

first

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local
Government
Association

No.708 September 2025

www.local.gov.uk



A local voice at party conferences

Permitted development

Costs of unplanned office-to-home conversions **p09**

Better governance

Members' central role in LGA decision-making **p15**

The best start in life

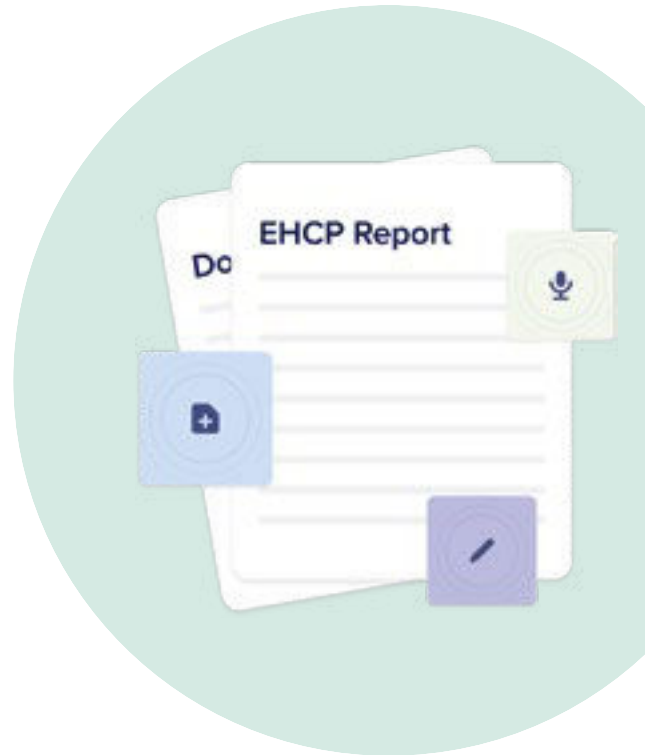
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Political change

The LGA has been busy engaging with the new team at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and continues to press for the clarity and support councils need to deliver for their local residents (p4).

We have been going through our own changes in governance, and you can read more about these – and find out who our LGA lead members are for 2025/26 – in this month’s edition of first (p15).

The party conference season is in full swing, and the LGA is attending these key events to ensure the voice of local government is heard on the national stage (p10).

We have also been successful in securing the contract to run the National Centre for Family Hubs, providing support for councils in England with the expansion of family hubs – one-stop shops for under-fives and their families (p21).

Elsewhere in the magazine, we reflect on our improvement support for councils (p18), Impact – our graduate scheme for local government (p20), and 21 years of the LGA’s leadership programme for black, Asian and ethnic minority councillors (p22).

Our lead comment this month is from Ben Houchen, Mayor of the Tees Valley, on unlocking economic growth through partnership and devolution (p25). ●

Councillor Louise Gittins
is LGA Chair



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Tel editorial 07464 652610
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Circulation 16,700 (August 2025)

first is published online at
www.local.gov.uk/first at least a
day before the magazine.
To unsubscribe email
first@oscar-research.co.uk

Photography istockphoto.com

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Taking the lead



Councillor Louise Gittins
is Chair of the LGA

It's almost a year since the first Leaders' Council was held at the LGA's 2024 annual conference in Harrogate.

Bringing together members from across England, including myself, LGA group leaders, other sector leaders, and ministers to discuss key cross-cutting issues for our sector, this new political forum was a key ask of the LGA's Local Government White Paper ahead of the 2024 general election.

We wanted to see an equal, respectful partnership between local and national government, and to ensure local government's voice was heard across Whitehall – and I believe the Leaders' Council has been helping us to do that.

For example, in July we met with the then Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, then Local Government Minister Jim McMahon, and Care Minister Stephen Kinnock.

Housing, the 10 Year Health Plan for England, the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, and fairer funding were among the issues discussed.

Ahead of the first neighbourhood

health services rolling out this September, we emphasised the need for local government to be equal partners alongside the NHS in delivering this key aspect of the 10 Year Health Plan.

Local government colleagues shared examples of good practice in co-designing and delivering integrated community health services with NHS colleagues that are reducing pressures on hospitals and improving residents' health and wellbeing.

But we also flagged the difficulties councils face in working with NHS integrated care boards when they are heavily focused on managing significant budget cuts.

We told ministers we want the neighbourhood health service to succeed, and that it is paramount that all of the NHS, and its partners, engage fully and openly with councils everywhere, and work collaboratively to deliver for our communities.

The Government committed to local government being firmly around the table in co-designing the neighbourhood health work.

The Leaders' Council is enabling us to advocate to ministers on the issues that matter most to our members. We look forward to continuing the conversation in our autumn session where SEND, local government finance, and standards and conduct are on the agenda. ●

● See p13

New ministerial team for local government

As first was going to press, the LGA was arranging meetings with the new ministerial team at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

These include former Lambeth Council Leader and former LGA Deputy Chair Steve Reed MP, who was appointed as the new Secretary of State.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "With a new secretary of state and a team of ministers in place now is a vital time for local government to continue to show our leadership and demonstrate that we remain committed to working in partnership to deliver for our communities.

"At the LGA, we understand the importance of continuity during times of transition.

"As new ministers take up their posts, we warmly welcome them and look forward to building constructive relationships that put local priorities at the heart of national policy.

"As LGA chair, I have already begun engaging in discussions with ministers and senior officials, ensuring that the important voice of local government is heard clearly and consistently.

"Such important conversations underline not just the LGA's influence but also our commitment to working quickly to reiterate the sector's position on key issues on behalf of our membership.

"What matters most to council leaders, members and senior officers, particularly during a period of change, is knowing that the LGA has already stepped up and will not miss the opportunity to press for the clarity and support that councils of all tiers and political stripe require to deliver for their communities and residents." ●



Residential care costs ‘doubled’

Residential care costs for looked-after children have almost doubled in five years, according to a new report from the National Audit Office.

The spending watchdog is recommending government has better oversight of providers, with proportionate data on costs, profits, staffing, and capacity to guide the market and support councils effectively.

Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Chair of the LGA’s Children, Young People and Families Committee, said: “With more children needing help with increasingly complex and challenging needs, a lack of appropriate homes and the challenges

with commissioning those placements are leading to an escalation in costs.

“The astronomical cost of care placements also means there is less money available for councils to spend on the earlier help children so desperately need.

“We would also like to see greater financial oversight of the largest providers, with some making huge profits when money should be invested in supporting children.

“In the Autumn Budget, the Government should ensure all councils receive sufficient funding to invest long term into family help, child protection, and child in care and care leaver services. ●

Right to Buy reforms ‘need to go further’

While recent reforms of Right to Buy (RTB) led to a sharp increase in applications from people wanting to buy their council houses, local authorities in England see long-term benefits from them for boosting their stock of social housing, a new LGA survey has found.

The survey, delivered in partnership with the County Councils Network and District Councils’ Network, looked at the impact of changes made in 2024, including the reduction of discount levels, increased flexibility in the use of receipts, an increased cost-floor protection period, and removal of the acquisitions cap.

The survey found that 44 per cent of councils had already made use of the increase in the maximum permitted contribution to the development of new stock from RTB receipts; many called for the further extension of this flexibility beyond the 2025/26 financial year, to which the Government has committed.

However, while 23 per cent of respondents reported that new housing



stock schemes had been unlocked or become viable because of recent reforms, 52 per cent reported that they have not been able to unlock any new schemes yet.

Respondents emphasised that budget constraints on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) remained a barrier to the viability of new schemes.

The LGA is calling on the Government to remove the time limit on the use of Right to Buy receipts, and for councils to have the ability to set discounts locally.

Cllr Tom Hunt, Chair of the LGA’s Inclusive Growth Committee, said: “The Right to Buy reforms are a step in the right direction for councils as they seek greater control over their housing stock, but we urge government to go further to ensure that local government is fully empowered to deliver the homes we desperately need.” ●

Teen pregnancies on the rise

Teenage pregnancy rates are rising for the first time in 14 years, prompting an LGA call for renewed action, including a national sexual health strategy.

In the 25 years since the publication of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy for England, councils have worked with local multi-agency partners to effectively reduce under-18 conception rates by 70 per cent. Areas with the highest levels of deprivation have seen the steepest decline.

Despite this progress, under-18 conceptions and abortions have risen since 2020, alongside a decline in condom use among adolescents.

The LGA warns the lost momentum could reflect broader systemic pressures, with funding cuts pushing councils from upstream prevention to downstream crisis response.

Alongside improved outcomes for teenagers, investment in teenage pregnancy programmes generates £4 of savings for every £1 spent through reduced demand on health, social care, housing and education services.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor, Chair of the LGA’s Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: “Councils have led the way in reducing teenage pregnancies. We must now build on the achievements of the past 25 years.

“Teenage pregnancy is not just a public health issue – it’s about safeguarding, education, social justice and giving every young person the chance to thrive.

“We are urging government not to become complacent and prevent any further rise in teenage pregnancy rates by facilitating consistent national support for local delivery and providing sustainable investment for prevention and early support.” ●

● See www.local.gov.uk/ publications for two new LGA guides for councils on teen pregnancies

News in brief

Early education

Disadvantaged children are at risk of missing out on the same early education as their more affluent peers because of the eligibility criteria for entitlements, says a new report from the Coram Family and Childcare charity. Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Chair of the LGA's Children, Young People and Families Committee, said: "We have long raised concerns about the potential disparity and would like the Government to review the entitlements offer." The LGA is also concerned about take-up rates for disadvantaged two-year-olds, and central government communications that focus more on the value of childcare for parents than on the importance of early education.

Housebuilding support

Debbie Ward has joined the LGA as Head of Programme for the Council Housebuilding Support Service (CHoSS). Funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, CHoSS provides free, bespoke capacity and capability support to councils in England so they can increase the supply of council housing in their areas. Ms Ward, who previously led the Local Government Capacity Centre in Homes England, said: "I am passionate about delivering great social housing. It's a pleasure to be joining the LGA to establish such an important programme."

What do you think of first?

The LGA is asking **first** readers what they think of the magazine and its e-versions, in its latest biennial readership survey. Please check your council email inbox for your invite to take part; it should take 10-12 minutes to complete online, depending on your responses. If you haven't received an invitation or encounter any technical problems completing the survey, email helen.wilkinson@local.gov.uk. The closing date is Monday 29 September.

'Details lacking' on jobs and careers integration

MPs reviewing the establishment of a new jobs and careers service have warned that adult careers services face issues of accountability, with responsibility falling between two government departments and local government.

The Commons' Work and Pensions Committee said careers service reform offers "exciting opportunities", but called on the Government to "urgently bring forward more details" on its plans, warning that uncertainty is putting service delivery at risk.

Cllr Tom Hunt, Chair of the LGA's

Inclusive Growth Committee, said: "Integrating Jobcentre Plus with the national careers service is a significant reform that must lead to a more seamless service for people looking to move into, and progress in, work, as well as for employers looking to recruit."

"To make the new integrated service work for communities in different places, the LGA wants government to work with councils and mayors to test new approaches, so it can be more locally responsive, embedded and engaged." ●

● **The LGA has published top tips for officers and councillors on Connect to Work, the Government's employment service helping disabled people, and others with complex barriers to work to find and stay in jobs, see www.local.gov.uk/publications**

Councils delivering on free health checks

A record 1.04 million people aged over 40 were invited to free NHS health checks in the first quarter of this year, as part of a national programme commissioned by local councils.

From these invites, more than 320,000 checks were completed in the first quarter of the year.

Councils across England have offered nearly 32 million eligible people an NHS health check since April 2013, with more than 14 million checks completed.

The national public health programme is designed to spot the early signs of serious illness, including diabetes, heart disease,

kidney disease, stroke and dementia. Local council public health teams work with the NHS to deliver the programme via GP practices, pharmacies, community healthcare settings and integrated health improvement programmes.

The gap between invitations and completed checks highlights the importance of making the service more accessible – for example, by bringing checks into workplaces.

The LGA said many councils have also adapted their approach to target individuals or communities at increased risk of disease, through proactive outreach programmes.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "While there is still room for improvement in the uptake of the checks, these latest figures reflect the scale of delivery and efforts of local authorities and health services to improve health outcomes."

"Public health funding gaps do continue to present barriers for councils. It is vital that councils are properly resourced to deliver preventative services and improve health outcomes for all communities." ●



Rural and deprived areas 'hit by dental deserts'

Persistent unequal access to NHS dental care is deepening health inequalities in England, with rural and deprived communities particularly struggling to access treatment.

LGA analysis, based on NHS data, shows an uneven distribution of NHS dental practices, with no local authority area in England having more than one practice per 1,000 people providing NHS treatment, and rural and poorer areas likely to have fewer still.

For example, in Middlesbrough, there are just 10 NHS dental practices per 100,000 people despite having one of the highest levels of deprivation, compared with Richmond upon Thames, with 28 per 100,000 people and one of the lowest deprivation levels.

Analysis also found that, despite an obvious need, areas with higher rates of child dental decay don't have more NHS dental practices than areas with lower rates.

The LGA is urging the Government to introduce targeted policy responses to improve provision in the most underserved areas.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor, Chair of the



LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "We know that poor dental health can significantly impact overall health outcomes, including increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease.

"It is encouraging that the Government is taking steps to improve dental access, such as expanding provision and investing in community dental services, but it is also vital that the current dental contract is reviewed to make NHS dentistry more viable.

"There is still more to do to ensure equitable care for all communities." ●

Ban on selling high-caffeine drinks to U16s

The Government has launched a consultation on proposals to ban the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks to children under 16 in England.

The move aims to tackle growing concerns about the impact of these drinks on children's health, wellbeing, and educational outcomes.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "Many people will be surprised that the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks to under-16s isn't already banned.

"We know that high levels of caffeine in energy drinks have been linked to health problems in children, making this ban a vital step in safeguarding children's health

and giving every child the best start in life.

"Local councils are ready to support its implementation and this legislation will give Trading Standards the authority they need to act when standards are not upheld. It's a fair, enforceable policy that puts children's health first.

"To succeed, the ban must be backed by adequate resources to ensure effective enforcement and compliance. Retailers must be confident in the legislation and prepared to implement it effectively with clear guidance, signage, and training to protect young customers and support business compliance."

The consultation is available on www.gov.uk and closes on 26 November. ●

Supported housing 'could save NHS millions'

The LGA is urging government to address subsidy rules and invest in supported housing to reduce pressures on health services and ensure effective implementation of the Supported Housing Act 2023.

A shortage of supported housing in England in 2023-24 cost the NHS £71 million through delayed mental health hospital discharges.

Expanding provision has the potential to save up to £50 million a year for the NHS and a total annual saving of £6 billion for the wider public purse.

Supported housing provides a vital safety net for individuals with complex needs, including people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, care leavers, people with disabilities and those with mental health needs.

It is a lifeline service offering safety and stability in a secure home environment, enabling people to live independently, preventing homelessness and reducing pressure on hospital admissions.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "Councils are committed to providing high-quality supported housing for residents and want to invest more to continue enabling people who draw on care to lead independent and fulfilling lives.

"But, without much-needed long-term investment in this essential preventative care service, many older people and those with physical and learning disabilities will continue to be in hospital and residential care longer than necessary.

"Young care leavers, people fleeing domestic abuse, and those experiencing homelessness will be without stable housing." ●

The LGA has released a new 'Supported Housing Guide', see www.local.gov.uk/publications

Care-experienced ‘need better access to physical activity’

A new report has called for care-experienced children and young people to have better access to physical activity.

The report, launched at this month’s LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport Conference in Bradford, warns they are “a hidden group” whose needs and experiences are often overlooked in physical activity policy and provision.

The LGA is calling on the Government to prioritise supporting care-experienced children and young people in the forthcoming physical activity strategy.

It says Sport England, the Department for Education and Department for Culture, Media and Sport should expand their existing data collections to include and track physical activity levels and experiences of care-experienced children and young people.

The call for data collection forms part of a series of recommendations set out in ‘Guidance on improving opportunities for physical activity for care-experienced children and young people’. This provides information, advice and examples of good practice on how councils and their partners can best support them to be physically active.

The report was commissioned by the LGA and written by the children’s charities Coram and Stormbreak.

Cllr Julie Jones-Evans, Chair of the LGA’s Culture, Tourism and Sport Committee, said: “As corporate parents, looking after children and young people is one of the most important jobs that councils do.

“Supporting care-experienced children and young people to be physically active is an important part of these corporate parenting responsibilities.” ●

‘Invest in grassroots sports through councils’

The £400 million announced in June’s Spending Review for grassroots sports facilities should be directed towards vital local community assets, such as leisure centres, swimming pools and local gyms.

So says a coalition of the LGA, Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association, Community Leisure UK, Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers, Swim England, and ukactive, which is calling on the Government to ensure the funding is invested in the facilities that people rely on every day to stay active and healthy.

The group argues that councils are best placed to identify where investment is most needed, and to ensure the funding delivers maximum impact for communities.

With councils already the largest funders of public fitness and leisure services, directing investment through them would help safeguard and enhance the infrastructure that supports physical activity across the UK.

This approach would also align with the Government’s 10 Year Health Plan for England, enabling councils to work with health and care partners to promote active lifestyles and improve public health outcomes. With leisure centres and swimming pools particularly popular



among older age groups and people with health conditions, supporting these facilities will help tackle health inequalities most effectively.

An LGA spokesperson said: “It is positive the Government has announced £400 million for grassroots sports facilities. But for this funding to be truly transformative, we are calling for it to be invested via councils, so it can have the impact that delivers the ambition the Government has to improve our nation’s health.” ●

Holiday programme extended

The Government has announced a £600 million extension of the Holiday Activities and Food programme in England for another three years.

The programme supports children from lower-income families by providing free meals and activities during the school holidays. The LGA has previously called for it to be continued.

Cllr Amanda Hopgood,

Chair of the LGA’s Children, Young People and Families Committee, said: “The programme has proven highly effective by encouraging children to engage in higher levels of physical activity, improving their diets, and increasing their confidence, wellbeing and feeling of social connection – in particular, reaching pupils who are persistent school absentees or at risk of absence.

“Councils would not have been able to replace this funding if it was discontinued, which would have impacted on the most vulnerable children in their communities, and risked losing experienced staff without adequate time to plan for future provision.

“Extending the funding provides much-needed certainty and safeguards valuable support and expertise.” ●



Permitted development rights

The LGA wants to end unplanned office-to-residential conversions

The House of Lords has resumed its consideration of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill in committee, having begun before the summer recess.

Among the proposals Peers are considering is an amendment tabled by Baroness Thornhill, developed in close partnership with the LGA, that seeks to remove a range of permitted development rights (PDR). These rights currently allow existing buildings, including offices, to be converted to residential use without full planning permission – and, consequently, without the requirement to contribute to social housing.

Permitted development was originally introduced to speed up housing delivery.

After more than a decade of expansion, this route has led to serious unintended consequences: homes of poor quality, the loss of desperately needed affordable housing, and the erosion of local democratic control.

LGA analysis published this month shows that around 28,000 affordable homes have not been delivered since 2013 as a result of office-to-residential conversions under PDR.

More than 110,000 homes have been created through this route, outside the safeguards of the planning system.

Because councils are unable to apply local planning policies, these conversions make no contribution to affordable housing or to local infrastructure (such as roads, schools and community centres), and there is no assurance that homes are climate-resilient, well-designed or suitably located.

The impact could not be more stark. At present, 131,000 households, including a record 169,000 children, are living in temporary accommodation. If the conversions delivered under permitted development had been required to contribute their fair share towards affordable housing, it would have helped

house one in every five families currently in temporary accommodation.

Councils also spent £2.3 billion last year on temporary accommodation, resources that should have gone into providing long-term housing solutions.

Concerns about quality are equally pressing. Studies, including those commissioned by government, have consistently found that homes delivered through PDR are more likely to be substandard: smaller, darker and poorly ventilated, often in unsuitable locations, such as industrial estates and business parks. There are people living in flats that would not meet the most basic space or habitability standards had they been subject to the normal planning process.

The amendment reflects the long-standing position of the LGA and is supported by a broad coalition.

An open letter coordinated by the LGA has been signed by 52 organisations and individuals across housing, planning and local government, including Shelter, the National Housing Federation, the Town and Country Planning Association, the Royal Town Planning Institute, Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, and the G15 group of housing associations.

The letter has been published on the LGA website, reported by the Guardian and shared widely across social media.

The case being made is clear. Permitted development has created a loophole allowing developers to sidestep their responsibilities, leaving councils unable to plan growth, provide infrastructure or secure affordable housing. It undermines local plans and damages public trust in the planning system.

Baroness Thornhill's amendment does not prohibit conversions. It restores a fair and proper process, one where quality, infrastructure, affordability and community interest are weighed openly and democratically. It is not anti-housing, but pro-housing done well.

As **first** was going to press, the amendment was being debated. The LGA will follow the bill's progress and provide further updates to councils shortly. ●

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

Showcasing local government

Ensuring councils are heard at the party conferences

As summer quickly turns to autumn and Parliament briefly returns from recess before breaking up again (more on that later), the LGA looks ahead to what is expected to be another busy quarter.

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill has now passed its second reading and is on its way to committee. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill and the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill continue to be debated in the House of Lords.

It’s not just legislation we are monitoring. Further policy announcements and strategies are expected later this year, including on long-term housing, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), among others.

But before all this, the parliamentary calendar pauses once again for the annual political party conferences.

Attending party conferences is a vital way for the LGA to ensure that the voice of local government is heard at the heart of national debate.

By bringing councillors, parliamentarians and ministers together, we can champion the sector’s priorities and ensure that local perspectives shape the development of national policy.

Over the coming weeks, the LGA will travel to



Bournemouth twice – first for the Liberal Democrats and then for the Green Party – before heading to Liverpool for Labour, and finally to Manchester for the Conservative Party Conference.

Our first stop, however, was in Birmingham in early September, where for the first time the LGA joined hundreds of first-time councillors at Reform UK’s annual conference.

Following the local elections in May, Reform UK was invited to join the LGA, creating a brand-new and fifth political group office. The LGA’s Reform UK Group was formally constituted at our General Assembly in July.

With the Reform UK group office establishing itself within the LGA, we took a different approach to the party’s conference by co-sponsoring its councillors’ lounge.

This provided a space for

Reform UK councillors to take a break from speeches, meet colleagues from across the country, and learn more about the work of the LGA.

For the remaining conferences, we will continue with our usual programme, facilitating a combination of panel discussions with local government representatives and receptions with keynote speakers from across the political parties.

In line with this, our discussions this year will focus on key themes such as devolution and local government reorganisation, employment and skills, and effective governance.

Alongside our own events, we are working with partner

organisations to highlight the importance of cross-sector collaboration. From health and housing to business and voluntary services, we want local government to remain central to joined-up solutions.

The LGA will use every opportunity to showcase the excellent work of local government and explore the issues that matter most to the sector.

We will also highlight best practice and share innovations, particularly as councils continue to navigate and adopt emerging technologies to improve services and deliver efficiencies.

Party conferences also provide an important opportunity to reflect on the past year and reconnect with key partners and stakeholders, sharing intelligence, exchanging ideas, and planning engagement for the year ahead.

The LGA’s public affairs team will be available to take questions and discuss policy at each of the upcoming conferences. To learn more about our presence at each event, including which members of our team will be attending, or to arrange a meeting, please contact **publicaffairs.team@local.gov.uk**. ●

i For the latest updates to the LGA’s programme of events at the 2025 party conferences, please visit www.local.gov.uk/party-conferences-2025

Liberal Democrat Conference

Bournemouth International Centre (BIC),
20-23 September
<https://www.libdems.org.uk/conference>

‘Celebrating success – Stockport’

Saturday 20 September, 1pm to 2pm,
Branksome suite, BIC
Hosted by LGA Lib Dems and the
Association of Liberal Democrat
Councillors (ALDC).

A beacon of Liberal Democracy in a sea
of red – how the Lib Dem council works
with local Lib Dem MPs.

Chair: Cllr Bridget Smith, Deputy Leader
of the LGA’s Liberal Democrat Group
Speakers: Cllr Mark Roberts, Leader
of Stockport Council; Cllr Jilly Julian,
Deputy Leader; and Tom Morrison MP
(Lib Dem, Cheadle) (tbc).

‘A precarious progressive moment: constructive opposition in the age of populism’

Sunday 21 September, 11.30am to

12.30pm, Bryanston Suite,
Marriott Hotel
Hosted by The Future Governance
Forum, LGA Lib Dems and ALDC.
Chair: Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, Chair of the
LGA Liberal Democrat Group
Speakers: Josh Babarinde MP (Lib Dem,
Eastbourne); Nathan Yeowell, Director
of The Future Governance Forum; Polly
Mackenzie, former Director of Policy to
Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg.

The Local Government Reception

Sunday 21 September, 7.45pm
to 9.00pm, Main Function Room,
Hermitage Hotel
Hosted by LGA Lib Dems and ALDC. All
friends of local government welcome.
The Hermitage is just opposite the main
entrance to the BIC.
Speakers: Cllr Joe Harris, Leader of
the LGA’s Liberal Democrat Group;
Sir Ed Davey MP, Leader of the
Liberal Democrats

‘Partnering for jobs and growth: how Whitehall and town hall can work better together’

Monday 22 September, 1pm to 2pm,
Blandford Room, Marriott Hotel
Hosted by The Future Governance
Forum, LGA Lib Dems and ALDC.
Chair: Cllr Joe Harris, Leader of the
LGA’s Liberal Democrat Group
Speakers: Vikki Slade MP, Lib Dem
Spokesperson for Housing, Communities
and Local Government; Cllr Bridget
Smith, Leader of South Cambridgeshire
District Council; Hamida Ali, The Future
Governance Forum; Julia Goldsworthy,
former MP and Head of Social Impact
Investment at Legal & General (tbc).

The full programme of Lib Dem fringe
events and training is available at
bit.ly/4nu7QQK

Labour Party Conference

ACC Liverpool, 28 September
to 1 October
<https://labour.org.uk/annual-conference>

‘English devolution: empowering people, empowering places’

Monday 29 September, 2.30pm, Room
12, ACC Liverpool
Speakers: Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA
Chair; Cllr Bev Craig, Leader of the
LGA Labour Group

Local Government Reception

Sunday 28 September, ACC Liverpool

Green Party Conference

Bournemouth International Centre (BIC),
3-5 October
[https://greenparty.org.uk/get-involved/
conference](https://greenparty.org.uk/get-involved/conference)

‘Neighbourhood governance: how to empower local communities’

Saturday 4 October, 5:30pm to
6:30pm, BIC.
Speakers: TBC

Local Government Reception

Friday 3 October, 6:30pm to 7:30pm,
AGC Room, BIC.

Conservative Party Conference

Manchester Central, 5-8 October
[https://www.conservatives.com/
conference](https://www.conservatives.com/conference)

Local Government Reception

Sunday 5 October, 3.30pm to 5.00pm,
Trafford Room, Midland Hotel
Speakers: Cllr Kevin Bentley, Leader of
the LGA Conservative Group

‘Getting LGR right for Conservatives in local government’

Monday 6 October, 3.30pm to 5.00pm,
Thatcher Theatre, Midland Hotel
Speakers: TBC



Fair funding reforms

Councils still need additional resources

Last month, the LGA responded to the Government's Fair Funding 2.0 consultation. We welcomed many aspects of the proposed approach to local government funding reform in England, including: the guarantee of multi-year settlements; grant simplification; less competitive bidding; and potentially greater flexibilities over sales, fees and charges.

However, different councils will have contrasting views on many of the other proposals in the consultation.

The Government needs to ensure that reform does not put the sustainability of individual councils' finances and services at risk. The consultation's proposals on transitional protection are key in this context.

While the offer of a cash-flat floor appears reasonable at first, it does not protect councils from real-terms cuts in their core spending power (CSP). The consultation is also clear that not all councils will receive the cash floor, meaning they potentially face cash-terms cuts in CSP over the period.

Given the scale of cost and demand pressures currently faced by the sector, real-term and cash-term cuts will be challenging for any council.

While the LGA has welcomed many of the consultation's proposals, it does not mean that the sector's financial problems are resolved.

Funding reductions in the 2010s, followed by rapid cost and demand increases in recent years, mean that local government is under extreme financial pressure.

Prior to the Spending Review 2025, the LGA estimated that councils faced a funding gap of £8.4 billion by 2028/29, compared with 2023/24, based on projected cost pressure and modelled income. While we have not updated our analysis, the funding announcements set out in the Spending Review are largely in line with our original income projections. This implies that a significant funding gap remains at the sector level.

Even where councils gain from the fair funding changes, it is unlikely that the long-term funding issues they face will have been corrected.

So, the proposals set out in the consultation provide a first step towards greater certainty and sustainability of funding, but they are not a resolution to the sector's financial problems.



The LGA has reiterated that councils still need a significant and sustained increase in overall funding to stem the emerging risk of system-wide financial failure, and to ensure that councils can meet growing demand for the vital services needed by their communities.

Alongside additional funding, we also called in our consultation response for deeper reform, as the core components of the system are largely unchanged.

The Government should undertake a cross-party review of options to improve the wider local government finance system, including widening the tax base by giving more freedoms on local taxes and charges, as called for in our report on 'Reforming the local government funding system in England' (see www.local.gov.uk/publications).

This has to include a review of council tax, including consideration of fairness in the system, alongside other council funding sources, and whether business rates retention represents a viable future funding model.

We should look to build a sector-wide consensus on the nature of any proposed reform.

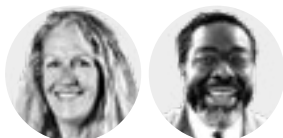
Finally, the consultation's proposals sit within a broader range of financial and service challenges.

It is vital that these are not overlooked and that the fair funding reforms align with other proposed changes, including to: the Treasury management costs of Dedicated Schools Grant deficits; internal drainage boards; devolution and local government reorganisation; and waste funding. ●

i You can read the LGA's full response to the Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation at www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses

Good neighbours

Partnership working is key to delivering health reforms



Councillor Louise Gittins is Chair of the LGA and Lord Victor Adebawale CBE is Chair of the NHS Confederation

The Government has, with its 10 Year Health Plan for England, put the establishment of a neighbourhood health service front and centre of its ambition for health service reform.

All eyes are now on implementation, with the National Neighbourhood Health Implementation Programme, rolling out this month, accelerating the work already planned or under way in many parts of the country.

This shift aims to deliver a model of care that is preventative and better supports those most in need, including those with long-term conditions.

The LGA and the NHS Confederation have welcomed many of the plan's proposals, including the drive to end 'hospital by default'. But we are clear that close and equal partnership working – between all parts of the NHS,

local government and our partners – will be crucial to creating the neighbourhood health services capable of delivering these pivotal shifts.

Health does not begin in hospitals – it begins in homes, streets, parks, and schools – and the NHS cannot deliver a healthier society on its own.

Moving to a neighbourhood model of care has to mean resetting the relationship between the NHS, the wider public sector and communities. To move to a truly preventative model of care, the health service needs to change how power and resources are distributed.

Sustainable, long-term reform requires resources and responsibilities to be shifted to neighbourhoods and communities. We all need to work more closely together, with government, to co-design a modern health and care system that is rooted in prevention, community-led solutions and long-term wellbeing, and that addresses health inequalities and low life expectancy.

Councils and their NHS partners are already leading bold, local solutions that work, and are key to building a modern, joined-up health system that delivers for our people.

The LGA believes a ministerial forum, bringing together national and local politicians, would help drive real reform and deliver neighbourhood health models built from the ground up – based on what our communities need and what already works – that put prevention and place at the heart of public services.

The NHS Confederation is clear that neighbourhoods are where the most impactful interventions can be made – in collaboration with communities, who are key to creating good health.

There are numerous examples of communities being at the heart of this shift to a more preventative model of care. The NHS Confederation is currently working in partnership with the charity Local Trust to explore community-led, hyperlocal approaches to health.

Meanwhile, there is a lot going on in both our worlds – not least the abolition of NHS England and the restructuring of integrated care boards, alongside devolution and local government reorganisation.

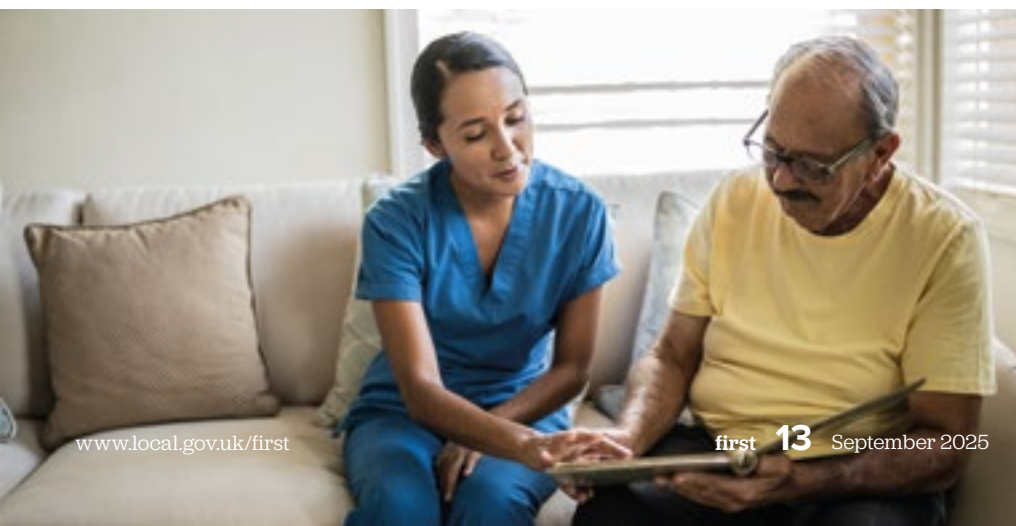
The opportunity to ensure these changes result in better alignment of mayoral combined authorities', councils' and health organisations' geographical boundaries is a significant prize that would cement closer partnership working.

There are many other public sector reforms impacting on us, from the Department for Education's Best Start Family Hubs and the Cabinet Office's thinking on community hubs for adults with complex needs, to still-evolving plans for neighbourhood area committees in new unitary council areas, and the Casey review of adult social care.

Putting neighbourhoods at the heart of health and care is not a minor tweak to the current model of NHS governance, nor is it a radically new blueprint, with many areas already working in this way.

With significant change under way in both our sectors, we must commit to 'rewire together' and not turn inward into silos when it comes to developing the neighbourhood health services that can deliver on our ambitions for our communities. ●

i The NHS Confederation is a membership organisation representing health trusts, primary care and integrated care systems in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, see www.nhsconfed.org



LGA ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION 2026

Bournemouth International Centre

Tuesday 7–Thursday 9 July

Book now

local.gov.uk/conference



Better governance

Members remain central to the LGA's decision-making processes

The LGA's new political year started in earnest this month, with lead councillors attending their first meetings under our new governance structure.

New policy committees have replaced our old policy boards, as part of changes designed to strengthen our governance so we can serve our member councils even better.

The LGA Board remains our central decision-making body, directing and overseeing the LGA's activities, business and strategic priorities. The board is made up of our chair, five political group leaders (vice-chairs), and additional deputy chairs to reflect the LGA's current political balance – all of whom are directors of the LGA company.

The board is backed by a new Strategic Policy Oversight Committee (SPOC), which will oversee and coordinate policy development, ensuring alignment with the LGA's strategic priorities and considering cross-cutting issues. The SPOC consists of the LGA's chair and vice-chairs, plus the chairs of our policy committees and Improvement Committee.

Our former policy boards

have been reshaped into nine thematic policy committees, which will continue to lead on policy development and report to the SPOC.

The nine committees are: children, young people and families; culture, tourism and sport; fire services; health and wellbeing; inclusive growth; local government resources; neighbourhoods; public service reform and innovation; and safer and stronger communities.

The Improvement Committee provides oversight of funding and performance for LGA improvement programmes. It reports to the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) Board, a subsidiary of the LGA focused on delivering improvement support to councils.

All these structures have been filled with councillors in line with the LGA's political balance, with our political groups using their respective methods of selection to populate the seats apportioned to them.

The LGA's political balance for 2025/26 is: Labour, 35.9 per cent; Conservative, 24.1 per cent; Liberal Democrat, 17.0 per

cent; Independent (including Independent, Green and Plaid Cymru), 15.2 per cent; Reform UK, 7.8 per cent.

The LGA's Councillors' Forum will continue as a key space for all elected members from LGA member councils, for engagement and policy input, and an enhanced programme of topical speakers, including senior government ministers.

We have embedded the LGA's values and behaviours across the entire governance structure, and clarified that the LGA Member Code of Conduct and Member-Officer Protocol apply to all members engaged in LGA business.


Our Articles of Association have been updated to restate our commitment to making decisions by consensus, while providing procedures for the rare occasion when this may not be possible.

These changes were agreed by the LGA's General Assembly following a major

review earlier this year. This included an external review of the effectiveness of the LGA's governance arrangements, to ensure that they are fit for purpose and comply with relevant legislation and best practice in corporate governance.

We also carried out a self-assessment using our 'Improvement and assurance framework for local government' (see www.local.gov.uk/publications); reviewed and improved internal processes, procedures and guidance; and interviewed elected members, staff and stakeholders connected with the LGA.

We will test our governance processes and procedures to ensure quality standards as part of our annual governance review.

Thank you to everyone who has previously served on our governance structures, and a warm welcome to those who joined us on 1 September. 

i See over page for details of the members of the LGA Board and of the LGA's Strategic Policy Oversight Committee (SPOC). For more information about the LGA's governance arrangements and its meetings, please visit www.local.gov.uk/about/our-meetings-and-leadership

FEATURE

Continued from page 15

LGA Board and Strategic Policy Oversight Committee (SPOC) members



Cllr Louise Gittins (Lab, Cheshire West and Chester) has been Chair of the LGA since July 2024. She previously served as Chair

of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, and Deputy Chair of its Community Wellbeing Board. She first became a councillor in 2011, becoming Deputy Leader of Cheshire West and Chester in 2015, and then Leader in 2019.

louise.gittins@local.gov.uk



Cllr Kevin Bentley (Con, Essex) became Senior Vice-Chairman and Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group in July 2023, having

previously chaired the LGA's People and Places Board. He was elected to Colchester City Council in 2002 and Essex County Council in 2009, and has been Leader of Essex since 2021.

cllr.kevin.bentley@essex.gov.uk



Cllr Bev Craig (Lab, Manchester) became an LGA Vice-Chair and Leader of the LGA's Labour Group in July 2024, having

previously served as an LGA Deputy Chair. She was first elected to Manchester City Council in 2011, and became its first woman and openly gay Leader in 2021.

cllr.bev.craig@manchester.gov.uk



Cllr Joe Harris (Lib Dem, Gloucestershire), an LGA Vice-Chair, has led the LGA Liberal Democrat Group since July 2021. He was first

elected to Cotswold District Council in 2011, leading it from 2019 to May 2025, and is Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Communications at Gloucestershire County Council.

joe.harris@gloucestershire.gov.uk



Cllr Amanda Hopgood (Lib Dem, Durham) is an LGA Deputy Chair and Chair of the LGA's Children, Young People and Families

Committee. She was Durham's first woman leader, from 2021 to 2025, and is currently its Deputy Mayor.

amanda.hopgood@durham.gov.uk



Cllr Hannah Dalton (Ind, Epsom & Ewell) became Leader of the LGA's Independent Group and an LGA Vice-Chair in July

2025. A Residents' Association councillor on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council since 2015, she became Leader in 2021, and is a Vice-Chair of the District Councils' Network.

hdalton@epsom-ewell.gov.uk



Cllr Stephen Atkinson (Ref, Lancashire) has been Leader of the LGA's Reform UK Group and an LGA Vice-Chairman since July

2025. He was elected to Lancashire County Council and became its Leader in May 2025, and is a member and former Leader of Ribble Valley Borough Council.

stephen.atkinson@lancashire.gov.uk

Other LGA Board members



Cllr Claire Holland (Lab, Lambeth), an LGA Deputy Chair since 2024, was first elected to Lambeth Council in 2014.

She became Leader in 2021 and, in July 2024, was appointed Chair of London Councils.

cholland@lambeth.gov.uk



Cllr Peter Mason (Lab, Ealing) has been an LGA Deputy Chair since 2024 and is Leader of Ealing Council. A trained town

planner, he was first elected in 2014 and became Leader of the west London borough in 2021.

masonpe@ealing.gov.uk



Cllr Bella Sankey (Lab, Brighton & Hove) has been Leader of Brighton & Hove City Council since May 2023 and an LGA Deputy Chair since 2024. Formerly

the director of a national charity, she was first elected in December 2022.

bella.sankey@brighton-hove.gov.uk



Cllr Abi Brown OBE (Con, Stoke) is an LGA Deputy Chairman and Deputy Leader of the LGA's Conservative

Group. First elected in 2010, she was Leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council from 2019 to 2023.

abi.brown@stoke.gov.uk



Other SPOC members



Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen (Con, Breckland) was elected to Breckland Council in 2007 and has been its Leader since

2019. A new LGA Deputy Chairman, he is also Chairman of the District Councils' Network.

sam.chapman-allen@breckland.gov.uk



Cllr Tim Oliver OBE (Con, Surrey) is a new LGA Deputy Chairman, Leader of Surrey County Council, and a former Leader of

Elmbridge Borough Council, where he was first elected in 1999. He is Chairman of the County Councils Network.

tim.oliver@surreycc.gov.uk



Cllr Bridget Smith (Lib Dem, South Cambridgeshire) is an LGA Deputy Chair, Deputy Leader of the

LGA's Liberal Democrat Group, Leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council since 2018, and a Vice-Chair of the District Councils' Network.

Bridget.Smith@councillor.online



Cllr Andrew Cooper (Ind, Kirklees) was elected Deputy Leader of the LGA's Independent Group in July 2025 and is a new

LGA Deputy Chair. He is Group Leader for the Green Party on Kirklees Council.

andrew.cooper@kirklees.gov.uk



Cllr Tom Hunt (Lab, Sheffield) is Chair of the LGA's Inclusive Growth Committee. He was first elected in 2022, becoming

Leader of Sheffield City Council in May 2023, and sits on the board of the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority.

tom.hunt@councillor.sheffield.gov.uk



Cllr Pete Marland (Lab, Milton Keynes) is Chair of the LGA's Local Government Resources Committee. He has been Leader of Milton

Keynes Council since 2014 and on the board of Local Partnerships since 2020.

peter.marland@milton-keynes.gov.uk



Cllr Jane Scullion (Lab, Calderdale) is Calderdale's Leader, and Chair of the LGA's Improvement Committee, the

Improvement and Development Agency's Board, and West Yorkshire Combined Authority's Climate, Energy and Environment Committee.

councillor.jscullion@calderdale.gov.uk



Cllr Arooj Shah (Lab, Oldham) is Chair of the LGA's Neighbourhoods Committee. The Leader and Cabinet Member for

Growth on Oldham Council, she was the first Muslim woman council leader in the North of England.

aroor.shah@oldham.gov.uk



Cllr Matt Boughton (Con, Tonbridge and Malling) is Chairman of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Committee. First elected in

2019, he has been Leader of Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council since 2022.

matt.boughton@tmbc.gov.uk



Cllr Dan Swords (Con, Harlow) is Chairman of the LGA's Public Service Reform and Innovation Committee. First elected in 2021, he

was Harlow Council's youngest ever Leader – age 22 – when he took over in May 2023.

dan.swords@harlow.gov.uk



Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor (Lib Dem, Newcastle) is Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee. A former Executive Member, she currently chairs

Newcastle City Council's Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee.

wendy.taylor@newcastle.gov.uk



Cllr Julie Jones-Evans (Ind, Isle of Wight) is Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Committee. A councillor since 2009, she

is Chair of the Isle of Wight Council's Economy, Regeneration, Transport and Infrastructure Committee.

julie.jones-evans@iow.gov.uk



Cllr Mick Barton (Ref, Nottinghamshire) is Chairman of the LGA's Fire Commission and Fire Services Committee. First

elected to Mansfield District Council in 2003, he has been Leader of Nottinghamshire County Council since May 2025.

cllr.mick.barton@nottsc.gov.uk



Sector support in action

LGA improvement programmes save councils millions of pounds



Councillor Jane Scullion is Chair of the LGA's Improvement Committee

As the new Chair of the LGA's Improvement Committee, I am pleased to share that our improvement offer has continued to deliver high-impact, low-cost support to councils in England.

As detailed in our 'LGA improvement support: annual report 2024/25', positive impact scores are evident across our surveys and programmes, which are helping to deliver savings of tens of millions of pounds – including through significant economies of scale and our cost-efficient, well-regarded peer-based approach.

Our offer includes the government-funded sector support programme, which provides councillors and officers with access to a range of learning and development opportunities, tools and resources across key areas, including: governance and assurance; finance; leadership; workforce; devolution and local government reorganisation; research and data; and transformation.

We also provide wider improvement programmes, such as those for: children's services improvement; Partners in Care and Health (PCH) for adult social care; One Public Estate for regeneration and transformation; planning (the Planning Advisory Service and Pathways to Planning, see **p20**); procurement and commissioning; sustainability; communications; culture and sport; and cyber, digital and technology.



Our support offers remain highly valued by councils, with all councils in England accessing at least one type of LGA support in 2024/25, and every local authority with adult social care provision receiving support from the PCH programme.

Regional teams – led by expert principal advisers, and supported by the LGA's political group offices and our vast network of member and officer peers – have also been crucial across this engagement. The annual report highlights how they engaged with 100 per cent of councils in 2024/25, as well as providing a critical gateway to, and being a source of, support. Whether helping councils to navigate changes following the English Devolution White Paper, or addressing concerns around council performance (including governance and finance), regional teams have continued to offer constant support to our local government members when they need it.

Assurance and support to deliver Best Value have remained core themes across our programmes.

We were pleased to launch our new governance and assurance hub, providing a range of useful tools and offerings. Our self-assessment framework, and wider guidance for political and officer leaders to help deliver good governance and Best Value, can be read on the website (see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/governance-and-assurance).

Our highly valued Corporate Peer Challenge programme has remained a cornerstone of our sector support offer, providing both improvement and assurance support. It includes a strong focus on council performance, finance, governance and culture and, following the English Devolution White Paper, quickly adapted to provide scope for considering implications relating to devolution and local government reorganisation.

Throughout 2024/25, this programme delivered 121 strengthened peer challenges and progress reviews, demonstrating the demand and value placed on the programme by councils.

“Assurance and support to deliver Best Value have remained core themes across our programmes”

“More than £2 million in savings was delivered through 1,800 days of peer support provided at no cost to the sector”

Surveys highlight positive impacts across 100 per cent of peer challenges delivered, with all those responding also saying that they felt more confident in delivering their priorities following their peer challenge.

This comment helps to capture the value of the experience: “It was a brilliant way of getting independent recognition of what we have achieved, feedback on our current plans and real strategic insight to help inform our future plans.”

Our peer-based approach harnesses knowledge and skills from expert councillors and officers, to deliver low-cost tailored support across areas ranging from corporate improvement and transformation to adult social care, children’s services and planning.

More than £2 million in savings was delivered through more than 1,800 days of peer support provided at no cost to the sector. The benefits of this model are mutual: more than 95 per cent of peers said their involvement in delivering a peer challenge had a positive impact on their own skills, knowledge and development.

The peer challenge programme also provides crucial insights into how councils are responding to new and existing challenges, and an analysis of key themes arising from peer challenges can be read in our ‘Corporate, finance and peer challenge programme: annual report 2024/25’.

The report highlights the resilience that councils continue to show in delivering for their communities, despite the pressures of a challenging economic climate, ongoing financial constraints, rising demand for services and a changing policy landscape.

Leadership development has also, critically, been a focus of our sector support offer.

During 2024/25, we delivered a wide range of learning and development opportunities for those in statutory or specialist roles and for specific portfolio

Have your say...

The LGA’s wide-ranging sector support offer continues to be shaped directly by the views of councillors and officers from across England.

To ensure our programmes continue to meet your needs, please complete our short survey at www.local.gov.uk/sector-support-survey: what aspects of our support are most valuable to your

council and are there other types of support that could benefit your council?

Your feedback will help shape our future offer, ensuring that it continues to provide the support local and combined authorities need to harness opportunities and address key improvement challenges. We are very keen to hear your views!

areas (for example, children’s services, adult social care and planning) to ensure officers and councillors have the skills and knowledge needed to navigate present challenges.

A total of 1,139 councillors from 258 councils attended leadership opportunities delivered through the sector support programme alone, with one councillor remarking: “This course is the single most important training I have received. All councillors should attend. I really feel the next few years would have been impossible without this course.”

More than two-thirds of councils also accessed our national recruitment campaign for local government, ‘Make a Difference, Work for Your Local Council’, delivered in partnership with Solace and the sector. It’s the first national recruitment campaign for local government and, with our wider workforce support programme, provided much-needed tools and support to address capacity challenges across the sector.

Evaluations show our campaign has made a real difference in supporting recruitment efforts at a local level (see **first** 705).

The programme for 2024/25 also supported councils to identify and respond to new challenges and opportunities across areas such as data and digital, with a new artificial intelligence hub launched to share and centralise resources across the sector (see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/cyber-digital-and-technology/artificial-intelligence-hub).

Our free, award-winning, local area data-benchmarking tool, LG Inform, continued to support councils to increase

their service delivery capabilities and champion data-informed decision-making across more than 18,000 metrics (see lginform.local.gov.uk).

In a year characterised by significant change, councils were supported to understand and respond to workforce reforms, changes to public procurement and to the planning system, and the English Devolution White Paper.

Across all of our support, this ability to flex in the face of change has remained a core strength of the offer, which has continued to evolve and adapt in conversation with the sector.

This year’s report highlights the breadth of support available to councils and the tangible difference it makes across all areas of service and delivery.

I encourage you to visit our website or contact your regional principal adviser to explore the full offer.

I would like to thank Cllr Abi Brown OBE, of Stoke-on-Trent City Council, who served as Chairman of the Improvement and Innovation Board during the period of activity covered in this article. Her leadership, together with the commitment and central role of the wider board, has been instrumental in shaping and championing the support described here. ●

See www.local.gov.uk/our-support for the LGA’s sector support offer. ‘LGA improvement support: annual report 2024/25’ and ‘Corporate, finance and peer challenge programme: annual report 2024/25’ are available at www.local.gov.uk/publications

Graduating in public service

Councils can apply now for top graduates

At a time when local government faces complex challenges, attracting skilled and motivated talent is more critical than ever.

Impact: The Local Government Graduate Programme, and Pathways to Planning, are the LGA's flagship initiatives helping councils bring fresh energy, ideas and leadership potential into the sector.

Formerly known as the National Graduate Development Programme, Impact has been a cornerstone of graduate recruitment in local government for more than 20 years. With 2,500-plus alumni – including local authority chief executives and senior leaders – the programme consistently delivers high-calibre professionals shaping the sector's future.

Interest continues to grow, with more than 8,000 applications for the autumn 2025 intake. Graduates from across the UK, representing diverse backgrounds and disciplines, are drawn to the opportunity to fast-track their careers in public service. Councils in England and Wales are encouraged to partner with

Impact and offer as many placements as possible to meet demand.

Impact offers a structured leadership pathway, with graduate trainees completing at least three placements within their host authority over a two-year period, working on strategic projects that drive real change. This is supported by a bespoke learning and development programme, culminating in a Level 7 qualification accredited by the Chartered Management Institute.

The programme's design – combining formal learning, professional development, and access to a national peer network – enables trainees to add value from day one.

Councils benefit from fresh perspectives and increased capacity, while graduates gain the tools and confidence to lead.

Impact also offers councils the flexibility to recruit local talent through the Local Recruitment campaign. This route allows authorities to market trainee roles specifically to graduates from their area, helping build local capacity and retain talent.

The process mirrors the national campaign, ensuring candidates meet the same high standards. Councils register interest through a short form, after which

Pathways to Planning

Since launching in 2023, Pathways to Planning has delivered 200-plus new planners to more than 100 local authorities in England.

In October 2025, the programme is expanding to support councils in recruiting for planning, surveying and construction project management roles.

Pathways runs a national marketing campaign and rigorous assessment process, giving councils access to a wide and diverse pool of high-achieving graduates, without hassle or cost.

Last year, there were more than 2,150 applicants, with the top 10 per cent progressing to interview. Graduates study alongside work on sector-accredited degrees.

Applications for councils to join cohort 4 (starting autumn 2026) open in October 2025. For more information, contact pathways.planning@local.gov.uk and/or visit www.local.gov.uk/pathways-planning-council-info

the Impact team sets up a tailored job advert on the LGA's portal. Councils receive a unique application link to share through local channels – including social media, employment services and university partnerships.

Applicants to local campaigns demonstrate how they meet locally defined criteria, such as living, working or studying in the area.

The Impact team supports councils in shaping their criteria. They also receive full support throughout, including marketing materials, guidance and a dedicated point of contact.

Candidates who reach the final stage are guaranteed an interview with their chosen authority, creating a direct recruitment pipeline with strong retention potential.

Councils can now register interest in joining cohort 28, to take on graduates in autumn 2026. For more information or an informal chat, contact the team at Impact@local.gov.uk. The deadline to sign up for Local Recruitment is **Wednesday 1 October 2025**. ●



The best start in life

Providing national support for family hubs

Back in July, the Government announced the 'Giving every child the best start in life' strategy, which included £500 million for the Best Start Family Hubs programme.

This funding will result in the hubs being expanded to every council area in England (see **first** 707).

Billed as 'one-stop shops' for babies, under-fives and their families, the hubs bring together a range of early years support, including for breastfeeding, early language development, special educational needs, and parenting skills.

They form a key plank of the Government's strategy, which aims to ensure 75 per cent of five-year-olds in England have a good level of development by 2028.

Councils already work hard to improve outcomes for children by running local children's or family centres, joining up support services, and overseeing childcare and pre-school education provision – see right for a case study from Wiltshire.

Meanwhile, the LGA recently won the contract to run the National Centre for



Family Hubs, which supports local authorities and partners to deliver family hubs and the 'Best start in life' strategy.

We will be working with all councils across England, both previously funded and unfunded, to support the implementation of the expanded programme, running national and regional events, and having nine regional advisers supporting councils directly. ●

Case study

Wiltshire family hubs



Councillor Jon Hubbard (Ind) is Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills at Wiltshire Council

The national launch of the Family Hub model, as part of the Government's 'Giving every child the best start in life' strategy, emphasises the principles of accessibility, connection and relationships, and was timely because it aligns with Wiltshire's vision for early help.

Work was already under way in Wiltshire to build on these principles as part of our Families and Children Transformation (FACT) programme.

It was therefore a natural step for us to fund the family hub model to improve the available offer for families, despite budget constraints.

Thanks to creativity and a committed provider, a quality service is now being delivered. Parenting support was identified as a key component of our service, underpinned by research showing that parenting interventions for children from birth to age three are effective in improving early childhood development outcomes. Therefore, the contract includes evidence-based parenting programmes for all ages of children,

children with additional needs, and for parental conflict. These programmes have proved to be very popular and are offered both in-person and online, so that parents are fully supported and can choose the approach that best suits them.

Another important element is the family hub 'navigator' – someone who provides a first point of contact for families and connects them with relevant services.

This role is instrumental in meeting with families in accessible community venues and offering very early help, aiming to prevent families from needing later or statutory support.

Three main hubs operate from council buildings, so services can be easily accessed under one roof. There is additional delivery in libraries, leisure centres and other community venues to ensure inclusivity and to reduce stigma, and to ensure they are easily accessible for families across our large rural county.

The model is working well and has uncovered demand for family support for children of all ages and with varying needs. The service is under pressure as Wiltshire tries to support more families. The national direction and funding for the Best Start Family Hub model is therefore warmly welcomed and will help Wiltshire to better serve families.

See www.local.gov.uk/national-centre-family-hubs to find out more, or email NationalCentreFamilyHubs@local.gov.uk

A platform for growth

Support for ethnic minority councillors



Grace Collins MBE is an LGA Adviser – Leadership

This year, we celebrate a remarkable milestone – 21 years of the LGA's flagship leadership event for black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) councillors.

As one of the longest-standing fixtures in the LGA's leadership calendar, the BAME weekender events have become a powerful platform for growth, reflection and transformation. These events have inspired and equipped councillors to lead with confidence, sharpen their political impact, and connect deeply with the purpose behind their public service.

Over the years, participants have explored what it truly means to be a black, Asian or ethnic minority elected leader – and many have gone



Participants at the LGA's 2024 leadership event for black, Asian and ethnic minority councillors

on to achieve positions of significant influence, from cabinet and senior councillor roles to council leadership and even Parliament.

Organising and working on these important events alongside David Weaver, an LGA Associate and Chair of Operation Black Vote, has been a privilege, and they have provided much-needed

support to all attendees.

Holding this year's event during October – Black History Month – gives it even deeper resonance. Black History Month is not only a time for commemoration and celebration, but also a vital space for honest reflection on the struggles, achievements and continuing challenges facing black and Asian communities in Britain.

Against a backdrop of complex societal issues and ongoing debates about race, equity and representation, the

conversations we will have at this leadership event take on added urgency.

It is a moment to reaffirm the importance of visible, effective leadership – leadership that is principled, courageous and rooted in service.

By gathering during Black History Month, we are reminded that the legacy of those who came before us is not only to be honoured, but to be advanced through action, responsibility, and the shaping of a more inclusive and equitable future. ●



The LGA's 2024 BAME weekender in Warwick

The LGA is running two BAME weekender events. The 'Claiming space, shaping change – leadership for a new political era' masterclass runs from 18-19 October, while 'Developing your political leadership skills' takes place from 21-22 February 2026. Both events are in Warwickshire, and councillors can attend either or both. To find out more or book your place, please email grace.collins@local.gov.uk or call 020 7664 3054

‘Solidarity and pride’



Councillor Beatrice Christopher (Lab) is Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People at Coventry City Council

Being part of the BAME councillors’ event, and the first black female councillor in my city, gave me a real sense of solidarity and pride. Black History Month is not just about looking back – it’s about recognising contributions today and ensuring that future generations see themselves reflected in leadership.

‘A safe space to connect’



Councillor Clara Ansong (Lib Dem) is a member of Watford Borough Council

connect with others, learn from shared journeys, and develop the skills needed to serve my community more effectively.

I left feeling more confident in my role as a councillor and inspired to create opportunities for others.

Black History Month is a time not only to honour the past, but also to create opportunities for future generations.

The BAME leadership event has been invaluable for me. It provided a safe space to

‘A transformative space’



Councillor Sibusiso Tshabalala (Green) is Chair of Area Committee 04 at Bristol City Council

elected representatives are empowered to be politically astute, intentional and impactful.

By enhancing our leadership capabilities and deepening our understanding of the wider political environment, the programme strengthens our collective voice and influence in local government.

This commitment is rooted in a powerful legacy. Pioneers such as Baron Pitt of Hampstead, and modern trailblazers such as Diane Abbott, Paul Boateng and Bernie Grant, remind us that representation is both a right and a responsibility. Their courage and conviction continue to inspire us to lead with purpose and pride.

Beyond the curriculum, the programme’s greatest strength lies

As we mark Black History Month 2025, under the theme ‘Standing firm in power and pride’, I am proud to reflect on the vital role that BAME councillors play in shaping a more inclusive and representative political landscape.

The LGA’s BAME councillor leadership programme continues to be a cornerstone in this journey. More than just a training initiative, it is a transformative space where

‘Supportive and affirming’



Councillor Chantelle Lunt (Lab) is a member of Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, and Mayor and Chair of Halewood Town Council

Being part of the BAME councillors’ network has been a truly supportive and affirming experience. As the only black member of my council, and the first black woman elected to this position, the network has provided what often felt like a lifeline – a space where my experiences are understood and valued.

The network has also given me opportunities to connect with colleagues from across the country, share knowledge and strengthen my advocacy for diverse communities. Knowing I have this supportive space behind me has been empowering, both personally and politically.

Black History Month is about celebration, reflection and action. It is a time to celebrate black achievements, reflect on the struggles overcome, and ensure that the progress we have made is not reversed on our watch. It is about reclaiming narratives, amplifying our voices and ensuring that the next generation sees itself reflected in the leadership of our communities.

in the network of solidarity it fosters. Connecting with fellow councillors and facilitators creates a space for mutual support, shared learning and accountability. It reinforces the idea that leadership is not just about personal achievement, but about uplifting communities and advancing equity in our political systems.

As councillors, we stand firm in power and pride, drawing strength from our diverse histories, driving progress in the present, and committing ourselves to a future where every voice is heard and valued.

The LGA’s leadership programme arrives at a crucial moment, with relevant content and at the perfect intersection of leadership and growth. It enables new councillors to pick up the baton and lead with pride, purpose and vision.

Are officers in your council up for the LG Challenge?

Now recruiting its 14th cohort, the LGA is looking for **10 contestants** to participate in the Local Government Challenge 2026, in which a diverse cohort of local government officers tackle real-life challenges, hosted by five councils around the country.

Nominate an officer in your council to apply.

The application deadline is 12pm on Monday 22 September.

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

Find out more and watch last year's challenge films:
local.gov.uk/lg-challenge
lgchallenge@local.gov.uk





**Ben Houchen (Con) is Mayor
of the Tees Valley**

Across the country, political leaders share a common goal: creating an environment where private enterprise can flourish, which, in turn, creates more and better-paid jobs, allowing workers to keep more money in their pockets. A virtuous circle, so to speak.

One of the most effective ways of achieving this has been through English devolution – the transfer of powers and resources from Whitehall into the hands of local and regional leaders who know their areas best.

The story of devolution so far is one of partnership. By working hand in hand with government, local leaders have been able to leverage investment, create jobs and transform opportunities for their communities.

The success of combined authorities and mayoral offices in leveraging devolved powers demonstrates how this approach can unlock potential that might otherwise remain untapped.

It is fair to say that, since last year's general election, my office has worked incredibly well with the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on the devolution agenda, unlocking opportunities for growth and investment in our region. They have been true to their word of working in a non-partisan manner and I think this demonstrates a maturity that benefits Teesside, Darlington and Hartlepool, and the wider devolution agenda.

In my patch, devolution has enabled bold, long-term decisions about the local economy.

Working closely with government, the region has been able to attract world-leading investment in the industries of the future. These opportunities are creating high-quality jobs for local people and building skills pipelines for the future.

None of this would have been possible without the powers devolved to the mayoral level and the constructive partnership with government



Unlocking growth through partnership and devolution

departments to make investment happen.

Importantly, however, devolution means greater accountability. Devolved leaders are directly answerable to their residents, ensuring that decisions reflect local priorities.

This democratic connection helps build public trust in a single point of contact and ensures that decisions are shaped by the people who stand to benefit most.

As devolution expands to more areas of England, there is an opportunity to deepen these partnerships further.

Greater fiscal flexibility – including the ability of mayors to lower any general or business tax rates devolved to them – and longer-term funding settlements will be vital in sustaining momentum.

The goal should be clear: a system where local leaders have the tools and certainty to deliver, and where government is a supportive partner in enabling places to succeed.

The results so far should give confidence.

By working together – on a cross-party basis – we are seeing towns and cities regenerated, new businesses attracted to the region from abroad, and communities given renewed pride in their future.

Devolution is not an end in itself – it is a means to drive real, tangible change.

That change comes only through partnership, with local and national government working side by side.

The story of devolution is, ultimately, the story of partnership working at its best – and the potential for economic growth is only just beginning to be realised.

I genuinely think this government understands this and I hope it continues with the ambition it has shown to date. ●

Visit teesvalley-ca.gov.uk to find out more about the Tees Valley Combined Authority

GROUP LEADERS



Councillor Bev Craig is Leader of the LGA's Labour Group

Believing in the power of councillors

They say a week is a long time in politics, and that is never truer than during a reshuffle.

The Prime Minister rightly identified that this represents a new phase for our Labour Government, but its mission to renew our country, after 14 years of neglect by the Conservatives left it on its knees, has not changed.

The whole Labour local government family pays tribute to Angela Rayner for her tireless work at the heart of government. She represents the very best of what a Labour Government can do for working people and has funnelled that into service for our communities.

We have also greatly enjoyed working



with Jim McMahon, himself a former Leader of the LGA Labour Group. It has been great to finally engage with a minister who truly understands local government and believes in the power of councillors.

It is positive to see Baroness Sharon Taylor remain in her role, one to which we know she is dedicated.

Looking to the future, we are pleased to welcome Steve Reed as the new Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

As a former Leader of Lambeth Council

“We look forward to discussions on how local government can provide innovative solutions”

and former Deputy Leader of the LGA Labour Group, he understands the mechanics of local government, and we are looking forward to continued engagement with the ministry.

We also welcome Alison McGovern, Miatta Fahnbulleh and Samantha Dixon, and look forward to discussions on how local government can provide innovative solutions, as well as be a key delivery arm for the Government.

Onwards to party conference, where I am looking forward to seeing many of you during the week – at our rally for local government, and many other LGA and Association of Labour Councillors' events, to mark the progress we are making for our country.

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



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

Productive relationships

September marks the start of the new political year, and I am delighted that, in its first week, we held the first 'Blue Team' meeting with our new Shadow Secretary of State, James Cleverly, and his shadow ministerial team.

The 'Blue Team' meetings have taken place in opposition and government for more than a decade.

They allow myself, my Deputy Leader Cllr Abi Brown OBE, the Chairman of the Conservative Councillors' Association, Cllr John Cope, the Chairs of the

County Councils Network (CCN) and District Councils' Network (DCN) – Cllr Tim Oliver and Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen – our group leader on London Councils, Cllr Elizabeth Campbell, and Baroness Teresa O'Neill (representing Peers) to share information, coordinate activity and highlight the key issues facing councils.

Our meeting with James was very useful and set the tone for what I am sure will be a productive relationship.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Tim and Sam, as outgoing chairs of the CCN and DCN, for their enormous contribution to the sector. I look forward to welcoming their respective successors, Cllr Matthew Hicks and Cllr Richard Wright, and to working just as closely with them.

In early September, the LGA held an induction meeting for councillors appointed to its governance bodies. Following an informative cross-party session, we held a group meeting that

“Blue Team' meetings... allow us to highlight the key issues facing councils”

allowed us to get to know each other, and myself, Abi and the group office staff to explain how we can support colleagues in their roles.

A busy first week of September also saw the resignation of Angela Rayner and significant changes to the rest of the team at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

As part of the LGA's cross-party senior politician team, I look forward to meeting with Secretary of State Steve Reed and his new ministers to discuss the key issues facing the sector.

Finally, with party conference fast approaching, I'm looking forward to meeting many colleagues in Manchester next month.



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

Getting things done locally

Across the UK, 76 councils have a Liberal Democrat leader, with the party holding the deputy leadership in a further 16 administrations.

For a record-breaking seven years, we have been gaining seats in local elections – and all that on top of a stunning general election result!

As we gather in Bournemouth this weekend (20-23 September) for our annual conference, we have a lot to celebrate, with more than 3,200 Lib Dem councillors.

Lib Dems are the official opposition to Reform UK on Kent, Warwickshire and Durham County Councils. We are the ones challenging them and holding them to account.

“We are the ones who get things done, who care and listen”

Lib Dem council leaders have budgets totalling £20 billion, and from Cornwall to North Norfolk and Westmorland to Eastbourne, more than 16 million people have a Lib Dem-led council.

Liberal Democrats make a real difference to people's lives, day in, day out: record recycling rates, delivering affordable homes, improving children's life chances, and delivering value for money.

At a time when political populism seems to be carrying all before it, Lib Dems have a proud tradition of listening to our local communities and taking action.

Our campaigners know Reform flourishes when communities feel neglected.

The best antidote to populism is the Lib Dem approach – getting things done at a local level, showing local communities that we are the ones who care and who listen.

Conference is about celebrating this: let's do that.



Councillor Hannah Dalton is Leader of the LGA's Independent Group

Leading with empathy and fostering unity

At the time of writing, we are dismayed by the murder in the US of Charlie Kirk.

Here in our own communities, we are seeing heightened tensions as political views clash and emotions run high.

In this climate, councillors face an increasingly complex and vital role: to lead with empathy, maintain dialogue and foster unity.

“Now more than ever, our collective leadership can make a difference”

Our members have shared how difficult it is to engage in conversations without facing hostility. Yet, it is precisely in these moments, when feelings are strongest, that our leadership matters most.

As community leaders, councillors are not only navigating public sentiment, but also facing concerns about their own personal safety.

This is a critical time for us at the LGA to show national leadership, by demonstrating how consensus politics that strengthens local government – so communities thrive – works in practice, exhibiting the LGA's values of collaboration, inclusion, ambition and respect.

The Independent Group is shaping its next annual conference, planned to be held early in 2026, around the theme of resilience: personal resilience, community resilience, environmental resilience and financial resilience.

This focus reflects the challenges we face and the strength we must cultivate together.

Now more than ever, our collective leadership can make a difference.

Let us stand firm in our values and support one another in building resilient, inclusive communities.



Councillor Stephen Atkinson is Leader of the LGA's Reform UK Group

Credibility, courtesy and professionalism

The establishment of the Reform UK Group Office at the LGA marks a historic moment.

For the first time, Reform councillors now have a dedicated presence within the association.

Our new office formally commenced in September, coinciding with the start of the LGA's 2025/26 committee year, which also sees Reform UK formally incorporated into the LGA's decision-making process.

This reflects both the growth of our party in local government and the democratic mandate entrusted to us by residents across the country.

“Consensus and civility strengthen local government”

That mandate brings responsibility. My aim as Group Leader is to ensure Reform UK establishes itself at the LGA with credibility, courtesy and professionalism.

Credibility comes from grounding our contributions in the real experience of councillors serving their communities.

Courtesy is about constructive engagement with colleagues from all parties, recognising that consensus and civility strengthen local government.

Professionalism means making sure our councillors are supported, our residents represented, and that Reform UK plays a full part in the boards, committees and business of the LGA.

Over time, we intend to strengthen our presence, grow our influence, and ensure Reform UK makes a lasting and constructive contribution to the sector.

I look forward to sharing more on this, and on our Reform UK Conference 2025, in next month's edition of **first**. ●

How the youth sector helps reduce violence



Caleb Jackson is Head of Change at the Youth Endowment Fund

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) exists to prevent children from becoming involved in violence, by identifying what works and translating evidence into practice.

This winter, we'll publish guidance, with evidence-based recommendations, on the role of the youth sector in reducing violence.

The first of three emerging insights from this work is around universal provision.

Local youth clubs, though open access, are often attended by children vulnerable to violence, including those excluded from school or supported by social workers. Black children, who are disproportionately affected by violence, are also more likely to attend.

Our research shows youth club closures are linked to increased crime: areas with no youth clubs saw a 14 per cent rise in youth offending.

Councils can strengthen the impact of universal youth provision by mapping access for vulnerable children, establishing clubs in underserved areas, and supporting staff with training.

Second, in respect of

targeted provision, the evidence supports mentoring as a way of fostering supportive adult relationships.

Targeted sports also help promote engagement and structure, and providers should consider adventure, wilderness and arts activities to reach children with different interests.

Finally, to be effective, youth provision must align with need and opportunity. So, your strategic planning needs to consider things such as service coverage (for example, ensuring access in high-need areas) and timing (focusing on peak risk periods, for example 4-8pm).

There also needs to be a commitment to long-

term funding to build trust and sustainability.

While our Youth Sector Practice Guidance will be published this winter, our YEF toolkit is available now, at youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit.

The toolkit provides a practical overview of existing research on preventing children and young people becoming involved in violence. It sets out what works (for example, mentoring) and what doesn't (bootcamps), rated for cost, evidence and impact. ●

See youthendowmentfund.org.uk for more information

NATIONAL CHILDREN AND ADULT SERVICES CONFERENCE 2025
Bournemouth 26–28 November

Bookings are open for #ncasc25

NATIONAL CHILDREN AND ADULT SERVICES CONFERENCE 2025
26–28 November | Bournemouth

The National Children and Adult Services Conference is a must-attend event for councillors, directors, senior officers, directors of public health, policy makers and service managers, and any individuals or organisations with responsibilities for children and adult services in the statutory, voluntary and private sector. Join us to hear about and respond to the very latest thinking on key policy and improvement agendas in social care, children's services, education, health and related fields.

To book and to find out more, please visit ncasc.info

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The future is cooperative



Councillor Jim Robbins is Chair of the Cooperative Councils' Innovation Network

Let's face it: local government can sometimes feel like trying to fix a leaky roof in a thunderstorm – with a teaspoon.

But what if I told you there is a network of councils across the UK that has decided to swap the teaspoon for a toolkit, a tarpaulin and a team of neighbours who actually want to help?

That's the Cooperative Councils' Innovation Network (CCIN) in a nutshell.

CCIN is a collaboration of councils committed to doing things differently – working with communities, not just for them. We're about cooperation, empowerment and innovation.

And we're not just talking the talk. Our members represent more than 11 million citizens and manage £19 billion in public budgets. That's a lot of potential for good.

And here's the exciting bit: the original architects of CCIN – Steve Reed MP, Baroness Sharon Taylor, and until recently, Jim McMahon MP – are now in government.

Yes, the very people who helped build this movement are now shaping national policy. It's like your mates from the local pub band suddenly headlining Glastonbury. And they've brought their values with them.

The Government has pledged to double the size of the cooperative and mutual sector. That's not just a nice idea – it's a seismic shift in how we think about public services, community wealth and economic resilience.

CCIN is perfectly placed to help councils ride this wave, rather than get swept away by it.

Now, let's talk about our shiny new Social Value Toolkit.

It's not just another PDF to gather



“The very people who helped build this movement are now shaping national policy”

digital dust. It's a radical rethink of how councils can commission services that actually deliver long-term benefit, not just tick boxes.

The toolkit challenges the old 'bolt-on' approach to social value and, instead, embeds it into every stage of decision-making. It's about co-production, collaboration, and community-led innovation. You can download the toolkit at: bit.ly/CCIN-socialvalue-toolkit.

Whether you're commissioning homecare, building housing, or just trying to make your procurement process less soul-crushing, this toolkit gives you

the mindset and methods to do it better.

It's packed with real-world examples – from Westminster's regeneration work to Wigan's ethical homecare framework – and practical tools such as supplier charters, social value directories and relational commissioning models.

So, if you're a council leader, officer, or just someone who thinks 'there must be a better way', then join us.

CCIN isn't a club for the converted, it's a movement for the curious, the courageous and, occasionally, the caffeine-fuelled.

And if you're still unsure, remember: in a world full of silos, spreadsheets and stress, being part of a cooperative network might just be the most sensible (and enjoyable) decision you make this year. ●

i The Cooperative Councils' Innovation Network is a special interest group of the LGA. Visit councils.coop or email comms@councils.coop to find out more



Showcase your business. Contact Chris Dixon at chris.dixon@cplone.co.uk or call 01223 378 042

Devolution ‘lacks democratic debate’

In August, several articles about English devolution were published in **first** 707.

It is a shame, though, that there has never been a proper democratic debate about whether local authorities or their citizens actually want this form of devolution.

Extra cash is being promised to new mayors, but this could equally well have been given to county and district authorities pro rata according to their size.



Unlike Scotland or Wales, English electors will be getting less democratic representation from English devolution.

In my own borough, for example, there are currently 40 councillors representing 64,400 electors – an average ward size of 1,600 electors per councillor.

The Government’s preferred model for new unitary authorities is for populations of around 500,000, with no more than 100 councillors, giving an average unitary division of more than 5,000 electors – only one-third of existing representation.

The Government has also instructed all principal councils with a committee structure to convert to a cabinet structure.

Having served under both arrangements, while a cabinet structure may be slightly faster operationally, the talents of ‘back-benchers’ (the majority of councillors) are wasted, as they have far less say within cabinet authorities.

It is most disappointing that there has not been more open debate about the sparsity of representation under so-called English devolution.

Cllr Tony Austin (Con), Ribble Valley Borough Council

‘Make road safety education mandatory’

One of my great passions is road safety, and particularly the need for children and young people to have the opportunity, while at school, to learn about road safety.

As a ward councillor, I have become increasingly aware of road-safety issues through dealing with a whole range of things – from speeding to how vulnerable pedestrians feel, and from e-scooters to how drugs and mobile phone use can not only affect the user when journeying, but also innocent victims, causing family devastation.

I am certain that, with mandatory road safety education, lives would be saved,

severe and minor injuries reduced, and the burden on the NHS lessened – surely a big win?

We all need to feel safe, and to conduct ourselves safely and responsibly on our journeys regardless of what mode of transportation we may be using.

Your day will be affected by road safety, so please sign and share my petition to Parliament to make road traffic safety a mandatory part of the National Curriculum, at petition.parliament.uk/petitions/732210.

Councillor Liz Childs (Independent Alliance), Central Bedfordshire Council



Get dyslexia diagnosed

For as long as I can remember, words have danced on the page, letters swapped places, working with numbers was a nightmare, instructions took longer to process, wordy presentations really were death by PowerPoint, and I often found myself working twice as hard to keep up.

Like many, I suspected I might be dyslexic, but life, work and the fear of ‘what if?’ kept me from seeking a formal diagnosis until I was 57 – and I want to share why I believe this was one of the bravest decisions I’ve ever made.

Admitting you need help, especially as an adult and a public figure, is not easy. There’s a stigma attached to learning differences; a worry that people might see you as less capable or less intelligent.

But dyslexia is not a reflection of intelligence or potential. It’s simply a different way of processing information – a difference that millions of people share.

Getting diagnosed matters. My diagnosis brought clarity. Suddenly, the challenges I’d faced throughout my life made sense. It wasn’t a lack of effort or ability – it was dyslexia.

With a formal diagnosis, I could access resources and strategies tailored to my needs, including practical support from my council, making daily tasks and responsibilities more manageable.

By speaking openly about my experience, I hope to encourage others to seek the answers they deserve and other councils to provide support to dyslexic elected members as well as staff.

Cllr Leigh Redman (Lab), Somerset Council

i What do you think? Email karen.thornton@local.gov.uk to share your views about any issue to do with local government

Robust support



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

Local by-elections continue to see Reform UK mainly, but not exclusively, progress against both main parties. Volatility abounds, with 16 of 35 seats changing hands.

The Conservatives' loss of six seats might have been greater had it not held on, by five and seven votes respectively, in two of its defences.

Neither do its three gains suggest a party with momentum, benefiting from Green absence in Rutland and the loss of a former Liberal Democrat councillor's personal vote in Harborough.

Reform's defeat to the Conservatives in Staffordshire's Eccleshall and Gnosall division, too, was unsurprising. The seat was originally won by only 27 votes, with the new councillor resigning two weeks later.

But two seats retained suggest Reform's electoral support may prove robust.

In Durham's Easington and Shotton ward, its vote increased, despite an inexperienced candidate and a challenge from three former councillors.

The win in Doncaster's Bentley ward proved critical in safeguarding Reform's councillor base. Its cause was helped by a former Labour councillor standing as an Independent.



Reform's threat to the Conservatives is apparent from two defeats in Dartford (where Reform polled 45 and 54 per cent from a standing start) and three in Surrey. But a victory in Bromley's Common and Holwood ward is of symbolic value, too, giving Reform its first election victory in Greater London.

Labour retained four, but lost seven, seats, with the party vulnerable on three fronts. Most seats fell to Reform, but there were also defeats inflicted by the Greens and the Liberal Democrats.

Labour lost Basildon's St Martins ward, generally one of the party's more reliable seats, to Reform, despite no previous form here. The same was true in Warrington and Carmarthenshire, with Reform winning more than 40 per cent of the vote in all three contests.

Cannock Chase's Hednesford Green Heath was won by former Conservative councillor Paul Jones, who

won the county division as a Reform candidate in 2025 and now adds the district seat after winning more than half of the votes.

With newly elected Green Leader Zack Polanski likely to steer his party towards the left, the coming months may provide more results such as those from Cardiff and Newcastle upon Tyne.

The Greens previously fought Grangetown in an alliance with Plaid Cymru, but emerged as outright winners in a field of eight candidates.

Splits within the Labour camp in Newcastle possibly contributed to a 25-point fall in its vote there and a Green win in South Jesmond ward.

A similar Labour collapse in West Hampstead gave Camden's Liberal Democrats an impressive victory. ●

By-election results

Basildon, St Martin's
REF GAIN FROM LAB
9.5% over Lab | Turnout 24.7%

Bromley, Bromley Common and Holwood
REF GAIN FROM CON
4.6% over Con | Turnout 28.1%

Camden, West Hampstead
LIB DEM GAIN FROM LAB
33.2% over Lab | Turnout 26.4%

Cannock Chase, Hednesford Green Heath
REF GAIN FROM LAB
28.9% over Lab | Turnout 16.6%

Cardiff, Grangetown
GREEN GAIN FROM LAB
1.3% over Lab | Turnout 26.9%

Carmarthenshire, Llangennech
REF GAIN FROM LAB
12.7% over Plaid Cymru | Turnout 39.4%

Dartford, Maypole and Leyton Cross
REF GAIN FROM CON
25.7% over Con | Turnout 24.9%

Dartford, Stone House
REF GAIN FROM CON
16.7% over Con | Turnout 15.1%

Harborough, Market Harborough Logan
CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM
4.2% over Lib Dem | Turnout 29.4%

Newcastle upon Tyne, South Jesmond
GREEN GAIN FROM LAB
3.4% over Lib Dem | Turnout 30.8%

Runnymede, Addlestone South
TWO REF GAIN FROM CON
7.7% over Lib Dem | Turnout 28.3%

Rutland, Barleythorpe
CON GAIN FROM GREEN
12.5% over Lib Dem | Turnout 29.3%

Staffordshire, Eccleshall and Gnosall
CON GAIN FROM REF
17.1% over Green | Turnout 34.8%

Surrey, Addlestone
REF GAIN FROM CON
10.0% over Con | Turnout 24.1%

Warrington, Bewsey and Whitecross
REF GAIN FROM LAB
7.1% over Lab | Turnout 17.7%

● Only results where a seat changed hands are shown here. For all the summer's results and additional data, please visit lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections



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