council governance and performance, and sparked a debate about the effectiveness of CPC.

This includes dissenting voices in the media that have challenged the robustness of CPC as an improvement and assurance tool. I strongly believe that we need to hear this feedback and act now.

In April, we are launching an improved, strengthened and more robust CPC offer for local government.

The changes we have already made over the past year to strengthen CPCs go some way to addressing the concerns of our critics. These include stronger requirements around publication of reports and action plans and a clear requirement for councils to have a 'progress review' 12 months after the CPC and to publish the report that follows.

But there is more still to do.



It is why our recently refreshed LGA Business Plan 2022-2025 includes a key commitment to 'strengthen our CPC offer to make it more robust and consistent as well as continuing to improve our wider sector-led improvement offers to maximise impact and continue to deliver value for money'.

This is paramount in the current financial climate.

A programme of work is under way that builds on the changes we've already made.

As we all know, the success of our CPC programme lies in the peer team.

To ensure we have the best people, we are continuing to invest in our peers through an enhanced programme of face-to-face training.

We will also ensure that each peer team is independent and includes member peers that reflect the political make-up of your councils.

There will be a greater focus on finance, data and evidence, with a strong assessment of council performance and productivity.

The five core areas of

*"100 per cent of respondents indicated that the challenge had a positive impact on their council"*





## *“We are investing in our peers with enhanced face-to-face training”*

assessment will remain as before – local priorities and outcomes; organisational and place leadership; governance and culture; financial planning and management; and capacity for improvement.

But there will be a stronger focus on performance, governance and culture, while fully reflecting current challenges to the sector and the current draft statutory guide for best value authorities, ‘Best Value Standards and Intervention’.

We will be introducing a new report structure, style and format, including report writing that will be more authoritative and direct in content with a stronger focus on performance and finance.

Councils will only be invited to input into the final report by addressing any factual errors or inaccuracies, with all reports being published in a timely

manner, alongside an action plan.

Following on from a CPC, our ‘progress review’ will include a full review of a council’s action plan with updates against each action or recommendation to date.

And, as ever, all evidence, knowledge and good practice will be captured for the sector, to enable better understanding and sharing of good practice.

To ensure our preparedness to swiftly deliver an urgent CPC to any council deemed as ‘high risk’, we are also working at pace to identify and develop a small cohort of both LGA officer and member peers and peer challenge managers who can be allocated to a council at very short notice, if urgently required.

Also, as part of our refreshed government grant-funded offer to the sector, it is now expected that all councils will have a CPC every five years.

To help with the timing of your CPC, we will work quickly to introduce a detailed timetable for all councils that will highlight a timeframe

window to assist you in your planning.

The LGA’s chair and group leaders will write to you in due course and in good time ahead of your own CPC as a reminder, and information will also be included in your annual LGA membership pack.

The new and robust CPC offer will launch in April 2024 and ensure that Corporate Peer Challenge remains the best in class as an improvement, assurance and prevention tool for councils.

It will run alongside our wide-ranging improvement and assurance support that aims to ensure your local authority is in the best shape possible and able to adapt to rapidly changing conditions, as well as to work now being carried out by Oflog.



For more information about the **LGA’s council assurance and peer support programmes, including Corporate Peer Challenge**, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/council-assurance-and-peer-support](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/council-assurance-and-peer-support)

# Childcare **expansion**



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

## The early years agenda can support wider council aims

A child's earliest years are their foundation; if we give them a great start, they have a much better chance of fulfilling their potential as they grow up.

By the time disadvantaged young people sit their GCSEs at age 16, they are, on average, 18.4 months behind their peers – and around 40 per cent of that gap has emerged by age five.

Pre-school has almost as much impact on a child's educational achievement at age 11 as primary school, and the impact is even greater for those who may develop learning difficulties.

High-quality early years provision can generate sustained and significant improvements in children's outcomes, reducing disparities in later life.

Not only does good quality provision have a positive impact on children's development, but it also

ensures that parents and carers can feel confident to access childcare.

Securing enough high-quality childcare for families and carers to get the places they need is something into which we need to invest our time and energy.

Children are part of families, who are part of communities, who are part of society. It is essential that services for families of young children are well connected to services for adults, and the early years agenda can significantly support wider council aims.

This includes health, safeguarding, and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Furthermore, ensuring that there is sufficient early years education and childcare can support families into employment and lift them out of poverty.

### Council responsibilities

The council must secure 'early childhood services' for the benefit of parents, prospective parents and young children, taking 'reasonable steps' to involve parents, early years providers and other relevant people in those arrangements.

They must also consider the quantity and quality of services, and where in the area they are provided, and consider the views of young children where possible.

Councils must also ensure enough childcare is available for every eligible child to access their funded early years entitlements for childcare.

They should also work to identify parents in the area who might not take advantage of early childhood services that could benefit them and their children, and encourage them to take these up.

Councils have the responsibility for passing through the entitlement funding for places, calculated by central government, to early years providers. In some places, local authorities have direct responsibility for maintained nursery schools or nursery classes.

### Expansion of early years education and childcare

There is a range of support available for childcare, with specific support for working and disadvantaged families.

Currently, two-year-old children of families entitled to certain benefits can access 15 hours of funding per week, and all three to four-year-olds in England can get 570 hours of funded early education or childcare per year from the term after their third birthday.

This is usually taken as 15 hours a week for 38 weeks of the year, or traditional school term-time. For working parents, this increases to 30 hours per week.

There are no plans to change this funded entitlement.

In March 2023, the Chancellor announced an expansion to the existing early years entitlements:

- From April 2024, working parents of two-year-olds can access 15 hours per week.
- From September 2024, working parents of children aged nine months up to three years can access 15 hours per week.
- From September 2025, working parents of children aged nine months up to three years can access 30 hours per week.

The recent expansion is the largest change to early years education and childcare since 2017 and, therefore, it is a large ask for councils to implement this policy, support providers to expand and maintain quality support, and ensure sufficiency of childcare locally.

### Challenges in the early years education and childcare system

Given the announcements in the 2023







Spring Budget, it is more important than ever that we get the early years system right. Last year, the LGA published a report, 'Early education and childcare: changes and challenges for the future', which highlighted concerns from local authorities and set out what local government needs to implement the childcare reforms effectively (see [www.local.gov.uk/earlyeducationchangesandchallenges](https://www.local.gov.uk/earlyeducationchangesandchallenges)).

Of particular concern to councils is the lack of powers and levers to manage the market effectively, despite having the statutory duty to ensure sufficient childcare.

This is coupled with broader financial pressures across councils that are impacting wider support services.

Many councils pass through more than the minimum 95 per cent of funding that they receive for early years entitlements to providers, to ensure they have sufficient funding.

With these increased financial pressures, however, some local authorities are concerned that they may have to start retaining more to be able to support providers most effectively.

Meanwhile, recruitment and retention across early years provision continues to be a significant challenge.

Many local areas are working closely with providers to build the workforce. This includes producing local campaigns, building toolkits for providers to use, and working with local training providers and further education colleges to support more people into the workforce. The Government has launched a national campaign looking at supporting more people into the early years and childcare workforce.

### Wraparound childcare

The 2023 Budget also announced a programme of investment into wraparound childcare for primary-aged children during term time.

This was supported by £289 million to help local areas trial different ways of working and pump-prime different models to ensure universal rollout by 2025.

The Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities to make sure there are enough childcare places within its local area for working parents, or for parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 to 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children). Therefore, local authorities are responsible for the delivery of the national wraparound childcare programme.

Many local authorities effectively

support the local market to ensure there is sufficient wraparound childcare, but we are also aware that there are some significant challenges facing councils in this delivery.

The LGA-commissioned 'Insights into wraparound childcare' explores this further and outlines some local areas of good practice (see [www.local.gov.uk/wraparoundchildcarereport](https://www.local.gov.uk/wraparoundchildcarereport)).

### Further information

To support councillors in understanding their councils' responsibilities for early years education and childcare, the LGA has produced a resource pack outlining different responsibilities, and highlighting some useful areas to explore (see [www.local.gov.uk/earlyeducationresourcepack](https://www.local.gov.uk/earlyeducationresourcepack)).

The LGA is funded by the Department for Education to provide a package of support to strengthen local systems for early years speech, language and communication pathways, with a particular focus on improving outcomes for disadvantaged children.

We have a series of case studies that explore good practice, and we develop resources and undertake activities to support political and corporate leaders (see [www.local.gov.uk/case-studies](https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies)).

# Making cities work for people

Transport is key to  
local prosperity



Councillor **Satvir Kaur** is Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board

**C**ouncils in the cities and urban areas of England have ambitious plans to support their communities and grow local economies in ways that benefit everyone.

For eight years, the LGA's City Regions Board has been at the forefront of making the case for providing greater powers for cities and urban areas.

Alongside the LGA's People and Places Board, we advocate for greater devolution and, this year, our remit has been expanded to include strategic housing and transport – without which people can't benefit properly from a more prosperous local area.

Improving the ways people can get around within and between cities and their surrounding areas is a challenge with which all our members are wrestling.

Our board members agreed to combine our recent meeting on strategic transport with a visit to one of the city regions at the forefront of devolution: Greater Manchester.

By train, car and bicycle, members gathered in the heart of the city, looking forward to seeing one another in person.

We had a jam-packed day and agenda, hearing industry and regional leaders' views of the current challenges and opportunities.

Jason Prince, Director of the Urban Transport Group, the UK's network of city region transport authorities, brought us up to speed on the current state of play in transport policy.

A clear vision for the importance of public transport is vital to developing the bus routes, road designs and cycle lanes that shape thriving cities, and members agreed that getting transport



right is important for the success of many other policy aims.

Henri Murison, Chief Executive of the business-led think tank the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, led a stimulating discussion about how and where decisions on transport investment could be made as the local government landscape changes.

We were delighted that Cllr Bev Craig, Leader of Manchester City Council, was able to join us to share her experiences of working in a combined authority and with national government to try to join up transport planning and investment in a way that meets the city's needs.

To bring this all to life, Cllr John Merry, Deputy Mayor of Salford and Chair of Key Cities, led us across the River Irwell to the impressive development at 100 Embankment.

Against the stunning backdrop of Manchester Cathedral, we learned how Salford's regeneration programme is bringing together housing, town centre development, new employment and infrastructure.

Knitting together private investment and contributions from

the city council, combined authority and government, improved transport – including active travel and making existing rail stations more accessible – is supporting the transformation of key areas such as Salford Central, Crescent Salford and Port Salford.

The programme delivered 67,000 new homes, almost 33,000 new jobs, and more than one million square metres of new employment floorspace. With more than 200 projects to 2040 identified, Salford is one to watch.

Thank you to Salford and Key Cities, and to all our speakers for their fantastic contributions.

It's clear that the LGA's City Regions Board has plenty to get its teeth into as we look to influence a new or returning government. Greater local leadership of transport planning and investment must be supported by a clear vision, and integrated into the wider economic agenda for cities.



Join us at the LGA's third annual **Urban Summit** on 18 June, in London, to hear more. **More information about the summit** will be available on the LGA website soon, at [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events). See p20





# Safe and welcomed

Councils continue to support Ukrainians escaping the Russian invasion



Councillor **Kevin Bentley** is the LGA's Senior Vice-Chairman

**J**ust over two years since Russia invaded Ukraine, councils across the UK continue to play a pivotal role in supporting over 200,000 Ukrainian people to rebuild their lives here.

Local government has always been at the forefront of responding at pace and scale to international challenges.

So, when the Homes for Ukraine scheme first opened in March 2022, councils redesigned services to ensure host arrangements were appropriate and safe, and worked across government to co-design the scheme as Ukrainians started to arrive.

Two years on, councils continue to link Ukrainians with key services and step in if sponsor arrangements end.

Via Homes for Ukraine, councils have supported people to open up their homes in the largest numbers since the Second World War.

New friendships have flourished between more than 140,000 Ukrainians and their hosts – myself among them.

When the Prime Minister called on British people to house Ukrainian refugees, my wife and I simultaneously

said that this was something we should do because it is the right thing to do.

Anyone in distress, with their country under invasion, should be given help in the best way we can.

We were lucky enough to have room in our home to accommodate people, so we put our names forward.

Our two Ukrainian guests, now friends – indeed, our family – have been with us since April 2022.

They have lost friends in drone attacks and bombings, and their home in Ukraine is under constant attack.

Their family is now scattered across Europe, but thanks to modern communications they can keep in contact.

Our country has a long history of helping people in genuine need and, at the time, I remarked to my wife, and to others, that we know how to do this, as our parents and grandparents took in evacuees and refugees during the Second World War.

I am delighted the Government has extended the visa period for Ukrainians staying here, and many, like our two new family members, are playing a full part in our society by working, paying taxes and helping in their communities.

As the war in Ukraine continues, councils remain keen to work with government to meet the long-term needs of Ukrainians, including access to employment, language support and housing.

With just under 10,000 Ukrainian households presenting as homeless across England since 2022, ongoing housing challenges have been recognised by the Government with £270 million of homelessness funding from 2023-25, the development of the Local Authority Housing Fund to increase housing supply, and an increase in funding for long-term sponsors.

However, funding was halved to £5,900 per adult last year; there is no funding beyond arrivals' first year; and there is no funding for, or data on, the 55,000 people who arrived on visas under the now closed Ukraine Family Scheme – even though they will have the same needs.

In parallel, councils continue to navigate how best to support all new arrivals in their communities under other asylum and resettlement programmes, all with different engagement, funding, and data arrangements.

Despite these challenges, government research on the experiences of Ukrainians in the UK shows most adults feel their connection to the UK is 'very' or 'somewhat' strong.

Councils will continue to work with their communities, hosts and local partners to ensure Ukrainians and all new arrivals to the UK feel safe, settled and welcomed.

# Beyond the **short-term**

How might patterns of ill health change because of our growing and ageing population? What measures are needed to mitigate rising levels of ill health?



Councillor **David Fothergill** is Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board

**T**o plan well for the future, public health teams, councils and health services must have as clear a sight as possible of the pressures and opportunities ahead.

One clear future strain on our health systems is demographic change and the resulting demand on public services because of ill health. Between 2018 and 2028, the number of people aged 75-84 years in England is projected to increase by a third, and those aged 85 years and older by more than a fifth.

During this period, the number of people aged 75 years and older living alone is forecast to increase by 461,000 – a population equivalent to the size of the city of Bristol.

Away from demographic change, is there any way to forecast health in our population in five, 10, 15 years' time?

The Health Foundation's REAL Centre produced an insightful report posing an answer to these vital

questions. Its 2023 report, 'Health in 2040: projected patterns of illness in England' provides independent analysis about predicted future levels of illness in our population to support policymakers and leaders in health and social care with better long-term decision-making.

Its analysis indicated that more than nine million people in England alone are anticipated to be living with major illness by 2040 – this is 2.5 million more people than in 2021, up more than a third. We know that much of this rise can be attributed to our ageing population and increases in life expectancy. While living longer is certainly something to be celebrated, there will undoubtedly be implications for our health and care services, such as rises in demand and complexity.

The magnitude of the challenge extends beyond England, as many other nations worldwide face a comparable demographic scenario, witnessing their populations age at a similar pace.

In England, as referenced above, the number of people living with major illness is projected to increase by 37 per cent – over a third – by 2040. By comparison, the working age population (20 to 69-year-olds) is

projected to increase by only 4 per cent. This population group will be responsible for generating the bulk of government revenues used to fund public services, including the NHS. This would create additional pressures on us all to care for and fund a growing population with high health and care needs.

A significant proportion of the projected increase in ill health relates to conditions such as anxiety and depression, chronic pain and diabetes, which are predominantly managed in primary care and the community.

This reiterates the need for greater investment in early intervention and prevention to reduce the impact of illness, keep people in good health for longer and improve the quality of people's lives.

Poor physical and mental health shortens lives lived in good health and impacts not just on individuals but on their family, friends and their communities. It has a significant detrimental impact

*"Our current approach is almost entirely focused on treating sickness"*





# Public health: a plea for 2040

on the economy through reduced productivity and increased demand for public services. It is a vicious cycle that needs to be broken.

This stark situation is unfair and avoidable, and calls for urgent action at a national, regional and local level, not just by public health teams and our NHS partners, but by all those who have an interest in the future prosperity of our nation.

While detailed evidence on the drivers of population ill health is still emerging, individual factors including lifestyle, the environments in which we live, and our genetics account for between 70 to 90 per cent of what represents our health. In contrast, treating ill health accounts for as little as 10 per cent, but consumes more than 90 per cent of available health resources.

Health-care demands will continue to increase while costs are spiralling as health takes up an ever higher proportion of public spending. Simultaneously, outcomes are deteriorating, with life expectancy beginning to reverse and health inequalities on the rise. This is only set to worsen if these stark projections become reality by 2040.

These problems are being driven by our current approach, which is almost entirely focused on treating sickness. As a result, our NHS is regularly overwhelmed by rising demand, with an estimated 7.6 million people waiting for treatment.

Critically, with 2.8 million people out of the labour market because of long-term ill health, any sustainable plan for growth needs to have improving population health and prevention at its heart.

Public health, working across all of local government's functions, can make a real, large-scale difference to promoting the independence of people with long-term chronic conditions, to preventing ill health and therefore to reducing pressures on the NHS, as well as to its primary goals of improving wellbeing and reducing health inequalities.

Public health teams, working with a 'health in all policies' approach across councils, are tackling persistent problems like obesity, mental illness, alcohol abuse, and the health impact of isolation and loneliness in old age, as well as addressing some of the serious health inequalities that still exist within and between communities.

However, the public health function of local government cannot continue to maximise its role while continually being left without any choice but to make budget cuts. We must not get used to the NHS and social care being in a permanent state of crisis. Public health could help make this country one where people live healthy lives for longer with less dependence on acute health and care services and a better quality of life, while reducing the public service budget in the long term.

More broadly, we need a paradigm shift. We must begin to treat individual and collective health as a national asset. Current and future governments

should focus their efforts and resources on creating the conditions in which population and individual health can flourish.

This means much greater attention directed towards preventative health measures alongside support for the drivers of good individual health. With an enabling policy infrastructure and shifting towards prevention and early intervention, it will be possible to increase population health, unlock long-term economic growth and make Britain fit for the future.

Only with a clear sight of impending pressures and a shift towards

prevention, can public health teams and policy makers truly plan and develop health services fit for the future.

With a growing

understanding of the vital importance of the nation's health and a commitment to improving health and wellbeing for those most at risk, we can be optimistic that public health will continue to grow in confidence and effectiveness for 2040 and the years to come.

We will be discussing these issues (and other key topics) with leading experts and councils at the LGA's and Association of Directors of Public Health's annual public health conference from 19-21 March, across three mornings (on Zoom). You can view the full programme and book your free place at [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events).

*"We must not get used to the NHS and social care being in a permanent state of crisis"*



# LGBTQ+ health and care needs

East Sussex's assessment has helped improve services



**Ross Boseley** is Specialist Support Manager (Public Health) and **Dani Plowman** is Public Health Specialty Registrar at East Sussex County Council

**I**n 2021, we published the East Sussex health needs assessment, reviewing the health, care and wellbeing needs of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (plus all other sexual orientation and gender identities) population in East Sussex.

This was the first time a specific LGBTQ+ needs assessment had been done for the county.

This project and report were developed with a steering group that had representation from council departments, NHS organisations, and the voluntary sector, as well as community representatives.

The report brings together data from local health and care services, the police, and findings from focus groups and a community survey of more than 400 people.

The needs assessment highlights that LGBTQ+ people have many of the same health and care needs as their heterosexual and cisgender peers.

However, they also have several health disparities. Three notable ones are:

- high levels of LGBTQ+ discrimination in educational and workplace settings

- higher rates of mental health conditions
- concerns about care needs and fears about discrimination in later life.

It was reassuring to learn that local LGBTQ+ people are happy to share their sexual orientation and gender identity with health and care professionals, if asked in an appropriate manner.

We co-produced and published some recommendations in the report.

Examples of recommendations include the better collection of sexual orientation and gender identity data, and actions to make services and settings more inclusive.

Working in partnership with NHS Sussex and other local partners, we are already running several projects to meet these identified needs.

The 'Ensuring Everyone Counts Project' seeks to improve the collection of protected characteristic data in local health and care services.

The 'Inclusion Award Project' supports local health and care services to become more inclusive. The scheme is run by Switchboard, a Sussex-based LGBTQ+ charity.

A number of primary care services and community services have been progressing through the steps to be awarded an Inclusion Award.

Since the publication of the assessment, we have also supported the 'Creating inclusive residential care for LGBTQ+ elders (CIRCLE)' research project, which is funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research's Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex, led by Dr Jolie Keemink and other researchers from the University of Kent.

It aims to understand how providers of residential care for older people can improve their LGBTQ+ inclusive care offer.

Since we published our needs assessment, other local authorities have contacted us, wanting to find out more about how our work could inform theirs.

Some great progress has been made to improve the health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ communities, but there is still much more we can all do to achieve health equity.



**The East Sussex LGBTQ+ Needs Assessment** is published on the East Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment website, see [www.eastsussexjsna.org.uk](http://www.eastsussexjsna.org.uk). For more information, please email [Public.Health@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:Public.Health@eastsussex.gov.uk)



# Abuse and intimidation

The LGA is calling for councillors' addresses not to be published



Councillor **Marianne Overton** is Chair of the LGA's Civility in Public Life Steering Group

**B**eing a councillor is one of the most unique and rewarding roles you can have.

I'm sure many people reading this can think of a moment when they have had a positive influence on the area they are privileged to represent.

Whether it be making a small improvement to a local park to influencing the future direction of your community, councillors are vital to the fabric of our society.

However, we know that sadly instances of abuse and harassment directed at councillors are on the rise.

Last year, an LGA survey found that eight in 10 councillors had experienced abuse or intimidation in 2023, up 10 per cent from the year before. More than half (54 per cent) of long-standing councillors had seen abuse increase since they were first elected, with 31 per cent seeing a sharp increase.

Some of this abuse may be low level; occasional unpleasant messages on social media or rude emails.

There are, though, an alarming number of councillors who have received abuse, harassment or stalking so severe that they have had no choice but to involve the police.

It is profoundly disturbing to hear of councillors being harassed and intimidated while doing their job. It should not become the norm that councillors need to install CCTV and panic alarms in their houses to feel safe while fulfilling their democratic duty.

The LGA is clear that this abuse and intimidation is unacceptable, poses a risk to our democracy and without concerted action risks driving good people out of local government entirely.

This is why we have been working hard since 2019 to highlight the



rising risk that abuse of councillors represents to our local democracy and what is needed to tackle this complex issue.

This has included engaging with the Home Office and the National Police Chiefs' Council to improve the protection offered to councillors, and securing amendments to the Online Safety Bill.

We have also been supporting councillors through our Civility in Public Life programme and Debate Not Hate campaign.

We've provided a range of support for people experiencing abuse, including providing a safer canvassing guide (see **first** 691), a guide to handling abuse, a safety training offer and a campaign toolkit for councils and councillors.

However, more can be done to address this growing issue.

Councillors, unlike MPs, are still required to publish their home address in their declaration of interests unless they are given permission from their council's monitoring officer not to do so. This has led to members of the

public turning up unannounced at councillors' homes.

We believe this can lead to a councillor's personal safety being compromised, leaving them and their families feeling distressed and vulnerable.

We are urging the Government to introduce legislation as soon as possible that would mean councillors' home addresses are not generally published.

We think this simple, practical step would go a long way in protecting councillors and their families from unnecessary abuse and intimidation.

Being a councillor is a fantastic role, but we cannot allow talented people to leave because of rising levels of abuse.

Anyone, regardless of their background or political affiliation, should feel safe to become a councillor and be proud to represent their community.

We must end abuse in public life and encourage healthy debate if we are to safeguard the future of our local democracy.



**A template letter for writing to your local MP** and/or relevant minister about our call to end the publication of councillors' home addresses is available by emailing [debatenothate@local.gov.uk](mailto:debatenothate@local.gov.uk). More details about the LGA's support offer and our **Debate Not Hate** campaign toolkit can be found at [www.local.gov.uk/debate-not-hate](http://www.local.gov.uk/debate-not-hate)



Councillor **Darren Rodwell** is Chair of the LGA's Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board

**A**lmost every journey in England begins and ends somewhere on 186,000 miles of local roads, be it on foot, by car, bus, bicycle, or other form of transport.

As a result, our local roads network requires constant maintenance and investment to keep up with the ever-increasing demands placed upon it.

This is not just from vehicles, but also from the impact of climate change – such as heavier rainfall, extreme temperatures, and coastal erosion – all of which can damage the road surface and infrastructure.

But the greatest challenge facing our roads right now is one we are all familiar with: inflation. Just like with other goods and services, the price of raw materials, labour, plant machinery and other essential costs have gone up, meaning councils' highway budgets are having to be stretched even further to try to deliver to the same standards.

Last October, the Government made the decision to cancel the northern leg of HS2 and divert \$8.3 billion of extra funding towards local roads across the country, to be spread out over the next 11 years.

It will go towards patching up potholes and fixing other defects that form the growing \$14 billion local roads repair backlog.

The first \$300 million of this extra money has been allocated to councils for this year and next, with no year-on-year commitment beyond this, meaning it is at clear risk from the spending decisions of a future or returning government.

The LGA is calling for longer-term funding certainty for councils' overall highways maintenance grant, on a par with National Highways which receives five-year funding allocations for running our motorways and major A roads.

Guaranteeing this level of funding over a longer period would enable councils to take the strategic, preventative actions needed to ensure our roads stay in good condition for longer, reducing the need for costly short-term repairs.

Highways budgets also cover

far more than just the road surface, ranging from bridges, tunnels and crash barriers to street lights, footpaths and cycle lanes, which would also benefit from longer-term planning and investment.

Pressures on these budgets are felt by all councils, both rural and urban, county and metropolitan, while our residents rightly expect that our roads and footways are kept in a safe and useable condition.

'Prevention is better than cure' is an adage that holds true for roads maintenance.

Regular preventative work, such as crack sealing, surface dressing, and timely repairs, can extend the lifespan of roads and prevent more extensive damage.

In the long run, these preventative measures are generally less expensive than major repairs or reconstruction and reactive pothole fixes.

By investing in proactive

# More than just potholes

Inflation is eating away at funding for local roads

maintenance, we can save significant costs further down the line and ensure the longevity of our infrastructure.

However, as highways budgets are inadequate to make this type of long-term investment across the whole of the network, councils end up prioritising those roads and paths at greatest immediate risk.

Surface treatments, especially ahead of winter, can also be planned and implemented in advance to avoid potholes and other defects appearing in the first place. Quality would also improve, enabling investment in better materials that have a longer life span.

It would also gain the confidence of suppliers and contractors who will be able to better plan their resources and provide training opportunities for the long term, knowing there is likely to be a steady supply of work.

It is good the Government has recognised that local roads





*“‘Prevention is better than cure’ is an adage that holds true for roads maintenance”*

maintenance funding over recent years has not been sufficient. The initial extra £300 million for the next two years is helpful in addressing the inflationary impact on councils' highways budgets, providing some much-needed clarity on what they can expect to receive in the short term.

As evidenced by councils (see right), what is really needed is year-on-year long-term funding certainty, to invest in roads and other highways infrastructure including for walking and cycling.

This will save costs in the long run by keeping people moving, while tackling climate change and enabling better planning and prevention.

## Cornwall Council

The funding required each year to maintain Cornwall's roads in a good condition is growing. In 2022, the council spent £25 million on road repairs, proactive surface dressing and resurfacing.

In 2023/24, the council faced a shortfall in its budget to tackle these issues, so committed to investing additional capital maintenance monies (in addition to the welcome extra funding from Government) into its highways service, which went some way to addressing those issues.

Efficiencies and reductions in intervention frequency have been made over the years and the council is now effectively delivering a basic level of service for its routine maintenance of its highways. Longer term funding would provide stability, training opportunities and cost savings.

## Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council

BCP Council manages 1,248 km of carriageways, 120 traffic signal junctions and 387,196 street lighting units. The council deals with about 10,000 repairs per year and manages between 400 and 1,200 reports a month.

Our roads are busier than ever before, leading to increasing costs in traffic management as well as works taking longer or having to be done overnight. An increase in parked cars has made making repairs, serving gullies and street cleansing harder.

The council has found that material costs such as tarmac, road markings and salt have gone up significantly. Short-term funding decisions have made work programming, recruitment and engagement with suppliers more challenging.

## Salford City Council

Recruitment and retention of staff is a challenge, with fewer engineers and shortages in operational teams, such as HGV drivers and operatives. Salford has attempted to address this with a pay review.

Revenue budgets have generally remained static, which due to inflation effectively means there is less money to maintain the highway network.

New developments where roads have been adopted have increased the number of streets the council has to maintain within its existing budget.

There have also been sharp rises in the price of raw materials, such as steel used for road safety barriers and bitumen used for pothole repairs, pushing up costs for the council. Longer-term funding would help with planning works programmes better, including seeking better competitive rates from suppliers knowing there is long-term investment.

## Lincolnshire County Council

Challenging ground conditions that are susceptible to drought damage affect about 30 per cent of Lincolnshire County Council's 5,500-mile road network.

Skills shortages leave the council and maintenance industry struggling to match pay demands, creating an emerging skills gap in certain positions.

Construction costs have increased by a third over four years, while buying power has decreased.

The recent additional funding announced for the next two years, while helpful, is less than the inflation pressures and less than previous pothole funding.

The council has already allocated an additional £19 million of funding into keeping the roads maintained, which are unprecedented additions and cannot be repeated.

Five-year funding would improve value for money in service delivery, encourage long-term recruitment and better strategic decision-making.

# Inspiring inclusion

Closing the gap in power and leadership positions



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

**F**irst marked in 1911, International Women's Day is a global celebration of women's achievements and a reminder of how far we have come in the fight for equal rights.

As we honour this year's event, on 8 March, it is important to focus on the theme, which is 'Inspire inclusion'.

Inclusion enables individuals from different backgrounds to feel valued and empowered to be their authentic selves, and break barriers to success.

We must recognise the immense progress made so far regarding women's rights. However, we still have a long way to go to close the gap in power and leadership positions.

This can be tackled as more and more women take on leadership positions both at work and in our communities, to help make decisions and effect change.

In local government, there are numerous training and mentorship opportunities that we can tap into; not forgetting the LGA's Be a Councillor campaign, which supports people to represent their communities by becoming councillors.

Through working individually and together across sectors, we can challenge discrimination in its entirety, opening up a world of opportunities for all women and girls.

Here, you can hear from four councillors (see right) who are working tirelessly to serve and lead their communities.



More information and contacts to access the LGA's support can be found on the **Be a Councillor** website, [www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor](http://www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor)





Councillor **Janine Lewis** (Lib Dem) is Executive Portfolio Holder for Public Health, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside at West Berkshire Council

## 'School of life'

For a year I danced around with the notion that I could make a real difference to my community if I did more than shout at whatever 'wrong I wanted to undo'.

I don't like confrontation, or politics or one-sided debate – or the scenes in Parliament where MPs seem to shout across or over people to get their message or motion across, like frustrated youngsters in a playground.

I noted in various articles about how to become a councillor that there are training sessions on resilience, communication, leadership, etc.

So, I pushed myself out of my comfort zone, applied, and was a surprised winning candidate. I went straight onto the front bench with five portfolios. Baptism of fire!

I booked straight on to two leadership courses and the support and friendship of those people continue to help me through my blue days.

My driving mantra? I want to put the word 'unity' back into the disconnected word 'community'. I do it with patience, love, listening, and not getting sucked into shouty pottymouth agendas; especially those on the other side of chambers.

I am a fun-loving 58-year-old with a varied CV. The school of life prepares you to be a councillor, as do experience, wisdom, humour and a thick skin.



Councillor **Sarah Suggitt** (Con) is Deputy Leader of Breckland Council

## 'Making the lives of our residents better'

I am a wife, mum of four, and businesswoman. I have been running a farming business with my husband since 2003 and my role is very much behind the scenes, as it has always fitted in well with bringing up our children. Safe to say, I had led a very insular life!

I was introduced to local government in 2019, having no clue what it meant or what the role would entail, but also having no idea how much I would get from it.

The biggest challenges were getting out of my comfort zone, finding confidence in myself, and understanding the quirks of local government. I found the latter easier to deal with. I compare the merits of council business with those of running my own, and take comfort and pride that our decisions are helping to make the lives of our residents better.

My confidence has grown the more I have pushed my boundaries. It is important for me that my children see that the work I do in my day job and my council role complement each other, and I hope it inspires them to take opportunities to push themselves.

It is really important that women are better represented in local government; we have so much to give and have an invaluable insight into our communities.



Councillor **Arooj Shah** (Lab) is Leader of Oldham Council

## 'See a better future'

As councillors, we have political power. It's up to us to get involved and make changes happen for all of society.

It's not easy, but I've yet to find a job that's as rewarding, where you can make a massive difference to the area you love.

Elections focus your mind, especially when, like me, you have lost your seat in the past. You must be clear, honest and tell people what you're going to do and why, and show how you are delivering.

In Oldham, we didn't hide that the national housing crisis is hitting us hard. Hundreds of families are in temporary accommodation; many people aren't remotely close to joining the housing ladder. So we took action. We got everyone together, hammered out solutions, and set goals very publicly. Now we can tell residents about our impact – developments visibly under way, building towards our initial target of 2,000 new homes.

Being a councillor isn't for those who want to sit and shout on the sidelines, but women from all backgrounds are putting their hands up. We understand the challenges for people since 2010 – disastrous decisions by the Government, and huge disinvestment in councils. And I won't pretend it's been easy as a Muslim woman councillor and then leader. But the highs of actually improving people's lives outweigh any lows.

If you empathise with local people, and can see a better future, please give it a go.



Councillor **Zoë Garbett** (Green) is Second Opposition Group Leader at Hackney Council

## 'Levers of change'

Public service runs through my family, with my parents being teachers, and me working in the NHS and public sector. These same values led me to the Green Party.

At first, I volunteered behind the scenes, organising election campaigns as I was worried about conflicts of interests with working at a council (turns out I needn't have worried!).

It wasn't until 2019, looking out a train window, thinking about how helpful I'd be to councillors when we got them elected, that I realised I should put myself forward.

I love being a councillor – I take the responsibility seriously, making sure I'm doing as much as possible for residents as well as for wider ward issues, such as advocating for traders at the wonderful Ridley Road Market, which started in the late 1880s.

Sometimes, when supporting residents, the levers of change are out of reach for a councillor, particularly in housing, but I've learned that showing care and listening goes a long way.

We have a supportive network of Green councillors in London and I've got better at asking council officers for advice.

Balancing non-councillor work and councillor duties is challenging – especially being part of a small minority opposition group – so reviewing capacity and priorities is important.

My advice to anyone thinking about being a councillor is to go for it – you are good enough and residents need passionate, caring advocates.

# Resources for sustainability

## Tools and training for councils tackling climate change

**A**longside the majority of councils, the LGA has declared a climate emergency, and we offer a wide range of resources to help councils address environmental sustainability.

In partnership with, and funded through, the Crown Commercial Service, the LGA has launched a sustainability programme as part of its sector support offer.

The programme will provide tools and opportunities to build councils' capability and capacity in sustainability and the environment.

The LGA provides data-driven and consistent approaches for the sector

to prioritise the actions that will drive their sustainability, efficiency and improvement goals.

The three key pillars of the programme are:

- Building capability – learning, skills and guidance to help councils deliver on their climate and adaptation targets, through masterclasses (see right) and roundtables that will highlight key sustainability themes and upskill participants.
- Tools – our free greenhouse gas accounting tool provides a straightforward and consistent approach for councils to

calculate their own carbon base, and our free waste emissions calculator assists with carbon 'foot printing'.

- Networks – an online sustainability hub, a monthly sustainability bulletin, and an officer 'communities of practice' network.



To find out more, please see below and right, visit the **Sustainability Hub** at [www.local.gov.uk/sustainability-hub](http://www.local.gov.uk/sustainability-hub), or email [sustainability@local.gov.uk](mailto:sustainability@local.gov.uk) with any questions or for additional information

### CASE STUDY

## Climate action **teacher champions**

Schools in Luton have developed climate action plans for the first time, with the support of a new scheme from Luton Council.

The Climate Action Teacher Champion (CATCh) programme trains nominated teachers to identify opportunities for environmental action in their schools.

Teachers share their experiences and learn from each other, and then they write up an action plan with one-to-one mentoring from environmental experts.

Schools are well placed to help facilitate climate action within school settings, but also to influence behaviour in the wider community.

The challenge comes in helping schools overcome barriers to action, where teachers may feel they lack support or need tools to help inspire and encourage staff and students.

Schools also have the challenge of



adapting to an ever 'greener' curriculum, with new opportunities to engage students on topics such as climate change and sustainability.

The scheme is funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and delivered by Luton Council's Climate Change Team, with support from the University College London (UCL) Climate Action Unit, Youth Network Community Interest Company, and community and environment charity Groundwork East.

The programme's initial development by UCL's Climate Action Unit allows for emphasis to be placed on the psychology of the challenges that schools may face in undertaking an action plan.

Benefits include helping schools and students take action to lower their carbon impacts, at school and at home.

Schools where Luton Council has direct control or influence produced 8,294 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> according to a 2020 report.

Action planning can start the process of identifying areas in which schools can take action, while also inspiring positive action – for example, helping reduce reliance on car journeys and switching to active travel means for getting to school.



The case studies on these pages are just two of the many available via the **LGA's Sustainability Hub** at [www.local.gov.uk/sustainability-hub](http://www.local.gov.uk/sustainability-hub)



On 31 January 1953, a tidal surge hit Canvey Island in Essex, and 59 people tragically lost their lives.

While the island is now well protected by a sea wall, residents have suffered surface-water flooding in recent years. The most severe event occurred in 2014, when flooding to 1,000 properties was reported.

In 2019, a multi-agency partnership involving all flood management authorities began to consider a street-level retrofit of drainage systems using green infrastructure on the island's Park Avenue, an area prone to surface flooding.

The aim of the project was to reduce flood risk by using the street's grass verges and public open space to absorb surface water, as well as provide other benefits to the community, such as



livening up the street with tree planting and an attractive planting scheme.

The other option would have been to upgrade the traditional drainage in the road, but that would have added to the demand on an already struggling drainage system.

The 'Make Rain Happy' scheme saw the installation of rain gardens, swale (a shallow grassy drainage channel for water to run through), trees, more than 1,300 plants, a footbridge across the swale

so residents can still access the green space during wet periods (pictured), and a permeable plastic grid to stabilise the ground and accommodate parking, while still allowing water to infiltrate and grass to grow ('X-grid parking').

The team designed and erected a lectern board by the footbridge to explain the scheme, its aims, and its features to residents and visitors.

The project was successful at reducing surface-water flooding, looked attractive, and was popular among residents – in part because of the car parking improvements.

Essex County Council consequently identified three new sites for rain gardens and is looking for additional suitable locations where it can replicate the success of Park Avenue's 'Make rain happy' scheme.

The LGA runs a series of sustainability masterclasses for councillors and officers in England that aim to help you make informed decisions about carbon reduction and provide 'carbon literacy' accreditation.

The masterclasses will explore your crucial local leadership role in responding to the climate emergency. They will also provide skills and knowledge to enable you to embed good practice concerning climate change, carbon literacy, adaptation, green finance, and environmental sustainability within your council.

During the course, you'll commit to two carbon-reducing actions. These actions will be evaluated by the Carbon Literacy Project for you to be certified as 'carbon literate', enabling you to train others in your area of work.

The masterclasses are fully subsidised and are delivered virtually across two consecutive days.

Applications are open for the next course, running on the 13 and 14 March for councillors.

To find out more and to book your place, please visit **[www.local.gov.uk/sustainability-masterclasses](http://www.local.gov.uk/sustainability-masterclasses)**.

Adapting to current and predicted changes to our climate, at national and local level, is vital across society and the economy.

Appropriate governance and decision-making are essential to ensure that leadership teams and elected members are aware of, and understand, sustainability and climate risk for local areas, and that they appreciate the importance of resilience measures to support adaptation to extreme weather events and incremental changes to our environment.

The LGA will be discussing these issues at a virtual adaptation event

on 14 March, providing guidance on developing capability and capacity to implement local adaptation plans, strategies and projects.

If you missed our two virtual events and roundtables run so far, on decarbonising transport, COP28, and community engagement, we have captured the key discussion points from the sessions, along with the slides from our guest speakers.

These can be found at **[www.local.gov.uk/sustainability-roundtables-and-virtual-events](http://www.local.gov.uk/sustainability-roundtables-and-virtual-events)**, where you can also book your place at the adaptation event on 14 March. This event is open to both councillors and officers.



# Setting the **standard**

Could your amazing apprentice be crowned champion?

**L**ocal Government Apprentice of the Year 2024 is an exciting event for apprentices from across the sector to come together to showcase their skills, expertise, and initiative, by working on real-life challenges faced by local government.

In 2023, more than 130 level 2 and 3 local government apprentices from across England, Wales and Northern Ireland took part.

The event theme was climate change, and apprentices experienced the opportunities, risks and challenges in creating a local response to a global issue.

Apprentices were helped to work through a range of activities to develop successful workplace behaviours linked to a range of apprenticeship standards.

*“This event can open doors and give you awesome experiences”*

The event’s development leads were on hand to mentor and support apprentices and assess their work through a series of group activities.

The title of Local Government Apprentice of the Year 2023 was awarded to Laura De Campos Duhamell (Lau, pictured), a level 3 Business Administration Apprentice from Surrey County Council.

Prior to the event, Lau carried out extensive research into net zero by networking with key individuals within her organisation who had experience in these areas, including the council’s cabinet member for environment.

Lau’s preparation was evident during the event and her new-found knowledge put her in good stead for the day’s developmental tasks.

She also enjoyed meeting other apprentices, hearing their ideas, learning about their backgrounds, and forging meaningful connections.

Since winning the event, Lau has been offered numerous opportunities for personal and professional growth and has gone on to secure a permanent role with Surrey County Council.

As the Co-chair of the council’s Early Careers Network, and a committee member of its Women’s Network, Lau says it is an honour to represent and support the journey of all apprentices.

“I feel like, together, we can make huge changes. We are all the workforce for the future in the public sector,” she said. “The Apprentice of the Year event provided me with unexpected opportunities for growth, learning and networking, surpassing my initial expectations.

“It’s not just about networking, though; this event is all about collaborating and learning. You’ll dive deep into hot topics that matter to our work, gaining insights that will turbocharge your skills and understanding.



“Attending this event can open doors, give you awesome experiences, and connect you with people who can truly make a difference in your career.”

Cllr Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, said: “We are so proud of Lau; she is a fantastic role model and always goes above and beyond in everything she does.

“Our young people are our future, so I hope that Lau’s success can inspire and encourage others to apply for apprenticeship schemes, to help develop their skills and gain experience.”

The LGA supports councils to deliver successful apprenticeship schemes helping young people into training and employment, as part of its government-funded sector support offer.

Its Apprenticeship Support programme helps councils share good practice, provides advice and guidance, supports councils to problem solve via an action learning programme, and audits council apprenticeship programmes through ‘Apprenticeships MOT’ health checks (see [www.local.gov.uk/apprenticeships](http://www.local.gov.uk/apprenticeships)).

Apprenticeship opportunities in local government have expanded significantly in the past five years, with councils in England creating more than 71,000 apprenticeships in more than 200 fields.

## Apprentice of the Year

Local Government Apprentice of the Year 2024 takes place from 21-22 May and is open to all level 2 and 3 apprentices in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This includes current apprentices and those qualified within the past 12 months.

There is a charge of £149 for each participating apprentice, to

contribute towards the costs of running this large-scale event, which is a joint partnership between the LGA, East of England LGA, and South West Councils.

For more information, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/AOTY](http://www.local.gov.uk/AOTY), where you can also book for our ‘Find out more’ session on 12 March.



## Asking the right questions



**Ian Dean** is  
Director of the  
Centre of expertise  
on child sexual  
abuse (CSA Centre)

**Child sexual abuse has been particularly prominent in the public discourse recently, with multiple high-profile cases, reviews and inquiries shining a spotlight on the scale of abuse taking place across the country.**

At the CSA Centre, we conservatively estimate that more than 500,000 children experience some form of child sexual abuse every year in England and Wales, so this heightened profile is hugely important – not just in raising awareness and understanding, but in highlighting a type of abuse that many people would rather not think about.

Sadly, these reviews have also highlighted significant gaps in the response that children receive from services.

Our latest research shows that the number of child protection plans for sexual abuse is now at a 14-year low of just 2,290, following years of decline.

Our recent publication, 'Support matters: briefing for policymakers, funders and commissioners', found that, even with identification at such low levels, waiting times for children to access support services following sexual abuse have more than doubled since 2015.

That said, we've found that a little help for the children's workforce can go a long way in improving responses for children and families.

As local councillors, you have a key role to play by actively interrogating your local data and asking how well your council is identifying sexual abuse and supporting the workforce to respond effectively.

For example:

**How does your local data on identification of child sexual abuse compare with your statistical neighbours?**

Consider metrics like the number of social work assessments identifying sexual abuse as

*"The number of child protection plans for sexual abuse is now at a 14-year low"*



**A school student shows her teacher some worrying messages on her phone after class**

© THE CSA CENTRE

a concern, or the number of offences reported to the police.

**What support services are available locally, both for children and for adult survivors of sexual abuse?**

You might want to direct local commissioners to our recent 'Support matters' briefing paper, which summarises key information to help drive more effective commissioning of these services.

**What tools and resources are available locally to support social workers to identify and respond to concerns of sexual abuse with confidence?**

We have a range of free practice resources on our website, covering everything from identifying signs and indicators to communicating with children about sexual abuse; guidance on more specific issues, like sibling sexual abuse and supporting families following online offending; and tailored resources for schools.

**What training do social workers, managers, teachers and others receive?**

We know that very little child sexual abuse content is currently included in pre-qualification training, leaving many people entering the workforce lacking the knowledge and confidence to act.

We offer a free e-learning course on

sexual abuse in family settings, alongside more in-depth training on a wide range of topics.

**How effective is local partnership work in response to child sexual abuse?**

Our new 'Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway' is an interactive online resource that guides professionals through the ways they can work together to protect and support children and their families. We're holding free workshops for any area wanting to find out more.

We understand that tackling child sexual abuse can feel complex and daunting, but timely interventions and good-quality support can make a huge difference to children and families.

The role of local councillors and other leaders is central in ensuring that local responses are fit for purpose, and in driving forward improved practice.

With guidance, research, training and resources – most of it free – the CSA Centre is ready to support this work however we can.



To find out more about the work of the **CSA Centre** and access **free training and resources**, please visit [www.csacentre.org.uk](http://www.csacentre.org.uk) or email [info@csacentre.org.uk](mailto:info@csacentre.org.uk)

## Give councils the respect they deserve



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

Only Prime Minister Rishi Sunak knows when he will call the general election that the country desperately needs.

While he dithers and delays, Labour councillors are working hard to ensure the next government gives local councils the respect that has been missing in the past 14 years.

The atmosphere of hope and determination for the future of local government was palpable at the LGA Labour Local Government Conference in February. With the largest turnout in years, the weekend was packed with sessions full of inspiration, training and debate.

We were delighted to hear from

speakers including our Labour Deputy Leader Angela Rayner, Shadow Local Government Minister Jim McMahon, and countless fantastic council leaders from around England and Wales.

It was particularly pleasing to be joined by so many new councillors elected for the first time last May, when Labour became the largest party in local government.

The LGA Labour Group also launched our latest publication '101 achievements of Labour in local government' – examples of the difference Labour can make in power and highlighting the tireless work by councillors for their communities (see [www.local.gov.uk/political/lga-labour](http://www.local.gov.uk/political/lga-labour) for the online copy).

The truth is that councils of all political colours are doing their best to deliver for their communities, despite this Government's failure to respect or support local government.

The next government has an opportunity to change this relationship,

and, if voters choose Labour, I'm confident that this will happen.

Angela Rayner spoke compellingly about building a genuine partnership with leaders and mayors, and councils are central to Labour Leader Keir Starmer's mission to build more homes, take back control of our streets and deliver growth across the country.

Whether the PM chooses to face the country in May, or to bottle it and delay to the bitter end, the Labour Party is ready.

The promise of a Labour government that will work alongside us to deliver change for our communities means Labour councillors will have an added incentive to campaign to give Britain its future back.

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**"Councils of all political colours are doing their best to deliver for their communities, despite this Government's failure to respect or support local government"**

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

## Local services matter

Despite councils' best efforts to protect services, the financial challenges they face from rising cost and demand pressures are having a marked impact on service provision.

For example, spending is concentrated on fewer people, as councils have protected services such as social care (adult and children's) where there are clearly defined statutory responsibilities and regulatory oversight.

There has been a reduction in spending on preventative services, despite growing evidence of their financial and social benefits. For instance, reductions in spending on preventative services for adolescents is highly correlated with rising rates of 16 and 17-year-olds entering care.

And there are growing concerns over the quality and scale of service provision.

The LGA's triannual residents' satisfaction surveys show that the share of

respondents who are satisfied with council service provision has fallen for every service area in the survey between 2016/17 and 2023/24, except for waste collection.

Satisfaction levels for key services such as street cleaning, road maintenance, pavement maintenance, library services and sport and leisure have all fallen by between 5 and 9 percentage points since 2016/17, despite all the hard work of councils.

This matters because it is these and other neighbourhood (and often non-statutory) services that make a difference not just to individual people's lives, but to public services and economic growth more widely.

Sport and cultural services boost productivity and reduce pressure on the



NHS and social care service by helping people to manage their conditions independently; library business and intellectual property centres reach new groups of entrepreneurs and create more sustainable businesses than other forms of start-up support.

The LGA believes it is a false economy – locally and nationally – to reduce councils to just the providers of statutory services by not adequately funding them.

Additional government support is needed urgently to ensure local financial and service sustainability. The LGA, as the national voice of local government working on behalf of councils of all parties, tiers and regions, will continue to lobby the Chancellor on these matters right up to the Spring Budget, on 6 March.





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

## Concerns about productivity plans

All of us will welcome the additional uplift in funding announced in the final local government finance settlement, while acknowledging that much more support is necessary.

As part of the announcement, it was made clear that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) expects councils to come forward with productivity plans this summer.

**"We need a less competitive grant-funding regime and a more streamlined funding process"**

I know that some in local government have expressed concerns about this and I wanted to make two points in response to those concerns.

First, I take the concern about potential external consultancy costs as a legitimate one.

The LGA Conservative Group has always said that we need a less competitive grant-funding regime and more of a streamlined funding process.

You have my word that we will use our weekly meetings with the Secretary of State to ensure that what DLUHC wants local government to do does not become overburdened with consultancy fees.

If DLUHC does follow through with its plans, my advice is very simple. Go back to government and highlight the decent transformation work that we in councils are doing; indeed, the Government might even learn a few lessons from our work on the ground.

This is an opportunity for us to work collaboratively, to influence policy and investment decisions; a chance for us to develop closer working relations with officials and to drive productivity at scale on some of the big ticket items we are collectively facing in areas such as the use of artificial intelligence, housing delivery and social care.



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

## Deeds not words make a difference

A key Liberal Democrat value is putting the environment first, so I am delighted to see that among English councils, out of the top 10 councils for recycling household waste, nine of them are led by Liberal Democrats.

From Stockport to East Devon, Lib Dem-led councils are working hard. South Oxfordshire currently has the highest recycling rate in England at just under 62 per cent.

In Wales, Lib Dem-led Powys is one of the top Welsh authorities, recycling just over 68 per cent of all waste and setting a great example.

I respect and welcome the fact that councils and councillors of all political shades take this seriously, but it is good to see my party working hard on this issue and getting results.

**"Nine of the top 10 councils in England for recycling household waste are Lib Dem"**

Part of this is making sure people get the right information about how important it is, working with communities to increase awareness.

As Cllr Sarah Nelmes, our Leader on Three Rivers District Council, which has the second highest rate, says: "We facilitate waste collections by making it as easy as we can to recycle, but we are grateful for how much our residents support us."

Decades ago, Liberal, then Liberal Democrat councillors, would often get derisory comments for wanting facilities like neighbourhood recycling sites. Now it is second nature for so many households.

We will continue to work cross-party within the LGA to ensure that councils get the support they need on issues such as simplifying packaging, cutting down on waste and making it easier to recycle.



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

## Working together on finances

Our shared work on the financial settlement for local government yielded a stopgap of a further essential £600 million, helping our councils set balanced budgets over the next month.

It is a good example of local government working successfully together to achieve more for our residents.

The LGA's group leaders spent Valentine's Day together at the UK Local Government Association Forum in Belfast. Local government leaders from the four countries of the UK joined forces to share vision and good ideas.

**"I'm concerned about funding for the removal of floodwater from our low-lying areas"**

The cross-party delegation from Northern Ireland were optimistic and pleased to have Stormont able to bring forward stalled plans and projects.

This past month, I have been particularly concerned about the need to fund the removal of floodwater from our low-lying areas.

Currently, we have a small number of rural council taxpayers protecting the nation's food, leaving little provision for fundamental council services.

I made the case strongly at a parliamentary reception organised by the LGA Special Interest Group for Internal Board Drainage Levies, supported by Lord Porter and Liz Truss MP.

As a group of Independent, Green, Plaid Cymru and smaller party councillors, we can, do and must work together to provide a real and genuine alternative to the 'traditional' parties.

Independents and smaller parties are making a difference across the whole of Great Britain, making big contributions in every street and parish, and leading in our councils, in the majority or in opposition.

We are independent in how we speak and vote and, working together, we are stronger.

# A curriculum for children with a vision impairment



**Fiona Spence-Arnold**

is Education Policy Coordinator at the Thomas Pocklington Trust

**When a child or young person has a vision impairment, it can be hard to access the specialist support they need to participate and thrive in education.**

The Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI) works to redress that inequality and offers the opportunity to thrive.

Since its launch almost two years ago, the CFVI has been used by specialist and non-specialist practitioners, children and young people with vision impairment aged 0-25, and their families and carers to unlock and navigate necessary support and education.

The framework provides a shared language and agreed approach for both specialist and non-specialist education professionals to collaborate with and

support blind and partially sighted children and young people.

It promotes best practice, empowering children and young people with the right support at the right time, allowing equity in their education, and the opportunity to thrive.

"The CFVI provides us with a tool to help explain and prioritise the needs of the whole child," says Amanda Bayley-Sunter, Qualified Teacher of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment and Manager of Doncaster's Service for Children with Vision Impairment.

"The need to teach skills for independence is central to the framework, enabling our work to focus on what life is going to be like for that child through to adulthood, and what needs to be put in place to prepare them for that."

The students understand that the CFVI meets their needs and gives a firm base for the future, highlighting the importance of the child's voice.

In addition to providing a relevant



curriculum framework, it helps facilitate a more inclusive world.

The CFVI was developed by the University of Birmingham, the Royal National Institute of Blind People, my own organisation (Thomas Pocklington Trust), VIEW (the professional association for the vision impairment education workforce), and sector partners following extensive consultation.

We're still working together to embed the CFVI into policy and practice across the UK – and we're here to help you do that locally with a collection of useful resources and guidance.



**Thomas Pocklington Trust** is a national charity that supports blind and partially sighted people, with a focus on education, employment and engagement. See [www.pocklington.org.uk](http://www.pocklington.org.uk) to find out more and to access the **Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI)** and other resources

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Leading the way



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The last month produced a small crop of by-elections but two-thirds of them saw a seat change hands amid some surprising results.

Wales features, with four examples and only a single successful defence. Labour made one gain but suffered two losses, including another to the Conservatives. Again, the Liberal Democrats led the way with two gains in addition to two defences.

In Gwynedd, as in other rural areas of Wales, some councillors often develop a strong personal vote, and none more so than in Criccieth where Eirwyn Williams was both a councillor since 2012 and a town council member for many decades.

In Criccieth ward, Williams withstood the challenge from Plaid Cymru on three occasions, although his majority had reduced to just 32 votes by 2022. He died in October 2023, triggering this by-election which was won by Sian Williams, herself a member and former chair of the town council. The win increases Plaid’s dominance on Gwynedd Council.

Neath Port Talbot saw mixed fortunes for Independents, who run the council in association with Plaid Cymru after Labour lost control at the previous May elections.

Labour was accustomed to winning Briton Ferry East ward. In 1995, the party won two-thirds of the votes, but the pattern changed in 2022. Then, Chris James, the ward’s former Labour councillor stood instead as an Independent and defeated his Labour rival by just two votes. James’ resignation and subsequently Labour’s victory means normal service is now resumed.

Labour would have been expecting a second victory in Rhos ward, which the party had held until a by-election in 2019 saw Plaid Cymru’s Marcia Spooner make a surprise gain. She defended the seat in 2022, but her death brought the chance for Labour to reassert its authority. Instead, Independent Bob Woolford won easily with Labour relegated to third place.

The Conservatives had mixed fortunes, making an unexpected gain from Labour in



Cheshire East but losing to the Liberal Democrats in West Northamptonshire.

Cheshire East was Conservative until 2019, when it was replaced by a joint Labour/Independent administration. At the 2023 elections, the Conservatives won 33 seats to Labour’s 31, with Crewe Central in the Labour column.

The Conservatives chose local business owner Roger Morris to fight the vacancy in this ward. His election campaign studiously avoided national issues, instead focusing heavily on the problems of litter, potholes and crime. Turnout was only 16.5 per cent, but perhaps those voters were playing close attention to the contest, which Morris won by 58 votes.

It was back to normal in West Northamptonshire, however.

In May 2021, Hunsbury and Shelfleys was an easy win for the three-member Conservative slate. Fortunes were reversed on this occasion, with Liberal Democrat Carl Squires taking the seat despite competition from Labour.

Labour and Liberal Democrats were rivals again in the contest for Hull City Council’s Avenue ward. In 2021, the ward elected a Liberal Democrat, but in the next two elections it voted in Labour councillors.

One of these, Marjorie Brabazon, a ward councillor since 2014, resigned her seat after being disciplined by her party. The following day, another member of the Labour group left, declaring himself an Independent. Labour’s loss proved to be the Liberal Democrats’ gain with the seat won by Rhiannon Beeson.

Local by-elections

Blaenau Gwent, Ebbw Vale South

IND HELD  
29.0% over Lab                      Turnout 12.9%

Cheshire East, Crewe Central

CON GAIN FROM LAB  
7.5% over Lab                      Turnout 16.5%

Dacorum, Tring West

LIB DEM HELD  
41.6% over Con                      Turnout 27.2%

East Hampshire, Four Marks & Medstead

LIB DEM HELD  
24.4% over Con                      Turnout 30.6%

Gwynedd, Criccieth

PLAID CYMRU GAIN FROM IND  
47.5% over Ind                      Turnout 40.0%

Hull, Avenue

LIB DEM FROM LAB  
6.1% over Lab                      Turnout 29.0%

Neath Port Talbot, Briton Ferry East

LAB GAIN FROM IND  
9.7% over Ind                      Turnout 23.0%

Neath Port Talbot, Rhos

IND GAIN FROM PLAID CYMRU  
26.6% over PC                      Turnout 44.8%

West Northamptonshire, East Hunsbury and Shelfleys

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON  
3.5% over Con                      Turnout 23.0%

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



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