

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

# first

Local  
Government  
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# Balancing the books



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not recognised **p11**

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# GRID SCALE BATTERY ENERGY UNDERSTANDING THE RISK

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## Budget-setting challenges

**As first** was going to press, the consultation on the Government's provisional local government finance settlement for England was closing.

While it's encouraging that we now have a multi-year settlement and that funding levels have been increasing in recent years, the LGA is clear that local government needs a significant increase in overall funding (p5, p10). We have also highlighted the need for councils to be properly funded to deliver new employment protections for staff and plans to end homelessness (p7).

Elsewhere in this edition, we look at the LGA's response to the Government's strategy on violence against women and girls (p11), our 'Force for growth' report on how councils are enabling inclusive economic growth (p16), and the latest phase of our national recruitment campaign for councils (p20).

We have political comments from Lords Minister for Housing and Local Government Baroness Taylor on Awaab's Law (p26), and from David Simmonds CBE MP, Shadow Minister for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, on devolution (p27).

Finally, congratulations to all those councillors and local government officers whose hard work and service to their local areas was recognised in the King's New Year Honours (p4). ●

**Councillor Louise Gittins**  
is LGA Chair

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# New year, new opportunities



**Councillor Louise Gittins**  
is Chair of the LGA

**Last year was** another extraordinary one for local government – one of challenge, but also of real progress.

I want to thank you for everything you did in 2025, from the resilience you have shown to the innovations you have delivered.

At the LGA, members and officers have continued to champion the work that you do.

Through our sustained engagement with the Government and a new equal partnership via the Leaders Council (see p12), we have secured several long-standing wins and delivered further support for the whole sector.

Local and regional government received the first multi-year settlement in a decade (see p5, p10), and we secured more than £1.4 billion to support prevention and reform in children's social care, the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system, and homelessness and rough sleeping services.

We continue to shape the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, a major step forward in putting power closer to local communities, and have already secured an amendment so that councillors no longer have to publish their home addresses.

Looking ahead to 2026, we know there is more change to come for the sector and the LGA.

Yet with every change comes opportunity: to shape national policy, to secure the resources the sector needs, and to support you – our members – in improving the lives of the communities you serve.

The collective purpose and strong cross-sector voice that saw us achieve so much together in 2025 stands us in good stead to navigate 2026 with that same sense of ambition, unity and confidence.

The LGA will be standing with you through local elections, further local government reorganisation and devolution, the Casey Review of adult social care, and the next steps in SEND reform, alongside all the other issues that matter for our people and places.

And, of course, we will keep making the case for the funding and powers you need to deliver for your communities, and help you on your improvement journey. ●



## Honouring the sector

**A swathe of** councillors and officers were recognised for their services to local government in the King's New Year Honours, underlining the sector's key contribution to national life.

Recipients of OBEs for services to local government included Cllr Bev Craig (Lab), Leader of the LGA's Labour Group and of Manchester City Council; and LGA Deputy Chair Cllr Claire Holland (Lab), who is also Chair of London Councils and Leader of Lambeth Council.

Cllr Roger Phillips (Con), Chairperson for Herefordshire Council and a member of the LGA's Local Government Resources Committee, also received an OBE, for services to the community, as did Anna Rose, Head of the LGA's Planning Advisory Service, for public service.

Cllr Martin Tett (Con), a former Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board and former Leader of Buckinghamshire Council for 14 years, was appointed a CBE, for political and public service.

And there was an MBE for Cllr Roger Hirst (Con, Brentwood), Vice-Chair of the LGA's Fire & Rescue Authority Committee and Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex, for services to policing and community safety.

Other local politicians made MBEs included Peter Dunphy (Ind, City of London), Cllr Liz Fairhurst (Con, Hampshire), Cllr Susan Goodchild (Lib Dem, Central Bedfordshire), Cllr Mary Harland (Lab, Leeds), Cllr Franklin Owusu-Antwi (Con, South Gloucestershire), and Rachel Turner (Con), recently a member of Reigate & Banstead Borough Council. ●



## More free support for care leavers

**Care leavers** in England will receive free prescriptions, as well as dental and eye care, up to their 25th birthday, under a new package of measures announced by the Government.

The reforms also include pilots to offer paid NHS internships and guaranteed interviews for NHS roles for care leavers, alongside a three-year programme to improve access to mental health support for children in care.

The measures aim to tackle long-standing health inequalities faced by care-experienced young people.

Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Chair of the LGA's Children, Young People and Families Committee, said: "We are pleased government has introduced measures so that young people leaving care do not have to pay for prescriptions, as well as dental and eye care. The LGA has previously called for this to help prevent care leavers from falling into financial hardship when they leave care and to support their transition into independence.

"The Government should also consider how it can go even further, such as through a national, government-funded council tax exemption for those leaving care, as well as providing long-term support around mental health and housing." ●

## Finance settlements published in England and Wales

**Budget-setting will remain** a "hugely challenging task" for many councils in England, despite confirmation of a multi-year financial settlement before Christmas, the LGA has warned.

While funding levels have risen over the past few years, an increase in overall funding is still needed to ensure the financial sustainability of councils and local services, said Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair (see also p10, p23, p24).

She added: "All councils need to be protected from real-terms cuts next year, and have adequate funding to fully meet spiralling cost and demand pressures.

"Alongside a significant boost in resources, it is critical that government works with councils to reform key services, such as special educational needs and disabilities, and adult social care, and undertakes a cross-party review of options to improve the wider local government finance system.



"We remain concerned by the number of councils having to use unsustainable emergency bailouts, which are a clear warning sign about the financial pressures facing local government."

In Wales, the WLGA has welcomed an updated draft local government settlement, published in early December, that includes an average 4.5 per cent increase and a minimum 4 per cent for all councils. The updated draft settlement includes £112.8 million in additional funding for local government, forming part of a wider Welsh Government-Plaid Cymru budget agreement.

The WLGA said pressures in social care, homelessness and education remain extremely challenging, but the settlement would "make a meaningful difference". ●



## Three-year public health grant confirmed

**Councils in England** will receive £13.45 billion over the next three years for local public health services, the Government confirmed last month.

The LGA warned that funding must keep up with inflation and demand pressures, but said it was "encouraged" by the Government's response to its long-standing calls for a multi-year settlement for public health.

The public health grant supports preventative local services, including for smoking cessation, drug and alcohol treatment, children's health, health visiting and sexual health.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "Sustainable long-term funding is vital for councils to continue delivering the local services that protect health, prevent illness and reduce inequalities.

"Councils are committed to using this funding to improve the lives of local people and tackle the root causes of poor health. However, public health services remain under significant pressure.

"To truly deliver on prevention and reduce demand on the NHS and social care, funding needs to keep pace with inflation and rising demand.

"We urge the Government to provide maximum flexibility within the public health ringfence, so councils can respond to local priorities and tailor services to the needs of their communities. Local leaders understand what works in their areas and flexibility is essential to achieve the best outcomes." ●

## Social care priorities ‘need investment’

**The Government has** written to councils setting out its three priorities for adult social care for local authorities, alongside its ambition to establish a national care service.

An additional £4.6 billion is being made available for adult social care in 2028/29, compared with 2025/26, but the LGA has warned the sector is “desperate” for sustainable investment.

The Government wants people who draw on care and support to: access high-quality care provided by a skilled workforce; have independence, choice and control over their support; and experience joined-up neighbourhood health and social care services.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA’s Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: “We are supportive of the Government’s focus on bringing together the elements of social care reform and improvement into one set of priorities, and its recognition of the importance of the Fair Funding Review 2.0 to enable this.

“While we are pleased the Government is making available an additional £4.6 billion, our adult social care sector is in desperate need of sustainable investment.

“The principle of devolved and flexible funding allows local council services to be tailored to the needs of local people.

“We are ready to work with the Government to ensure the national plans for health, the NHS and adult social care are aligned, so that people can get the right support, when they need it and into the future.” ●



## Closing the ‘holiday experience’ gap

**Giving children from** low-income households access to similar opportunities to their peers during school holidays improves children’s health and wellbeing, promotes healthy eating, boosts school attendance, and improves inclusivity for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

So say councils in feedback to the LGA on the Holiday and Activities Food (HAF) programme, which funds local authorities to deliver free healthy meals and enriching holiday activities for primary school-aged children from low-income families.

The Department for Education has invested £600 million to extend HAF for a further three years, but demand for provision is high and some eligible children are missing out, according to the LGA’s report.

The most vulnerable families are often the least likely to attend programme services because of access barriers including transport challenges, language, digital exclusion, lack of awareness and stigma. Data-sharing limitations between local authorities, schools and central government are also reported to restrict the ability of councils to identify all eligible families in their area.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA’s Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: “Extending the HAF funding is an important part of efforts to combat child poverty. But as we enter another three years of the programme, it is vital that we tackle the barriers to access and efficiency.

“Councils are well placed to explore solutions that work for their residents. Now is the time to ensure the programme works for every eligible family.” ●

## Expansion of specialist SEND spaces

**There will be** more specialist, calm learning spaces in mainstream schools to support children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), the Government announced last month.

Ministers also confirmed 10,000 planned special free school places will be delivered through new schools or by giving councils funding to create equivalent provision.

Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Chair of the LGA’s Children, Young People and Families Committee, said: “It is good that government is investing in creating specialist places in mainstream schools, so children can attend their local school with their friends.

“We are also pleased government has confirmed special schools will be funded or councils will be given money to develop their own provision. We would like to see government implement a single, local funding pot, held by councils, to build appropriate provision quickly and effectively.

“We look forward to the Government’s Schools White Paper setting out a roadmap to a system that meets children’s needs more quickly and effectively, in their local mainstream school system, where an education, health and care plan is not necessary to get support, with a workforce that has the capacity and right skills.” ●

## New strategy 'to end homelessness'

The UK Government has published its long-awaited National Plan to End Homelessness, setting out a long-term, cross-government strategy to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring in England.

Key goals in the strategy – launched in December and backed by £3.5 billion for homelessness and rough-sleeping services over the next three years – include eliminating the unlawful use of B&B accommodation for families, halving long-term rough sleeping, and placing prevention at the heart of local and national responses.

Councils will be required to publish and regularly update local action plans aligned with national outcomes.

Cllr Tom Hunt, Chair of the LGA's Inclusive Growth Committee, described the plan as "ambitious" with an admirable goal of ending homelessness for good, but stressed that councils need to be sufficiently funded and empowered to deliver its aims effectively.

"Specifically, the Government must make sure there is greater accountability to ensure all stakeholders are involved and incentivised to prevent homelessness, and that these goals can be delivered, foster collaboration between partners, and have evidence-based policy underpinning this," he added.

"As this strategy acknowledges, local government has a crucial role to play in turning its ambitions into reality." ●



## Protections for workers 'must be funded'

The cost to councils of implementing new employment reforms must be matched by new funding or public money could be diverted from vital local services, the LGA has warned.

New worker protections – including day-one paternity leave and parental leave, new statutory sick-pay reforms, extra protection from unfair dismissal and a new right to bereavement leave – passed into law in December, potentially benefiting up to 15 million people.

More than two million people work in local government across the country, providing crucial services to communities and residents every day.

Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA's Resources Committee, said: "It is crucial that local government is involved in the secondary legislation expected to follow the passing of the Employment Rights Act.

"Costs flowing from employment reforms must be matched by increased funding to councils for the reforms to be effective.

"Changes will affect directly employed staff, outsourced workers and the whole adult social care sector, where local government has a critical role in ensuring services are provided to the public but is proposed to have a very limited role in the new Adult Social Care Negotiating Body.

"Local government needs to be engaged by government on how the act is implemented, otherwise the bureaucratic and legal burdens on councils will mean public money is diverted from vital local services." ●

## Council voice 'must be heard' on planning reforms

It is crucial that councils' views are fully considered in a consultation on "significant" changes to the planning system in England, the LGA has said.

It has also raised concerns about democratic accountability, with the Government's proposed revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) including plans to remove from council planning committees the right to decide on small developments.

Other proposals aimed at encouraging more housebuilding include automatic approval for housing developments around railway stations and on brownfield sites, and to build upwards when it comes to new homes in towns and cities.

Cllr Tom Hunt, Chair of the LGA's Inclusive Growth Committee, said the proposed NPPF changes were "some of the most significant we've seen", and that



it was "crucial" that the views of councils – which approve nine in 10 planning applications – are fully taken into account.

"While the Government's commitment to boost development and housebuilding is admirable, changes to the planning system alone will not suffice," he said.

"Councils need sufficient powers and funding to buy land, bring forward and connect with much-needed infrastructure, and speed up buildout of sites with planning permission.

"Government must also take steps to address the growing skills and workforce challenges in the construction sector."

He added: "Planning committees are the democratic backbone of the planning system, with councils being accountable to their communities about what should be built where.

"This is a central tenet that must remain under a reformed planning system." ●

● Consultations on the NPPF close on 10 March – see [bit.ly/3NAcUGj](https://bit.ly/3NAcUGj)



## LGA restructure 'to empower local leadership'

As first was going to press, the LGA was launching a consultation with staff on restructuring the organisation.

Proposals in the new-look organisation include making better use of digital data and insight to anticipate emerging trends and influence future decision-making; generating more commercial income to do more for LGA members without having to increase core costs; and providing stronger support across fewer regions.

The restructure will also bring policy and improvement together in one 'impact' directorate, focused on five 'impact areas' – health and care, children and young people, economic growth and communities, local government resources, and improvement and productivity.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "Our new transformation model will allow us to be even more responsive to our members' evolving needs, build even greater trust with our partners and in Whitehall, and help shape national reform using data-driven, place-based evidence.

"Our new way of working ensures clear accountability, even stronger programme planning, and will empower local leadership.

"There is monumental change ahead for councils with devolution and reorganisation. Many are facing financial challenge at a time when we need to be market-shaping services that are fit for the future and sustainable for the many people who rely upon them day in, day out.

"Our new model allows us and our members to be at the heart of shaping the future of local government." ●

## Call to ban unethical 'patient brokering'

The LGA and campaigners are calling for new legislation to tackle the exploitation of vulnerable people through 'patient brokering' in England's drug and alcohol addiction treatment sector.

Patient brokering involves financial incentives for referring patients to specific private addiction rehabilitation centres, regardless of whether it is in the best interest of the patient.

The LGA, along with the Ethical Marketing Campaign for Addiction Treatment and the charity Collective Voice, have warned that a rise in unregulated private treatment providers has created opportunities for unethical practices to flourish, leading to inappropriate placements, inflated costs and compromised care.

With the latest figures showing the highest number of adults in drug and alcohol addiction treatment since records began, they are also warning that the practice risks long-term harm for people seeking recovery and undermines public confidence in addiction treatment services.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "Patient brokering is a deeply concerning and unethical practice that puts profit before patient wellbeing.

"Vulnerable individuals seeking help for addiction deserve safe, ethical and clinically appropriate care, and not to be treated as commodities at one of the most vulnerable points in their addiction recovery.

"We must protect the integrity of our addiction treatment system, and ensure that adequate safeguards are in place so that every person seeking help is met with dignity, compassion and respect." ●



## Child poverty strategy published

The Government's new UK-wide 'Tackling Child Poverty' strategy aims to lift more than half a million children out of poverty through measures including expanding childcare for families on Universal Credit, cost savings on baby formula, and ending the long-term placement of families in B&B accommodation.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "Child poverty not only limits children's life chances and wellbeing, but also imposes significant long-term costs on our economy and society.

"The renewed emphasis [in the strategy]

on prevention in key areas, including housing, social care, employment support and health, is a positive step.

"Councils will continue to work closely with government to identify ways in which integration and service reform can enable earlier intervention in the underlying causes of disadvantage.

"However, without additional investment in these services and recognition that councils still face high levels of immediate demand in many acute services, it is hard to see how we will be able to achieve the step change that is needed to reverse current trends successfully." ●

# English devolution

## Progress made and the road ahead

**T**he LGA welcomes further devolution to England. This is a core ask of our sector, and we have long championed the genuine transfer of powers to local places.

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill presents a valuable opportunity to embed that ambition into legislation.

With Parliament returning after its Christmas recess, it is worth reflecting on the progress already secured and the priorities that must still be addressed.

The bill was introduced in the Commons last September. While supportive of the bill from the outset, the LGA has consistently made clear that additional measures are needed to ensure it delivers genuine devolution for communities.

By the time of report stage, in late November, we had engaged widely across the sector. This included detailed work with internal groups, local government bodies and public sector partners.

Alongside this, we engaged with MPs to develop a set of well-considered amendments designed to secure better outcomes for councils. Several positive changes were achieved.

One of the most significant steps forward was the Government's announcement that mayors will be able to introduce a visitor levy. This move is welcome, although the LGA will continue to advocate for councils to access this power.

Another achievement was an amendment allowing councillors to choose not to publish their home addresses, reflecting a long-standing LGA ask to support councillor safety.

On governance arrangements, the Government eased the requirement for councils to move from a committee system to a leader and cabinet model. However, it remains a concern that the



revision would still require some councils to change immediately.

We also pressed for stronger local collaboration. Helen Morgan MP, LGA Vice-President and Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Health and Social Care, tabled an amendment on our behalf to introduce a duty on local public service partners – such as integrated care boards and NHS trusts, police and fire authorities – to cooperate with strategic authorities and principal councils.

While it was not included in the bill, broad support for coherent local decision-making provides a solid basis to re-table this amendment in the Lords.

In addition, the bill now allows government to introduce national minimum standards for taxis and private hire vehicles, responding to, in part, LGA asks.

These achievements are promising, but important gaps remain.

Key areas still require attention, including expanding the role of culture and creative industries, and introducing safeguards on the use of ministerial

powers to create or expand strategic authorities without local consent.

We will also continue to call for a robust role for constituent councils in decision-making and development of local growth plans, and measures to ensure appropriate scrutiny and governance arrangements for appointed commissioners.

Ahead of the bill's second reading in the Lords in December, the LGA briefed peers on these priority areas. It was encouraging to see strong interest and several LGA vice-chairs speaking in the debate.

With the bill now in committee stage, we stand ready to work with ministers and parliamentarians to ensure the final legislation delivers meaningful devolution.

At the halfway point of the bill's passage, we can be pleased with the progress made while recognising the significant work that still lies ahead. ●

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



Councillor Louise Gittins is Chair of the LGA

# Balancing budgets

## Rising pressures threaten councils' financial sustainability

December's provisional local government finance settlement included some very important and positive steps for councils in England.

The settlement delivers additional funding for councils and a multi-year settlement, offering greater certainty than the year-by-year approach we have lived with for too long.

The LGA welcomes the principle of simplifying and consolidating specific grants, as well as the commitment to reduce competitive bidding – something we have long called for.

And there is some welcome investment in priority areas, including social care, prevention, and support for children and young people with complex needs.

However, this settlement does not provide the increase in funding councils need to ensure their financial sustainability and protect services. Much of the new

funding will be absorbed simply by cost pressures already locked into the system, workforce and commissioning costs, and rising demand – particularly in homelessness and temporary accommodation services, adult and children's social care, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and home-to-school transport.

In many cases, the new funding will only allow councils to stand still, rather than improve services or invest in prevention, while some areas will receive real-term funding cuts in 2026/27.

Standing still is not enough when need continues to grow.

Councils have not reached this point because of poor financial management. Over the past decade and a

half, local government has shown resilience, innovation and discipline in managing financial pressures – making billions of pounds of savings and efficiencies, redesigning services, sharing back-office functions and embracing digital transformation.

But there comes a point when resilience becomes fragility – with more councils being forced to rely on exceptional financial support from government simply to set a balanced budget and keep essential services running.

We are seeing the increasing pressure on local government financial sustainability, and councils of all political colours, all types and across all geographies are warning that this can't go on.

This is not a failure of ambition or capability. It is the result of a funding system that has not kept pace with demand, complexity or inflation.

What councils need is a reformed funding system that offers flexibility and enables them to make decisions based on local circumstances.

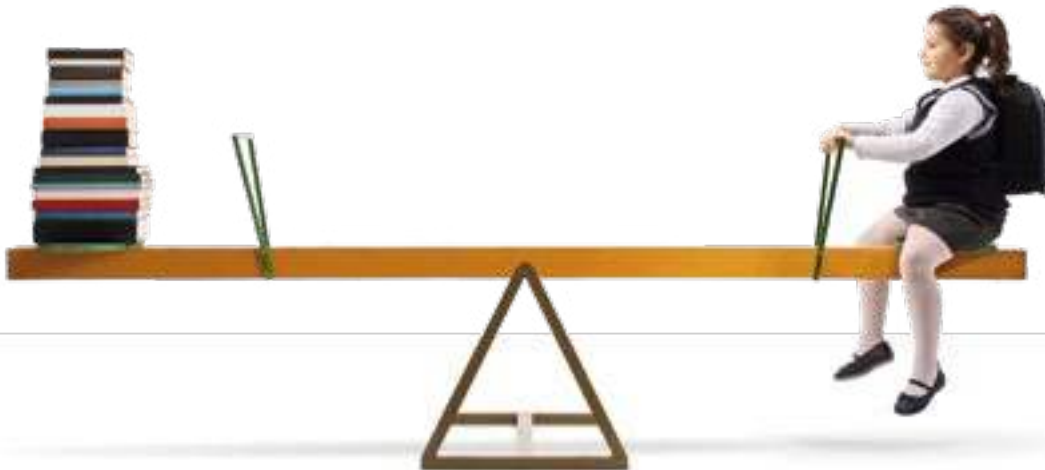
The LGA is working constructively with government departments, using clear evidence from councils, to make the case that:

- multi-year settlements must come with real-terms funding increases
- funding must increase to reflect real levels of need
- no council should be pushed to the brink simply to deliver statutory services.

We'll also continue to press for proper recognition of cost and demand-led pressures, and for greater investment in preventative services, not just crisis response.

The LGA continues to encourage the Government to undertake a cross-party review of options to improve the wider local government finance system. This has to include a review of council tax, alongside other council funding sources, and whether business rates retention represents a viable future funding model.

The Government's wider reform agenda – including to SEND and adult social care – also presents an important opportunity to reset the system. We welcome these opportunities, but they must go hand in hand with a recognition of the financial realities councils face. Otherwise, we risk redesigning services without giving councils the resources they need to make those reforms work on the ground. ●



# Violence against women and girls

## New strategy presents significant challenges



Councillor Matt Boughton is Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Committee

The publication in December of the UK Government's new cross-government strategy, 'Freedom from violence and abuse', represents an important step in addressing one of the country's most urgent public safety challenges.

With one in eight women experiencing sexual assault, domestic abuse or stalking in the past year, and the Government rightly recognising this as a national emergency, decisive action is needed.

The strategy for England and Wales sets a bold ambition: to halve violence against women and girls within a decade.

It identifies three key pillars: prevention and tackling root causes; pursuing perpetrators; and improving support for victims and survivors.

Each of these reflects areas in which councils already play a central role.

Local government delivers a wide range of services that prevent harm, respond to crises and support survivors. Councils provide and commission specialist domestic abuse services, run housing support programmes and refuges, and work through community safety partnerships.

They also lead safeguarding boards, collaborate with health services, schools and the voluntary sector, and design early intervention initiatives that stop abuse before it escalates.

These examples show that prevention is



**“This is not just a policing and criminal justice issue; education, public health, housing, social care and community safety must all work together”**

not just a policy aspiration, but a practical reality delivered locally.

We welcome several aspects of the new strategy.

Its emphasis on prevention and early intervention, including education and behaviour-change programmes, aligns with the work councils already deliver in schools and communities.

The strategy's focus on trauma-informed, victim-centred support, and the

commitment to strengthen multi-agency working, will help improve coordination between local services, the police and the voluntary sector. The Government has also announced additional funding for victim support services, which is vital to sustain and expand these initiatives.

However, the strategy presents significant challenges.

While it highlights the need for prevention and joined-up working, it does not fully acknowledge the central role councils play in delivery.

Local government is crucial in connecting national policy to local communities, identifying risk and providing support in the places people live. Without explicit recognition of this role and sufficient funding to match ambition, there is a risk that councils will struggle to deliver at the scale required.

The Government's commitment to halving violence against women and girls in 10 years is welcome, but success will require the full power of the state.

As Jess Phillips MP, Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls, has emphasised, this is not just a policing and criminal justice issue; education, public health, housing, social care and community safety must all work together.

Councils are central to this multi-agency response, and national ambition must be matched by recognition of local responsibilities and resources.

The publication of the strategy is only the first step.

The challenge now is to move from ambition to action, ensuring that councils are supported with the funding, powers and partnership frameworks needed to play their full part.

With genuine collaboration, sufficient investment and recognition of local leadership, the strategy has the potential to deliver lasting change, making communities safer and providing women and girls across the country with the protection, support and opportunities they deserve. ●

For more on the LGA's work on community safety, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/topics/community-safety](http://www.local.gov.uk/topics/community-safety)

# A cross-sector voice

Engaging ministers on what matters to councils



Councillor Louise Gittins is Chair of the LGA

**J**ust before Christmas, I was pleased to co-chair the latest meeting of the Leaders Council with Steve Reed MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Also present were Lords Minister for Housing and Local Government Baroness Sharon Taylor, the LGA's five political group leaders, and wider sector representatives, including the chairs of the County Councils Network, District Councils' Network, Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities, Key Cities, Core Cities, and London Councils.

It was helpful to hear the Secretary of State outline his vision for public service reform and place-based service delivery built around, and accountable to, local people.

He was keen to build on the great examples we shared of our member councils already delivering on the ground – from children's services and cohesion to preventative health and wellbeing services and tackling economic inactivity.

We stressed that our councils can and will deliver even greater impact and improved



public and financial outcomes, if empowered to do so with better partnership working arrangements and improved data-sharing across government and its agencies.

We agreed that we would work together to unlock the issues holding back public service reform, including on data sharing, spreading existing and emerging best practice, and devolution.

The Secretary of State also outlined the measures his department is taking to boost housing supply and affordability, reform planning, and tackle homelessness.

We reiterated that councils are committed to delivering their local plans for their places, but challenges remain with infrastructure development so vital to building homes and communities. This includes essential infrastructure and utilities provision, as well as streamlining decision-making across government departments and agencies.

We also raised the pressure on housing revenue accounts and the importance of upcoming decisions on rent convergence, not only for the financial sustainability of councils, but also our ability to invest in new builds.

We will continue to engage closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and support our members to navigate the vast programme of housing and planning change.

The Leaders Council took place on the day the provisional finance settlement was published, and we welcomed the introduction of multi-year settlements – a longstanding LGA call.

We also agreed to explore further areas in which reform and options for releasing monies within the current system could bring benefits, particularly with the number of councils having to use unsustainable emergency bailouts under

the government's exceptional financial support scheme.

Finally, it was helpful for representatives to seek clarity and assurance on the government's plans for devolution and local government reorganisation – an example of the opportunities provided by the Leaders Council to hear from, and speak directly to, ministers on the things that matter most to our people and places.

It was through our cross-party LGA White Paper that we called for a new equal partnership with central government. The Leaders Council demonstrates that reset in practice and provides a forum to co-design the solutions that councils of every region, tier and stripe need.

More than that, it is a powerful illustration of the LGA's core strength and unique tradition in action – our collective weight and impact by speaking together with one cross-sector voice. ●

# Reading for pleasure

## A call to local government leadership



**Councillor Philippa Storey (Lab) is Deputy Mayor and Executive Member for Education and Culture at Middlesbrough Council**



**T**his is the National Year of Reading, a Department for Education initiative, in collaboration with the National Literacy Trust, that is a partnership movement of national, regional and local organisations.

For elected local authority members, it's an opportunity to highlight and increase support for reading, learning and community wellbeing.

We need this because levels of reading for pleasure are at an all-time low. The impact of this decline is far-reaching, affecting children's development, language and critical-thinking skills, and contributing to social and economic inequalities.

The campaign aims to address the decline, with an ambition to reconnect people of all ages with reading in all its forms as part of their everyday life.

Throughout 2026, with the support of literacy partners such as BookTrust and The Reading Agency, schools, early years settings, prisons and library services will be supported with simple ways to take part, whether through a year-long approach or individual activities.

Libraries, community groups, cultural services and youth organisations will play a central role, using campaign toolkits and materials to promote reading.

Councils are ideally placed to convene these partners with a coordinated offer for all residents, and I'm asking you to look

## “Improved literacy is closely linked with better educational outcomes and life chances”

at ways to bring partners together around reading in 2026.

As a councillor I have made promoting reading a personal mission during my time in Middlesbrough.

We have started a programme of reading sheds in local schools and 2026 will see Middlesbrough have its own reading festival.

There is so much that we can do at ward level in our communities and in our wider roles – community book sheds, mini-travelling libraries, book hunts and more.

I encourage elected members to spread the word to schools, libraries and community groups you know well.

Community initiatives work best when co-designed with the people they serve and councillors are uniquely placed to make that collaboration happen.

Supporting the National Year of Reading brings a wide range of benefits because improved literacy is closely linked with better educational outcomes and life chances.

Reading also builds empathy and social connection, and can strengthen inter-

generational relationships, as well as support wellbeing.

At a community level, the simple act of encouraging reading can build a culture of learning, pride and shared identity, along with increasing footfall in libraries and community spaces, contributing to the vitality of our local cultural life.

As representatives of your local areas, you can help shape this national moment and ensure that your communities feel the full benefit.

By endorsing the National Year of Reading, getting your council to complete an online pledge outlining what you'll be doing, encouraging participation and promoting activity across local services, you can help create a legacy for your communities that lasts long beyond 2026.

The National Year of Reading is an invitation to every council and councillor to celebrate stories, strengthen literacy and inspire a new generation of readers. Your leadership will be essential in making that ambition a reality.

You can find out more about the initiative online at [www.goallin.org.uk](http://www.goallin.org.uk) ●

# Helping councils maximise their early years impact

The innovation foundation Nesta is offering free support to assist local authorities to develop their Best Start in Life plans

**Local authorities** are tasked with delivering a substantial step change in early years outcomes – an increase in the proportion of children reaching a good level of development from 67.7% to 75% nationally by 2028. Achieving this target requires ambitious, credible strategic plans and, to help deliver these plans, local authorities are being given funding to commission evidence-based programmes that support parenting and the home learning environment.

Research from Nesta has identified more than 135 early years parenting programmes. These vary a lot in the outcomes they are seeking to achieve, how widely they are implemented and their evidence of impact on child development, making it difficult for local authorities to determine which programmes are evidence-based and best suited to their local needs.

To address this, Nesta has designed a new free-to-use Parenting Support Commissioning Assistant for Local Areas (PASCAL) to provide data-driven insights tailored to the demographics of each local authority area, as well as to their specific needs, budget and preferences. It uses local authority data from the National Pupil Database to select from more than 20 programmes and recommend the most suitable ones that offer the best value for money for different segments of a given population.



The online assistant is aimed at predicting which programmes are likely to deliver maximum value for money and achieve the greatest potential impact on the number of children reaching a good level of development.

Alongside the launch of PASCAL, Nesta has developed resources to save local authorities time and help them with the foundational work involved in developing their plans. Nesta is also offering expert one-to-one advice, and opportunities for connection with other local authorities.

Louise Bazalgette, deputy director of Fairer Start at Nesta, said: “The next few months are critical for local authorities as they rise to the challenge of creating ambitious new strategic plans. The evidence is clear that parenting programmes can make a world of difference to helping children get the right start. But the complexity of the market means it’s a real challenge for local

authorities to identify which programmes are the best fit for families in their area.

“As our first step in supporting local authorities, we’ve developed a decision-making assistant to simplify this by offering data-driven insights, helping commissioners identify programmes that are likely to deliver the maximum impact on the number of children reaching a Good Level of Development. Nesta will continue to work collaboratively with local areas to put to good use our expertise in early years innovation, data science, behavioural science and design.”

Get in touch with Nesta to take advantage of this opportunity to improve your strategic planning and save time, or find out more online at [nesta.org.uk](https://www.nesta.org.uk) ●

**nesta**

**i** This free support includes a new decision-making online assistant called PASCAL to help early years commissioners identify parenting programmes that are most likely to meet local needs. It also includes a step-by-step playbook and data profiles, personalised online coaching with expert advisers, and regional events. Local authorities can get in contact with Nesta at [bsil-support@nesta.org.uk](mailto:bsil-support@nesta.org.uk) to access the resources.

# From strategy to action

## Delivering the best start for under-fives

In December, the LGA hosted a webinar for elected members called 'From strategy to action: the councillor's role in the best start in life'.

The session explored how councils can turn the Government's 'Giving every child the best start in life' strategy into practical action through Best Start Family Hubs – a cornerstone of national plans to improve outcomes for children and families.

Launched in July 2025, the Best Start in Life strategy sets an ambition for every council to establish family hubs by April 2026. These hubs bring health, education and other key services together, so families can access support when they need it.

Councils are expected to publish a Best Start Plan by April 2026, outlining how they will achieve ambitious targets – such as increasing the proportion of five-year-olds reaching a good level of development by approximately 9 per cent by 2028.

Chaired by Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Chair of the LGA's Children, Young People and Families Committee, the event highlighted why councillor leadership is critical.

Cllr Hopgood stressed that hubs are about joined-up early help and prevention, not just physical spaces. Her own council's (County Durham's) experience as one of the first 75 funded areas shows their transformative potential – from infant feeding support to youth employment programmes.

The webinar showcased insights from councils at different stages of implementing hubs.

Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Young People at Hackney Council, shared its experience as an early adopter. Building on strong foundations of children's centres, the east London borough developed a hub-and-spoke model, with integrated services ranging from stay-and-play sessions to debt advice.

Cllr Bramble stressed the importance of co-production with families and



cultural competence, alongside innovative father engagement programmes, such as dedicated support groups and antenatal classes.

Cllr Leigh Redman, Chair of Somerset Council's Children and Families Scrutiny Committee, offered a perspective from a development grant area. His message was clear: councillors can champion the vision, secure funding and use scrutiny to shape governance and monitor progress.

Cllr Redman reminded delegates that every hub will look different, urging members to map existing services and build on local strengths, rather than reinvent the wheel.

Family hubs are not just buildings; they represent a new way of working focused on integration, accessibility and early intervention. Councillors play a crucial role in bringing this vision to life. As well as endorsing the strategy, by being visible, asking questions and understanding what's happening on the ground they can make a real difference.

Visiting a local hub is a powerful way to witness the offer first hand, meet staff, and hear from families about what works and what could improve. These insights help shape priorities and ensure services reflect local needs.

The LGA, through the National Centre for Family Hubs, provides support for councils, including peer challenges, regional advisers, themed webinars, case studies and tailored advice.

Councillors can use these resources to strengthen local plans and share learning with peers.

When members champion the vision, connect with communities and use scrutiny to keep delivery on track, they play an important role in making sure every child really does get the best possible start in life. ●

For more support and information, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/national-centre-family-hubs](http://www.local.gov.uk/national-centre-family-hubs)

# A force for growth

The role of councils in delivering inclusive growth



Councillor Tom Hunt is Chair of the LGA's Inclusive Growth Committee

Inclusive growth is “impossible” without local authorities, because “they deliver the housing, the infrastructure, the training and the community support”.

That’s according to Mayor of South Yorkshire Oliver Coppard, who was speaking at the launch of the LGA’s ‘A force for growth’ report, which makes a compelling case for why local authorities are critical to the delivery of local inclusive growth ambitions across England.

As Chair of the LGA’s Inclusive Growth Committee and Leader of Sheffield City Council, I was delighted to host the launch at the Millennium Gallery in

Sheffield last month, where we heard from a range of speakers from business, health and higher education.

Local authority representatives were joined by delegates from combined authorities, the civil service, further and higher education, the NHS, the private sector and beyond – united under a shared belief that investing in councils is investing in local growth

Local government’s role in driving inclusive growth is broad – as growth enablers, service providers, orchestrators and anchor institutions. Its reach into every community enables action that strengthens local economies and expands opportunity.

Initial analysis, released at the LGA’s annual conference in Liverpool last July, revealed that councils across England could unleash £276 billion of untapped economic potential – equivalent to more than a tenth of national output.

In addition, local authorities also inject £117 billion annually into local economies

as anchor institutions, through their role as employers, service providers and investors.

‘A force for growth’ highlights a range of best practice from across the sector. Wyre Forest District Council, for example, pushed ahead locally to create the South Kidderminster Enterprise Park, which has been used by 17 businesses and provided £25 million to the local economy.

In addition – building on the legacy of European Capital of Culture in 2008 through to the hosting of the Eurovision Song Contest in 2023 – Liverpool City Council has capitalised on the city’s strong cultural assets to drive inclusive growth, generating in excess of £6 billion in 2023 alone, and employing 58,000 people.

The council has now partnered with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to bring the benefits of cultural tourism to the whole region.

It was fantastic to work with the Growth and Reform Network, which produced the report in partnership with the Future Governance Forum thinktank.

We are clear this is just the beginning of a wider conversation to ensure that local government’s role in unlocking inclusive economic growth is not only recognised, but actively promoted.

The report identifies several areas for further action, including the need to provide local authorities with sustainable, multi-year funding for growth with fiscal flexibility; and a desire for government to establish structured mechanisms for continuous engagement on economic development between local, regional and national tiers in all areas.

If you would like to work with the LGA on this mission, or want to hear more about the report, please contact [localgrowth@local.gov.uk](mailto:localgrowth@local.gov.uk).



To read ‘A force for growth’ in full, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/publications/a-force-for-growth](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications/a-force-for-growth)



From left: Darren Jones MP (Lab, Bristol West); Ely Hyman, Maryam Al Hakim, Lily Traykov (all participants in the Pathway Bond); Stephanie Peacock MP (Lab, Barnsley South); Cllr Stephen Cowan



Pathway Bond participant Ely Hyman

initiative bringing innovative businesses, educators and the council together to create routes from classroom to career – so every young person, whatever their background, can find a place in the industries of the future.

One sixth-form student, Ely Hyman (pictured), recently joined us in Parliament to reflect on how access to researchers and entrepreneurs in our innovation district helped build his confidence and clarity about his future.

Through the Pathway Bond, he's gained work experience with cutting-edge biotech firms, meeting people from whose career paths he can learn. Ely's story demonstrates how practical exposure shifts opportunity from the abstract to the tangible.

The principle that talent, not background, determines who progresses is at the heart of our approach. Local councils are uniquely positioned to connect business expertise, institutional influence and community insight, making inclusion the foundation of long-term economic success.

The question is not whether we can influence economic outcomes, but how decisively we choose to do so. Growth that excludes is fragile. Growth that includes – shared prosperity – is transformative.

Where local authorities set a clear mission, adapt planning, mobilise partnerships and put inclusion at the centre, growth can be measurable and lasting.

For more than a decade, that's been our experience in Hammersmith & Fulham, and the best is still to come. ●

# Inclusive economic ecosystems

## Growth that improves life chances



**Councillor Stephen Cowan (Lab) is Leader of Hammersmith & Fulham Council**

The world is changing faster than ever before – thousands of times faster in the fourth industrial revolution than in the first.

Across the UK, councils are grappling with the challenge: how to deliver meaningful economic growth that improves residents' life chances.

That a key priority of local government should be to spur and lead place-based growth, and that it is the only arm of government capable of building genuinely inclusive economic ecosystems, is proven by

councils around the country, including ours in Hammersmith & Fulham.

On taking office in 2014, we pivoted to a new economic strategy focused on the industries defining the coming decades: science, technology, engineering, maths – STEM – medicine and media. This was not just an economic bet; it was a social commitment to ensure local people, especially young people, can access emerging opportunities.

In 2016, we set out our vision of building Hammersmith & Fulham into an 'innovation borough' and a global economic hotspot. A year later, we launched the White City Innovation District, in partnership with Imperial College London, as the epicentre of what we envisaged would become a broader 'WestTech' corridor.

We defined our approach as 'entrepreneurial municipal government', rooted in agility and creativity.

We brought together businesses, academia and the council – combining soft powers to convene and build consensus alongside our hard powers on planning, placemaking, infrastructure development and skills.

We coalesced people around a common vision of a localised industrial strategy, now known as Upstream London.

The results? Since 2017, Upstream London has attracted £6 billion in high-growth investment and curated more than 17,000 STEM jobs. We're number one in London for economic growth.

But if growth is to last, it must be inclusive. That conviction drove our development of the Pathway Bond, a first-of-its-kind

# Transformational support

## The LGA can help councillors lead change



**Councillor Wendy Fredericks (Lib Dem) is an LGA Member Peer and a Member of North Norfolk District Council**

**T**he LGA's Transformation Leadership Essentials course was a game-changer for me.

I attended the February 2025 course because I was keen to increase my knowledge of introducing change and seeing it through to implementation in different

areas of the council. I thought this would be beneficial to my role as a councillor, especially now, as councils face the challenge of local government reorganisation.

The course shifted my perspective on what true transformation means – not just cutting costs, but creating a council that operates more efficiently, delivers better outcomes, and genuinely improves resident satisfaction.

I learned the critical role of being a transformational leader and how to inspire that mindset across the council.

The course challenged me to reflect on how innovative we already are and where



we can push further. It reinforced the importance of clearly communicating the 'why' behind transformation, both internally and to our stakeholders, because without that clarity, change loses momentum.

Another key takeaway was the scrutiny aspect of transformation: why it matters and how to do it well.

Real-world examples brought the theory to life, showing what successful transformation looks like in practice.

Networking with colleagues from across the country was invaluable; hearing their experiences – what worked and what didn't – gave me practical insights to accelerate change in my own council.

Using the knowledge I gained on the Transformation Leadership Essentials course, I was better able to approach challenges by using the benefit of other councillors' hindsight on what worked and what didn't, and using those insights to expedite transformation in an efficient manner.

Overall, this course didn't just teach me concepts – it equipped me with the tools and confidence to tackle challenges head on. If you're serious about driving meaningful change, I highly recommend it. ●

## The LGA's Transformation Programme

Councils are undertaking transformation to fundamentally change their systems, processes and skills to achieve measurable improvements in efficiency, effectiveness and resident satisfaction.

The LGA's transformation offer gives councils direct support with learning and development opportunities, helping boost capacity and capability within local government.

We aim to help authorities

achieve their transformation goals, deliver efficiencies and drive continuous improvement across a range of service areas.

With our transformation programme, we are offering councils:

- partners and peer support
- learning and skills
- data-driven tools and benchmarking.

Responding to feedback from the sector, the programme also features a

range of councillor-focused development opportunities.

We also run a quarterly Councillor Transformation Network, which gives councillors a safe space to network, discuss issues and trends affecting councils, and hear from each other and guests on new policies, programmes, and practices. To sign up, email [transformation@local.gov.uk](mailto:transformation@local.gov.uk).

See [www.local.gov.uk/transformation](http://www.local.gov.uk/transformation) for more on our support offer.

**i** The next Transformation Leadership Essentials course takes place from 7-8 February at the Hilton Sheffield City. For more information, please contact [transformation@local.gov.uk](mailto:transformation@local.gov.uk) and, to sign up, contact [grace.collins@local.gov.uk](mailto:grace.collins@local.gov.uk)



CONFERENCE  
+ EXHIBITION  

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7-9 July 2026  
Bournemouth



[local.gov.uk/conference](https://local.gov.uk/conference)

From neighbourhoods to nations  
Building lasting futures locally

# Working for the council

## Making a difference for residents



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

As first was going to press, the LGA was launching its latest national recruitment campaign for councils in England.

'Make a difference, work for your local council', funded by the UK Government, shines a spotlight on the brilliant opportunities for people to grow their careers in local government, and is running for six weeks up to mid-February.

We all know our hard-working staff in local government make a positive impact on people's lives in our communities, have a wide variety of jobs to choose from (more than 800), and benefit from training and development opportunities, and flexible, inclusive working practices.

However, in a recent survey, 94 per cent of councils said they were experiencing recruitment and retention difficulties. At the same time, demand for services is rising, highlighting the vital need to attract more people into the workforce.

The 'Make a difference, work for your local council' campaign delivers the transformative impact of a career in local government – and how it gives people the power to change their lives in a way that can also have an impact on their communities.

The campaign was first piloted in North East England in 2023-24, before its first national roll-out in 2024-25. It was developed in collaboration with councils, regional employer organisations, and expert creative, media and research partners.

In the first two years of the campaign, we've already seen the impact it can achieve.

External evaluations have shown an increase in views and applications for jobs, and those who had seen the campaign had

a significantly more positive impression of their local council.

More than two-thirds of councils downloaded the campaign toolkit, and many felt the campaign supported their recruitment efforts.

The campaign is award winning, having received two national awards for 'Best Innovation in Recruitment' (LGC Workforce Awards 2024) and 'Best Partnership/Collaboration' (PPMA Excellence in People Management Awards 2025).

This year's campaign will be advertised in all regions in England, using the most engaging media channels for our target audience – including outdoor billboards, radio, social media, podcast adverts, popular websites, and much more.

There are many new, exciting additions to this year's campaign, including:

- videos of real council employees talking about their jobs in legal and governance, and digital and IT
- a focus on early careers (see [www.localcounciljobs.gov.uk/earlycareers](http://www.localcounciljobs.gov.uk/earlycareers)), to engage young people and demonstrate the routes into local government, which was recently piloted in the West Midlands.

We are asking all councils to use the updated campaign toolkit as part of their recruitment activity, to enhance the national reach of the campaign.

This will help us to encourage more people to consider working in local government and build positive public perceptions of our sector.

The toolkit contains all the campaign materials, which are ready-to-use on your council's communications channels.

Whether you plan to share one of the assets on your social media, display a poster in your local library, or use the campaign logo on your recruitment adverts – your support is really appreciated, and will help to make a difference. ●



**i** To find out more about 'Making a difference' and to access the campaign toolkit, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/national-recruitment-campaign-local-government](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/national-recruitment-campaign-local-government). See p28

# Leadership support for disabled councillors

## Developing skills and building networks



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

**A**t the LGA, our political leadership programmes support councillors to develop leadership skills and enhance their effectiveness as councillors.

We understand the value of providing councillors with learning opportunities alongside peers with shared experience, and we are committed to supporting under-represented groups in local government.

It is estimated that 25 per cent of the UK population has a disability. However, disabled people are consistently under-represented in local government, including in positions of leadership.

The number of councillors declaring a disability or long-term impairment has varied from 10.9 per cent in 2006 to 16.1 per cent in 2018.

In 2022, we launched the LGA's Disabled Councillors Leadership Programme, in partnership with the charity Disability Rights UK. The programme was shaped in co-



production with disabled people and councillors, ensuring it responds to the specific needs of disabled leaders.

Now in its fourth cohort, the programme has helped disabled councillors to accelerate their leadership skills and build networks with peers from across the country and from different political parties, and supported them to be resilient and confident local leaders.

If you would like to find out more about this programme, please visit [bit.ly/4p2O7rG](https://bit.ly/4p2O7rG). To express an interest in joining a future cohort, please contact [leadership@local.gov.uk](mailto:leadership@local.gov.uk). ●

## Embedding lived experience in policy-making



Councillor Tracey Rawlins (Lab) is Executive Member for Clean Air, Environment and Transport at Manchester City Council

'Imposter syndrome' is a phrase that gets thrown around a lot, but it absolutely describes me. It's something I have always struggled with.

I took up an executive member role in 2021. There was a lot to learn of course, as there would be in any new job, but that imposter's voice was back louder than ever.

When the LGA's Disabled Councillors Leadership Programme came up in 2022, I thought – well, maybe there are people like me in other councils, if not my own. Let's see if I can learn how to do this better. So, I applied.

For most of my life, I've tried to ignore my disabilities and just get on with things – you know that phrase 'there are people worse off than me; I'm not that disabled...'

The programme has enabled me to embed my disability and lived experience into the way I lead and shape policy.

Support and adjustments were embedded throughout the course and were not an add-on. I didn't have to adapt to someone else's space or meeting; everything fitted around me and I realised that, when the right enablers are in place, I thrive – and can achieve more and perform even better.

So now I am much more able to say what I need to be the best I can be.

The course has given me a network of peers across the political spectrum with different lived experiences, and I am richer for that. We continue to be in touch, sharing our wins as well as our challenges.

I now see my disability as an asset, and it is very much the heart of me. I was very pleased in late 2024 to be appointed as the first Disability Advocate for the Bee Network, Greater Manchester's integrated transport scheme.



# LGA Annual Fire and Rescue Conference and Exhibition

Tuesday 10 to Wednesday 11 March 2026  
Mercure Manchester Piccadilly Hotel

The annual fire and rescue conference and exhibition is a key event in the calendar for senior fire officers and members of fire and rescue authorities.

The event provides an opportunity to meet in person and discuss key strategic and practical developments impacting the fire and rescue sector over the next 12 months.

Book your place visit: [local.gov.uk/events](https://local.gov.uk/events)



## Leading not following

### LGA Independent Group Annual Conference 2026

#### Resilience for councillors, community and place

31 January – 1 February 2026, The Met Hotel, King Street, Leeds, LS1 2HQ

Join us for the LGA Independent Group Annual Conference and Awards Dinner 2026. A vital opportunity to connect, reflect, share ideas, and plan ahead.

#### Key highlights:

- networking and exhibition from midday Saturday
- awards dinner on Saturday evening
- workshops, debates, and plenary sessions
- conference concludes 2pm Sunday.

**Book now:**  
[local.gov.uk/events](https://local.gov.uk/events)



Councillor Matthew Hicks is Chair of the County Councils Network

# The uniqueness of our places

The provisional local government finance settlement was the last main event of a busy 2025.

We always recognised that the Fair Funding Review 2.0 would lead to vastly different outcomes for areas, with some county and unitary councils gaining and others seeing their government grant cut – some significantly so.

Our analysis shows that at least 90 per cent of the County Councils Network's (CCN) member councils' much-vaunted increase in total 'core spending power' will come from presumed council tax rises of 5 per cent.

We will highlight this in our consultation response, but it is vital that the Government makes more money available to mitigate the impact of the most recent – and unfair – changes to their proposals.

Aside from the redistribution of funding away from county areas, the CCN has worked hard to articulate its members' concerns in what has been a much-changed year for the organisation.

While our political proportionality has changed following last May's elections, our ability to work collaboratively and with a single voice has not.

In my short time as CCN Chair, I have enjoyed working cross-party with leaders from across the political spectrum to deliver for county residents, as we work on making our advocacy even stronger.

While individuals may come and go – such is the nature of politics – and while council structures may change, the CCN's purpose and focus will not.

That's because our network is about more than a type or function of local government. What makes CCN the natural home for county and unitary authorities, and what binds our network together, is not only the services our councils provide, but also the uniqueness of the places our councillors represent.

The CCN is the national voice for county and large rural unitary authorities



in England. Counties, unlike urban areas, contain not only major towns and cities, but also large rural and coastal communities.

We will continue to work as the most prominent counterbalance to the urban-focused and city-centric national representative bodies, engaging existing and new unitary councils who share these common characteristics, and building on the recent addition of North Lincolnshire as the latest unitary council to join our network.

Looking to see what 2026 has to offer, there has scarcely been a more important time for counties and rural unitaries to speak with strength and clarity.

That is why we will not only be focusing on the big, existential issues facing local government – such as special educational needs and disabilities, adult social care, and local government reorganisation – but also those that matter most to our expanding cohort of councils.

These include ensuring that counties' concerns over planning reforms (particularly the dilution of the local voice within these) are heard loud and clear, as well as advocacy on the challenges in renewing county roads, the rise in temporary accommodation spend in rural areas, and the case to allow all areas to use fiscal devolution powers.

When the Government's big priority is economic growth, we will continue to bang the drum that county areas are unquestionably the backbone of England's economy – and ministers won't achieve the type of productivity gains they are aiming for without our areas firing on all cylinders.

It is shaping up to be another busy and pivotal year. The CCN will continue to make the case for counties, loud and clear. ●

See p24. For more on the CCN, visit [www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk](http://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk)

## GROUP LEADERS



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

### Progress on fair funding

Let me take the opportunity in this first magazine of 2026 to wish all LGA member councils a very happy new year.

As we look back on 2025 and ahead to 2026, we can reflect on the progress this Labour Government has made in bringing stability, investing in public services and investing in communities.

We see this in the commitment to beginning to rebuild councils' finances. December's provisional local government finance settlement was a symbolic

moment, one when we could firmly say austerity is over.

Under previous governments between 2010 and 2020, local government saw a £16 billion reduction in funding.

The evidence shows that deprived, predominantly Labour areas faced disproportionate cuts – and have had to make difficult decisions to protect the services our communities need. It is right, therefore, that this settlement places a stronger focus on deprivation, need and tackling regional economic disparities.

Too often, funding has failed to reflect the real pressures facing communities with the greatest need.

In 2024, under Labour, we saw the biggest funding boost to local government since 2010.

Going forward, fair funding will ensure core spending power is directly connected to need and residents won't face substandard services just because of where they live.



After years of financial insecurity and instability, councils will have greater certainty to plan, invest in and protect services. We have been calling for a multi-year settlement for councils and are pleased that this Labour Government has delivered on that.

There is still more to do to put council finances on a sustainable footing, and many authorities continue to face significant pressures – but this settlement marks progress.

Labour councils, in partnership with this Labour Government, will continue to work constructively to ensure councils have the resources they need to get on with the job of improving our communities in every region of the country.

### “This settlement places a stronger focus on deprivation and tackling regional economic disparities”

For more information about the LGA's political groups, see [www.local.gov.uk](http://www.local.gov.uk)



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

### Election delays damage public confidence

The past year has been unsettled for local government.

Decisions taken by central government have raised serious questions about democratic accountability, and the consequences for councils, communities and confidence in the system.

Most concerning has been the pattern of election delays.

Following the postponement of the inaugural mayoral elections in the Devolution Priority Programme areas,

further uncertainty has emerged around scheduled local elections.

This has prompted clear intervention from the Electoral Commission, which has stated that capacity constraints are not a legitimate justification for delaying long-planned polls, extending mandates risks damaging public confidence, and asking sitting councils to determine when they next face voters creates an inherent conflict of interest.

These are not partisan observations. They go to the heart of democratic principle. Elections are not a discretionary administrative exercise; they are the mechanism through which consent is renewed and accountability maintained.

When electoral timetables become uncertain, trust is eroded and councils are placed in an invidious position.

Within the LGA, the Reform UK Group was the only political group to make a formal statement on the postponement of scheduled elections. We did so because democratic integrity requires clarity, not ambiguity. Public trust depends on

### “Elections are the mechanism through which consent is renewed and accountability maintained”

predictability and fairness, and voters are not blind to the context in which decisions to delay elections are taken, particularly when political fortunes are at stake.

Councils have also received the latest finance settlements following the Fair Funding Review 2.0. Despite the stated aims of the review, the impact has been uneven, with many rural and non-metropolitan authorities facing increased pressure.

The local elections scheduled for May are the single most important political event between now and the next general election. When so much rests on the outcome, the certainty and integrity of the electoral process cannot be compromised.



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

## Scrutinising devolution in the Lords

I would like to wish everyone across the local government family a prosperous 2026 and congratulate all those in the sector who were recognised for their efforts in the New Year Honours List – in particular, the former Leader of Buckinghamshire Council Cllr Martin Tett, who has been made a CBE.

However, considering another difficult finance settlement for local government, I know the budget-setting process will become even more challenging as we move into 2026.

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill started its Lords committee stages this month.

It is profound that, for a bill of this

## “Conservative Peers will be pushing worthy amendments”

magnitude and importance, the Government has taken the decision to move proceedings at committee stage from the floor of the House and into Grand Committee.

This decision is normally only taken for the scrutiny of secondary legislation and bills considered not to be contentious by all sides of the House.

I know that Conservative Peers in the House of Lords will be scrutinising every line of the bill and pushing worthy amendments in January.

Baroness Scott and Lord Jamieson will be pushing hard on the far-reaching powers awarded to the Secretary of State in the bill.

They will also be moving amendments on the need for constituent councils in strategic authorities to approve governance changes – for example, in the new strategic authorities.



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

## Ready for more gains in May

Last year, the Liberal Democrats won the most council by-elections across the UK.

This year, there will be one of the biggest set of local elections, and the Liberal Democrats are up for the challenge – unless Labour and Conservative council leaders, behind closed doors, get them deferred in their areas.

## “We have been on a winning streak in local government elections”

We have been on a winning streak in local government elections, making gains for the past seven sets of local elections in a row and continuing to make progress in by-elections.

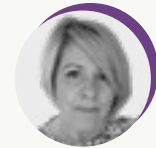
We are also able to win across the board, making gains from Conservatives, Labour and the nationalists. And when contests are head to head between us and Reform UK, we are the winner the majority of the time.

In the 2025 local elections, the Liberal Democrats gained seats and took control of more councils. We won 370 seats in May, more than the Conservatives, Labour or Greens. We now lead 76 councils, more than the Conservatives, Reform or Greens. We gained overall control in Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire and Shropshire, and lead the councils in Cornwall, Devon, Gloucestershire, Hertfordshire and Wiltshire.

Across 2025, it was the Liberal Democrats that won the most council by-elections across the UK, ahead of Reform.

We know that some areas may have their elections cancelled – but if the Government goes ahead with them, we are ready for more gains this May.

## GROUP LEADERS



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

## An honest and balanced partnership

As we enter 2026, local government faces a year of significant change.

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill is progressing through Parliament, the Planning and Infrastructure Act has gained Royal Assent, and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) reform remains high on the agenda.

Debate also continues around the timing of local elections.

We now have greater clarity on our financial position for 2026/27 to 2028/29 with the provisional local government finance settlement.

A multi-year settlement is, of course, welcome, and the ambition for stability and bringing funding closer to local need is laudable.

## “Financial resilience is not built on funding alone”

However, financial resilience is not built on funding alone. It depends equally on strong local leadership, constructive dialogue and close partnership working with our communities, so that solutions reflect real local insight and experience.

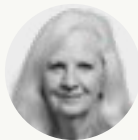
We also need an honest and balanced partnership with central government.

At the end of December, I attended my first local-central government Leaders Council, alongside fellow LGA group leaders, the LGA's chair, and the chairs of key special interest groups, including the District Councils' Network and the County Councils Network.

I found the discussion encouraging, with Secretary of State Steve Reed engaging openly as I raised key issues around devolution and local government reform.

There is much ahead in 2026 for you, our members – and I, the Independent Group leadership and group office are here to support you throughout. ●

# Implementing renters' rights



Baroness Taylor of Stevenage is Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing and Local Government

I wanted to take this opportunity to update councillors on some significant recent developments.

The Renters' Rights Act delivers the Government's manifesto commitment to transform the experience of private renting, including by ending Section 21 'no fault' evictions.

The act will improve the current system for both the 11 million private renters and the 2.3 million landlords in England, giving renters greater security and stability, so they can stay in their homes for longer and build lives in their communities. It removes many barriers to renting – by ending unfair bidding wars, preventing landlords from demanding large amounts of rent in



advance, and tackling rental discrimination.

Local councils will be equipped with strong new enforcement powers, and services such as the Private Rented Sector (PRS) Ombudsman and Database will help modernise the sector.

We will raise housing standards by applying the Decent Homes Standard to the PRS.

Good landlords have nothing to fear from these reforms. They will benefit from more straightforward regulation and the support of innovative new services.

Our implementation roadmap sets out when each of these measures will be brought into force, alongside information on how we are supporting the sector (see [bit.ly/49v8F6e](https://bit.ly/49v8F6e)). I encourage you all to read this.

Last October, Phase 1 of Awaab's Law came into force – named in memory of two-year-old Awaab Ishak, who died tragically in 2020 as a result of a severe respiratory condition due to prolonged exposure to mould in his home.

The law means that all social landlords must repair all emergency hazards within 24 hours, and significant damp and mould hazards within fixed timescales. Regulations will be expanded over 2026 and 2027 to cover further hazards.

Guidance for landlords can be found at [bit.ly/4qkD2DU](https://bit.ly/4qkD2DU). We will also be consulting soon on the details of our approach to applying Awaab's Law to the PRS.

I'd like to thank everyone for all their work and support. I look forward to working with you in 2026. ●

## What do you need from the next census?



Jason Zawadzki is Director of the Population Transformation Directorate at the Office for National Statistics

Probably the last thing on your mind as you contemplate 2026's in-tray is the next UK census.

But at the Office for National Statistics (ONS), work is under way to finalise topics for inclusion and the deadline for you to inform this process is 4 February.

Census is a unique moment in time, when we gather information about people's lives not captured in other ways.

Many core topics on age, education and the jobs we do have remained consistent over time, but new topics have

been added (in 2021, we asked people if they had previously served in the UK armed forces).

Equally, if there is no evidence that census data users still need particular information, or if it can be sourced another way, the topic is removed to keep the burden on respondents proportionate.

We're currently reviewing around 50 sub-topics, from demographics and housing to newer areas such as type of health condition, impairment or disability.

The data collected in 2031 will influence public service planning, policy development, funding allocation and equality monitoring for years to come.

That's why it is vital to hear from local government representatives, as one of the key user groups of census data.

What do you need from a census in an age of rapid societal and technological change? The impact of

e-bikes or e-scooters on local journey needs, perhaps?

The next census will provide high-quality statistics to meet your needs for the 2030s and be a strong foundation for meeting future population data needs across the decade, using the best available sources.

However, we need your evidence to support decisions about which topics should be included.

The deadline to respond to the ONS consultation is 4 February 2026 – we want to hear from you now and throughout the census planning process. ●

● See [consultations.ons.gov.uk/census/census-2031-topic-consultation](https://consultations.ons.gov.uk/census/census-2031-topic-consultation) to find out more about the census consultation and submit your response



**David Simmonds CBE MP is Shadow Minister for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities**

**All politicians frequently** hear from their constituents about the importance of joined-up government, and the impact of its absence in decision-making.

For any government serious about delivering real power to local councils, Whitehall departments must stop working in isolation.

As the Opposition, Conservatives are working on how to recast government so that it works better from the perspective of the people we serve – like a business seeking to improve its performance by focusing on the customers' engagement, rather than administrative convenience.

As I saw first hand during my time as Deputy Leader of Hillingdon Council and at the LGA, local government touches on the full range of matters from education to health to transport.

It is usual for councillors to be left to manage demands from competing government departments. Sometimes these are conflicts arising from statutory duties – for example, to protect the environment while also having to approve development, or to meet social care obligations despite no resources from government to meet the cost.

Ministers are eager to stress that they work with one another between departments, but what comes down to councils feels very different. When these demands conflict with those issued by another department, it leaves councils in a difficult position.



## Managing Whitehall's competing demands

Since the Local Government Act 1972, successive governments have continued to add to local authorities' statutory duties without a coherent strategy, with different departments advocating for conflicting priorities.

There was some optimism that a powerful new government, with a sizeable majority, would enact real devolution. Perversely, the Government's devolution drive has left councils in the lurch.

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, for instance, touches on almost all departments, from housing to health.

Despite this, it is essentially a rehash of existing local government powers, rather than devolution from Whitehall. Indeed, pages of the legislation are about new powers for the

Secretary of State to direct the new councils and mayors.

Sadly, it has become apparent that no minister in the department has realised that they can't do this alone. While the Government talks about transferring more powers to local leaders, the opposite is true.

This is mainly because Whitehall departments are not willing to part with their powers, and ministers seem unwilling to talk to one another.

Nowhere is this more clear than in special educational needs and disabilities, where the Department for Education insists councils must spend to meet their legal duties, while the Treasury and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government insist councils must balance the budget each year.

In Opposition, the Conservatives must take time to reconsider how things could be done differently.

Our policy renewal programme is asking deep and searching questions about how councillors can be unshackled and councils enabled to deliver so much more, through effective and efficient local leadership of a range of services.

As we approach the next set of local elections for new authorities (if they do go ahead), the Conservatives will outline our aspirations for what local government is and what it must represent.

To fulfil the potential of our nation and people, we cannot remain the most centralised democracy in the developed world. ●

# Local government's everyday heroes



Emma Bennett is Chief Executive of Walsall Council

A career in local government is one many choose for the sense of purpose it offers, and the sector attracts people who are often the everyday unsung heroes of our society.

One of the great things about local government is that many colleagues establish long-term loyalty to their employer and, before you know it, decades of their careers and lives have been spent serving residents and communities across the hundreds of different services councils deliver.

In Walsall, we recently had the pleasure to proudly recognise 45 long-service



Walsall Council's Chief Executive Emma Bennett and Mayor Cllr Louise Harrison (centre) with staff who received long-service awards

colleagues who, collectively, have spent 1,830 years working for Walsall Council. Three have reached an incredible 50-year milestone, while 42 have worked for the council for 40 years.

Paul Guilfoyle and Trevor Cockayne are two Walsall Council employees who each marked an incredible 50 years of service to the borough and its residents.

Both began their journeys with Walsall Council in 1975, starting as trainee gardeners (Paul at the age of 17 and Trevor at 16).

Over the decades, their careers have evolved, and Paul now works as a waste and street cleansing HGV driver within the Street Cleansing Team, while Trevor is

an environmental driver operative for the Grounds Maintenance Team.

It really is a privilege to recognise those who have dedicated such a significant part of their lives to our borough. There is so much fluidity in the job market these days, so to achieve such long-standing service is remarkable.

Looking to the future, we know the sector needs to secure talent and retain vital skills. We're working closely with partners to position Walsall Council as an employer of choice, to attract the next generation of local government officers, and inspire young people to start, grow and thrive in rewarding careers with us and the sector. ●

## The joy of helping care-experienced youngsters



Cllr Richard Kemp CBE is Chair of the Local Authorities' Mutual Investment Trust

Children in care can sadly often be seen as a financial burden, but that's not how it should be.

The work that CCLA, the UK's largest manager of charity funds, has been funding through the Local Authorities' Mutual Investment Trust, alongside the charity UK Community Foundations, clearly shows the other side of the coin.

Our jointly funded Care Leavers Programme, providing support for care leavers to thrive as they transition to

adulthood, was originally valued at £3.6 million over three years in 17 areas.

Now, a further £1.7 million grant from the Henry Smith Foundation over three years has enabled the programme to expand into another 14 areas, with local community foundations working alongside their local councils and other providers. Programmes in Wales and Northern Ireland are also included.

I have listened to successful people in my own city of Liverpool who have come through the care system and gone on to great things, becoming university students, a renowned concert pianist, an expert in artificial intelligence, and a BBC TV presenter, among many other things.

I have seen the joy that the work can bring and the valuable resource for our

communities and country that these young people represent if given the right help.

To go with care leavers to the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra or to museums – or to enjoy a Chinese banquet or take part in water sports, and to see good experiences being given to youngsters who have had too many bad experiences – has given me huge satisfaction and pleasure.

We hope that other organisations and councils will buy into the work that we have pioneered.

You can read the recently published report reviewing our first year's work at [www.ukcommunityfoundations.org/our-impact](http://www.ukcommunityfoundations.org/our-impact).

For information on how to get involved in the programme, email [Partnerships@ukcommunityfoundations.org](mailto:Partnerships@ukcommunityfoundations.org). ●

# Local research on improving residents' health



**Councillor Adam Walker (left) is Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Health and Prevention at Newcastle City Council, and Professor Brian Ferguson is a Public Health Strategic Advisor at the National Institute for Health and Care Research**



The National Institute for Health and Care Research has made a significant investment in local government research capacity recently, through the establishment of 30 Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HDRCs) across the UK – each receiving £5m over five years.

These HDRCs are designed to enable greater evidence-informed decision-making, ensuring that local government resources are targeted effectively to improve residents' health and tackle deep-seated health inequalities.

In Newcastle, the HDRC is instrumental in advancing our city's commitment to health, wellbeing and equality, underpinning our ambition to become a Marmot City.

The HDRC's work aligns seamlessly with our political priorities, focusing on the wider determinants of health, and ensuring that our policies and practices are grounded in robust research and evidence.

Central to this is the council's commitment to 'Health equity in all policies' – placing health and the reduction of health inequalities at the forefront of decision-making across all services. This approach ensures that improving health outcomes becomes everyone's responsibility and is embedded within the council's strategic aims and priorities.

Collaboration between the council, Newcastle University and other key partners has fostered a culture of innovation and excellence, reflected in the many initiatives and projects led by the HDRC.

A flagship achievement is HDRC Newcastle's leadership in developing the council's first Evidence and Data Strategy.

Co-produced with more than 130 staff – from frontline workers to senior leaders – the strategy ensures that evidence-informed decision-making is embedded across all services.

The strategy is now being woven into corporate processes, including medium-term planning, and is shaping how the council prioritises, funds and evaluates its work.

This is helping to shift organisational culture, making evidence central to how decisions are made and services are delivered – ultimately supporting better outcomes for residents.

The HDRC's influence on council business is a significant achievement, with departments regularly seeking HDRC's expertise and incorporating insights into business case submissions.

The establishment of Areas of Research Interest across directorates, including children's and families, and

adult social care, has been pivotal in linking research with decision-making. This ensures that our policies are not only evidence-based, but also tailored to the unique needs of our communities.

Examples of this include a HDRC-led deep dive into Newcastle's high levels of school non-attendance, where recommendations were shaped by existing council data, as well as new insights gathered directly from children and families. In response, we are developing a 'Single child view' – linking data across services to uncover inequalities, support early intervention and improve system-wide impact.

Another project is exploring access to perinatal care among ethnic minority women, with findings shaping a co-produced event connecting service commissioners and providers with those directly affected, to improve maternity services.

The HDRC's commitment to addressing health inequalities is further demonstrated through the development of sustainable data tools and bespoke analytical resources. These empower council practitioners to make data-driven decisions that address social vulnerabilities and promote equity in service delivery.

As we continue our journey towards becoming a Marmot City, the HDRC's role in embedding health equity into policy-making cannot be overstated. The work of the HDRC supports our vision of a fairer, healthier Newcastle, where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. ●

**i** To find out more about the National Institute for Health and Care Research's health determinants research collaborations, please visit [bit.ly/497pllx](https://bit.ly/497pllx)

## Support for refugees



**Dr Nooralhaq Nasimi MBE is Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association**

In 1999, I arrived in the UK as a refugee, hidden in the back of a refrigerated container with my young family and unable to speak a word of English.

While studying English at Lewisham College, the challenges of starting over in a new country motivated me to establish the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association (ACAA) charity. What began as a small office in Lewisham, south London, has grown into thriving community centres



in Feltham, Birmingham and Liverpool, with plans for a new base in Brent, in north London.

My aim has always been simple: to ensure that all refugees who arrive in the UK are treated fairly, and are given the opportunity to integrate, contribute and thrive.

ACAA works to improve the quality of life for refugees and the wider Afghan diaspora, both here in the UK and through our citizens advice centres in Afghanistan.

From homework clubs and Saturday

schools to legal clinics, women's groups and employment support, every project reflects our belief that integration succeeds when people are given the tools to participate fully.

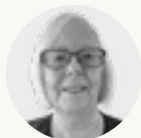
Each year, we support around 13,000 refugees through free English classes, cultural activities and practical advice services.

With more than two decades of experience, ACAA is well placed to help councils strengthen their outreach and integration programmes.

At a time of uncertainty and limited representation of refugee voices in public life, partnership is essential. We can provide practical insight into community engagement, help with delivering effective provision, and a trusted bridge to those who may otherwise be hard to reach. ●

**i** To learn more about the work of the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association, visit [www.acaa.org.uk](http://www.acaa.org.uk)

## Fire prevention and safeguarding residents



**Councillor Marian James (Lib Dem) is Chair of the People Committee at Sutton Council**

Fire safety is often viewed as a technical issue, but tragic incidents have demonstrated that it is fundamentally a safeguarding one.

Following a local rollout, Sutton's safeguarding partnerships have launched their Fire Prevention and Safeguarding Toolkit nationally.

This is a vital national resource library and e-learning module, available to all safeguarding practitioners, councillors and officers, free of charge.

Developed in close collaboration with the London Fire Brigade, Sutton Safeguarding Adults Board and Sutton Local Safeguarding Children Partnership, this toolkit bridges the gap between fire prevention and supporting residents' needs.

The initiative is born from lessons learned from real tragedies, aiming to ensure that every practitioner entering a home – whether supporting vulnerable adults, families, or children – has the skills to identify and report life-threatening risks of fire.

I wholeheartedly endorse this toolkit and the vital learning it provides. This is not just a resource for Sutton, but a national tool arising from learning in the intersection of fire safety and safeguarding.

I strongly encourage all councillors, local authorities and safeguarding partners across the country to ensure their teams complete this free training.

Equipping our frontline staff and partner agencies with this knowledge is an essential step in preventing future tragedies and keeping our most vulnerable residents safe.

The knowledge gathered here could quite literally save lives.

The toolkit offers a comprehensive suite of e-learning courses and bite-sized training modules.



It is designed for anyone who works with people in their homes, including social workers, domiciliary carers, housing officers, police, health visitors and nursing staff.

By embedding this free training into your council's workforce development, we can foster a culture where fire prevention and safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. ●

**i** To access the fire safeguarding toolkit, please visit [www.firepreventiontoolkit.org.uk](http://www.firepreventiontoolkit.org.uk)



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

Last year established a new record for the rate at which by-election seats change hands.

Each of the final three quarters of the year saw more seats change party control than were held. This level of volatility has only been recorded nine times, and never before over such a long sequence.

Seat turnover in the final quarter reached 62 per cent, matching the previous record set between January and March 1986.

The latest contests further underline Reform UK's capacity to undermine the established order, as the party took seats from Labour, Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Independents.

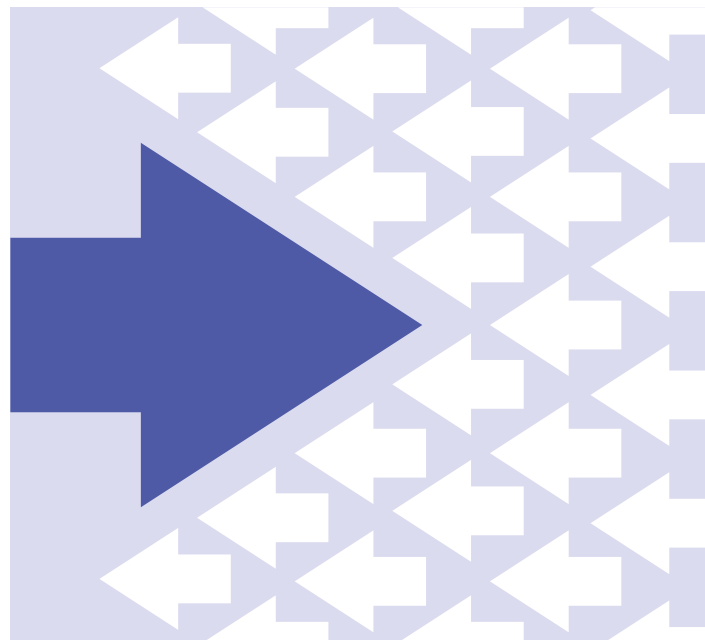
It comfortably defended its own two vacancies, although vote share fell in both. These results push Reform's total by-election gains to more than 100 since the last general election.

Three gains from Labour – in Sunderland, Darlington, and Blackpool – highlight the scale of the challenge facing Labour as next May's elections approach.

Sunderland's Hetton ward typically votes Labour, with Reform polling just 11 per cent in 2024. That old pattern changed as Labour's vote fell by 25 points, while Reform's rose by 35.

In Darlington's Red Hall and Lingfield ward, Reform, which had not stood there in 2023, recorded a 38 per cent swing in its favour.

# Undermining the established order



In Blackpool Greenlands, both Labour and the Conservatives were squeezed, with Reform's vote matching the combined total of the two parties.

Elsewhere, in South Kesteven's Aveland ward, the Conservatives were unopposed in 2019 and won comfortably in 2023, but were edged out by Reform this time, by just 10 votes.

The Conservatives won both Pakefield seats in Suffolk in 2021, but lost one to Labour at a by-election held on general election day 2024. Reform secured almost half the vote in this second vacancy.

While Reform is taking seats from Labour and the Conservatives, its gains from the Liberal Democrats are fewer. One such was Middlesbrough's two-member Nunthorpe ward. Elected as a

Liberal Democrat-Conservative split in 2023, the by-election saw Reform squeeze both parties and secure a narrow 13-vote win.

Reform also gained two former Independent seats – Hunstanton in King's Lynn and West Norfolk, and Belmont in South Kesteven.

The Liberal Democrats recorded two gains from the Conservatives in Devon – Torrington's Winkleigh ward and Seaton in East Devon. In both cases, the Conservative vote was reduced by Reform's presence.

Seat exchanges in the opposite direction remain rare. However, the resignation of a Liberal

## By-election results

### Blackpool, Greenlands

REF GAIN FROM LAB  
21.8% over Con | Turnout 24.7%

### Broxtowe, Stapleford South East

BROX ALLIANCE GAIN FROM LAB  
12.8% over Ref | Turnout 28.2%

### Darlington, Red Hall and Lingfield

REF GAIN FROM LAB  
20.3% over Con | Turnout 27.5%

### East Devon, Seaton

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON  
11.7% over Ref | Turnout 33.4%

### Harborough, Logan

CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM  
19.9% over Lib Dem | Turnout 30.5%

### Kings Lynn & West Norfolk, Hunstanton

REF GAIN FROM IND  
3.7% over Lib Dem | Turnout 33.0%

### Middlesbrough, Nunthorpe

REF GAIN FROM LIB DEM  
0.8% over Lib Dem | Turnout 35.8%

### South Kesteven, Aveland

REF GAIN FROM CON  
1.4% over Con | Turnout 35.7%

### South Kesteven, Belmont

REF GAIN FROM IND  
0.3% over Con | Turnout 20.9%

### Suffolk, Pakefield

REF GAIN FROM CON  
29.7% over Green | Turnout 22.6%

### Sunderland, Hetton

REF GAIN FROM LAB  
21.2% over Ind | Turnout 29.3%

### Torrington, Winkleigh

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON  
9.5% over Ref | Turnout 41.8%

Democrat councillor in Market Harborough's Logan ward created an opening, which the Conservatives seized with a 20-point swing. ●

Only results where a seat changed hands are shown here. For all the recent local by-election results and additional data, please visit [www.lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections](http://www.lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections)



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