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Shaping the future, not chasing it



Care where we live

LGA consulting on the
Casey commission **p13**

Social cohesion

Building safer and more
resilient communities **p18**

Housing support

Delivering social homes
with confidence **p19**



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Looking to the future

As this edition of **first** was going to press, we were expecting publication of the final local government finance settlement for England. In response to the provisional settlement, the LGA warned that a third of all councils responding to a new survey are likely to have to apply for emergency government bailout agreements (p5).

Adult social care costs remain a significant concern (p4, p9), and the LGA is keen to hear from member councils about how the sector should respond to the Independent Commission on Adult Social Care, chaired by Baroness Casey (p13).

While we react to the immediate pressures facing our members, the LGA is also looking at how we can prepare for the opportunities and risks of the decade ahead, with a new programme called LG Horizons (p11).

Elsewhere in this **first**, we hear about the LGA Independent Group's annual conference (p12), and highlight new guidance on policing crime against elected members (p16), community cohesion (p18), and managing performance, finance and risk (p22). Our comments are from the District Councils' Network (p23), the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (p27), and Tonic, the first LGBTQ+ registered provider of social housing (p29). ●

Councillor Louise Gittins
is Chair of the LGA

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16 **aggression** /əgreʃən/ aggression is a quality of a person that makes you ready to attack. Aggression is by no means a new phenomenon. The raid was an unjustified aggression.

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Councils at the heart of social care reform



Councillor Louise Gittins
is Chair of the LGA

Our adult social care sector is in desperate need of sustainable investment and a proper plan for long-term reform.

The growing cost pressures the sector faces are not new, and the LGA has long argued for adequate and sustainable funding. However, financial investment alone cannot bring about genuine and lasting reform.

Workforce shortages, retention and pay challenges, and complex and lengthy processes, are just some of the daily pressures contributing to the sector's precarious position.

Coupled with rising numbers of people requesting care and support each year, it is clear that urgent action is needed.

It is also clear that councils, as the largest commissioners of adult social care in England, are critical to reforming

and delivering a sustainable sector and a better future for our residents who draw on our care services.

That's why, with Baroness Casey's Independent Commission on Adult Social Care due to make its first report this year, the LGA has launched a series of engagement events for you, our member councils. We want to be ready to contribute to the commission's work, ensuring local government has a strong voice in this important national process.

This is especially so in light of the LGA's projections that one in 10 social care councils faces real-term cuts in spending power in 2026/27 (p5) and proposals for local government to have minimal engagement in the development of a fair pay agreement for care workers (p9).

This is a pivotal moment to influence the future direction of care and support in England, and ensure that it is the best it can be at supporting people to live the independent lives they want to lead.

Local government must be heard – so please engage with us so we can make the strongest case possible to central government on your behalf. ●

● **To find out more, see p13 and visit local.gov.uk/care-where-we-live**



Government gives go-ahead to rent convergence

Councils and other providers of social rent homes in England will be able to increase weekly rents on properties currently let at below the maximum that could be charged, if they were re-let to a new tenant.

The LGA has long called for the reintroduction of rent convergence, to help provide additional support for council housing finances.

The Government has said providers will be able to charge up to £1 per week extra from 1 April 2027, and up to £2 per week from 1 April 2028, to bring rents on some social accommodation into line with the 'formula rent' on similar properties.

Cllr Tom Hunt, Chair of the LGA's Inclusive Growth Committee, said: "This is an important step in the right direction, as more must be done to ensure that all people can live in a safe, warm and decent-standard home. While the phasing of its implementation may impact the delivery of some new homes in the short term, measures within this package will give councils greater certainty and confidence to invest in the long term."

The package also outlines changes to the housing revenue account (HRA) threshold, including that councils won't have to set up an HRA until they own 1,000 homes, up from the current figure of 200.

These changes will help councils deliver new social and affordable homes more easily, said Cllr Hunt, adding: "It will be important that councils are properly funded so they can deliver at scale." See p19. ●



£15bn Warm Homes Plan launched

The Government has launched its Warm Homes Plan, a £15 billion programme to upgrade up to five million homes, offering low- and zero-interest loans for solar panels, heat pumps and batteries.

Ministers say £5 billion will fund free insulation and clean-technology packages for low-income and fuel-poor households, with support for renters and landlords.

The plan aims to cut bills, reduce reliance on fossil fuels and help lift households out of fuel poverty by 2030.

Cllr Arooj Shah, Chair of the LGA's Neighbourhoods Committee, said: "Cold,

damp homes are a serious public health and social issue. Councils are pleased to see the significant investment behind the measures in this plan.

"It is crucial that it is delivered properly and to high standards, with good advice for residents and a workforce with the right skills. Councils are best placed to lead this work locally and target support where it's needed most.

"We need more powers and long-term, devolved funding so we can get on with improving homes and protecting tenants." ●



'1 in 3 councils will need emergency bailout' – LGA

The LGA has called for a significant increase in resources for councils in the final local government finance settlement in England, which was expected to be published as **first** was going to press.

Ahead of its publication, the LGA warned that a third of councils responding to a new survey – and almost half of all social care councils – are likely to have to apply for emergency government bailout agreements to set budgets in at least one of the next three years.

The LGA has previously warned that one in 10 councils with social care responsibilities, and two-thirds of district councils, face real-term funding cuts in the 2026/27 financial year.

Almost six in 10 councils responding

to the LGA survey said it will be fairly or very difficult to set a balanced budget in 2026/27. While eight in 10 feel they will be able to meet their minimum legal duties in 2026/27, this number halves by 2028/29.

More than a third (34 per cent) of responding councils have already applied, or are very or fairly likely to apply, for Exceptional Financial Support in at least one of the financial years between 2026/27 and 2028/29.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "This research underlines the stark reality facing councils. Short-term fixes will not address these challenges. Councils need sustainable funding and reform so they can focus on prevention, growth and delivering the services communities expect." ●

News in brief

SEND spend to double

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said spending on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is expected to more than double in real terms between 2015 and 2028. Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Chair of the LGA's Children, Young People and Families Committee, said: "These findings drive home the need to urgently reform the SEND system. Despite spending increasing massively, the educational attainment of children with SEND has failed to improve, while councils build up huge deficits related to SEND spending."

● See p7

£1.5bn arts funding

The Government has announced £1.5 billion to be invested in cultural organisations over a five-year period. The funding aims to 'help save' more than 1,000 local cultural venues from closure, including arts venues, museums, libraries and heritage buildings across England. Cllr Julie Jones-Evans, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Committee, said: "This investment will help cultural institutions stabilise, address urgent maintenance needs, and begin to plan for growth rather than simply survival."

Measles-free status lost

The World Health Organization has confirmed that the UK no longer qualifies as measles-free, after a sustained rise in cases and declining vaccination coverage. Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "Councils are working with the NHS, GP surgeries, schools and early years settings to support the uptake of the MMRV vaccine. They will continue to play a central role in providing trusted information... so that more children are protected from preventable illness."

News in brief

MAT inspections

Government plans to introduce inspections of multi-academy trusts (MAT) “will support improvement in educational standards, the identification and resolution of patterns of concern, and enable greater learning between trusts”, according to Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Chair of the LGA’s Children, Young People and Families Committee. She said it was “right that multi-academy trusts are subject to inspection” to highlight the work of the best trusts and ensure all children are receiving an excellent education, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.

Housing and homelessness

With the number of households in temporary accommodation now exceeding 132,000 – the highest level since records began – and 9,292 people estimated to be sleeping on the streets, the LGA has launched a new housing and homelessness hub for councils. Highlighting good practice in the delivery of affordable housing and the tackling of homelessness, the hub brings together real-world case studies, showcasing successful interventions, partnerships and strategies that can be adapted to different local contexts.

See local.gov.uk/housing-and-homelessness-hub

WLGA leader

Cllr Andrew Morgan OBE, Leader of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), has confirmed his intention to step down as Leader of Rhondda Cynon Taf Borough Council next year and as WLGA leader. Cllr Morgan, who has been at the helm in Rhondda Cynon Taff for 12 years, is the longest-serving council leader in Wales.

‘Integrated services support child development’ – LGA

New LGA-commissioned research has found that integrated local services are crucial to meeting the national ambition for 75 per cent of five-year-olds to reach a good level of development (GLD) by 2028.

The findings follow a report from the Commons’ Health and Social Care Committee, which found that babies and young children in England have some of the worst child health outcomes in Europe and called for increased recruitment of health visitors.

The LGA research engaged with 60 council areas. It revealed that, while multi-agency working helps identify children who may otherwise fall through gaps, progress is being held back by workforce shortages, uneven access to high-quality early years education and childcare, inconsistent data sharing and funding disparities.

Councils have developed local models that bring together maternity, health visiting, social care, family help, libraries, public health and mental health support. But with 78 not receiving Healthy Babies (Start for Life) funding, thousands of families are missing out on vital perinatal mental health, infant feeding and early intervention programmes.

Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Chair of the LGA’s Children, Young People and Families



Committee, said giving every child the best start in life “cannot be achieved without continued workforce investment and development”, including health visitors and early years professionals, to build sustainable and equally accessible services.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA’s Health and Wellbeing Committee, said councils are “committed to delivering tailored and preventative services to support the needs of local children and families. However, we have serious concerns that this is undermined by the Government’s decision not to extend Start for Life funding for enhanced services to councils newly joining the Best Start Family Hubs programme.

“Without equitable funding, the promise of Family Hubs and achievement of our GLD targets cannot be fully realised.” ●

Children placed in ‘illegal’ care homes

Nearly 800 vulnerable children in England have been placed in illegal care homes, raising serious concerns about their safety and wellbeing, according to a report by MPs on the Public Accounts Committee.

Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Chair of the LGA’s Children, Young People and Families Committee, said: “With more children needing help with increasingly complex and challenging needs, what is most important is ensuring they get the best care and support. No council wants to place a child in an unregistered setting, and it is

extremely concerning that, in many cases, a lack of choice means provision is not fully meeting children’s needs.

“The astronomical cost of care placements also means there is less money available for councils to spend on earlier support for children and families.

“It is vital that the entire sector works together to ensure that we have enough homes that can meet children’s needs. This includes central and local government, Ofsted, the NHS and providers in all sectors.” ●

Minister discusses Schools White Paper

School Standards Minister Georgia Gould OBE attended the LGA's Councillors' Forum in January, to talk about special educational needs and disabilities provision, and the forthcoming Schools White Paper. The minister recognised the powerful examples of local collaboration and leadership in delivering specialist support and inclusive provision close to communities, and acknowledged the challenges councils, schools and families are experiencing, which the upcoming proposals would seek to address. She committed to returning to the Councillors' Forum once the reforms were announced. ●



Georgia Gould addresses the Councillors' Forum in London in January

Special needs teacher training announced

The Government has announced a £200 million teacher training programme to support pupils in England with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

New courses will be available to all teaching staff to improve knowledge on how to adapt their teaching to meet a wide range of needs in the classroom, such as visual impairments and speech and language needs.

There will be a new expectation set out in the SEND Code of Practice, stating that every nursery, school and college should receive training on SEND.

Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Chair of the LGA's Children, Young People and Families Committee, said: "It is vital that our education system becomes more inclusive, so that more children with SEND can attend their local mainstream school.

"For this to happen we need a workforce that has the capacity and right skills, and this investment will help support that.

"We look to the Government to follow up this positive announcement soon, with a Schools White Paper that sets out how the SEND system will be transformed to meet children's needs more quickly and fix the failings of the current system." ●



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Councils 'could face insolvency' over SEND deficits

As first was going to press, an announcement was expected on how ministers plan to deal with councils' mounting deficits in respect of costs for supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in England.

Ahead of that announcement, the LGA reiterated its call for high-needs deficits to be written off, as it published a new survey in which four in five responding councils with SEND responsibilities warned they will otherwise become insolvent.

Councils are currently able to keep high-needs deficits off their main balance sheets through a temporary accounting mechanism known as a 'statutory override'.

The survey found 95 per cent of responding councils had high-needs dedicated schools grant deficits.

With the override due to end in March 2028, when the deficits would move onto councils'

books, 79 per cent of councils responding to the survey said they will not be able to set a balanced general fund budget in 2028/29.

The Office for Budget Responsibility has forecast that councils' cumulative high-needs deficits will reach £14 billion by the end of 2027/28. The LGA is calling for the deficits to be written off, or else risk undermining councils' ability to plan sustainable services and improve outcomes for children and families.

The challenges within the SEND system are not just financial, however.

The forthcoming Schools White Paper "must deliver brave and bold reform, where more children are able to get the support they need in a mainstream school, without having to go down the route of needing a statutory plan", said Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Chair of the LGA's Children, Young People and Families Committee. ●

News in brief

Pavement parking

The Government is to introduce new legal powers for councils in England to issue fines for pavement parking – something for which the LGA has long called. The move aims to make pavements safer and more accessible for disabled people, those with mobility issues, parents with pushchairs and older residents. Cllr Tom Hunt, Chair of the LGA's Inclusive Growth Committee, said: "Pavement parking is one of the most complained about issues... [these powers] must be accompanied by requisite resources to implement and enforce effectively."

Disabled facilities grant

The Department of Health and Social Care has provided an extra £50 million for distribution to councils for essential home adaptations for disabled adults and children. Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "Home adaptations funded through the Disabled Facilities Grant enable people to manage their health and wellbeing at home, prevent hospital admissions... and avoid premature moves into residential care."



Digital inclusion 'needs national coordination'

Councils are working to improve digital inclusion, but progress is being hampered by funding challenges and a lack of national coordination, says LGA research.

Its Digital Communities Survey gathered responses from 83 English councils to understand how local authorities support residents who face barriers to digital access and skills.

The survey found that financial pressures are the biggest barrier, cited by 77 per cent of respondent councils, alongside issues such as staff capacity.

Conducted in autumn 2025, the research also shows that more than half (56 per cent) of respondent councils have at least one member of staff responsible for digital inclusion, with many providing services such as public Wi-Fi, skills training and

one-to-one support. Nearly half (49 per cent) reference digital inclusion in their digital strategy, while 13 per cent have a dedicated digital inclusion strategy.

The survey found that only 24 per cent have elected members with digital inclusion in their portfolio.

Cllr Dan Swords, Chairman of the LGA's Public Service Reform and Innovation Committee, said: "Digital inclusion is fundamental to unlocking inclusive growth and ensuring no one is left behind in a rapidly changing economy.

"Councils are doing everything they can to support residents, but they cannot do this alone. We need a coordinated national approach and sustainable funding to match the scale of the challenge." ●

● See p10

Funding for road maintenance

The Government has published an interactive local road-maintenance ratings map, showing how 154 English highway authorities are performing when it comes to repairing potholes and maintaining roads, grading them on a red, amber or green scale.

The scheme, backed by £7.3 billion over the next four years, aims to make progress more transparent and to incentivise councils to invest in long-term preventative maintenance, rather than

reactive patching. The ratings draw on road-condition data, reported spend and adoption of recognised best practice, and can be viewed on the Department for Transport's online map.

While the LGA said the additional funding was positive, it urged caution over the centralised assessment approach.

Cllr Tom Hunt, Chair of the LGA's Inclusive Growth Committee, said long-term funding certainty is helpful, but "it is up to local communities

to say how well their council is running local services through local democracy".

He added: "Councils face a £17 billion backlog of road repairs. Only longer-term funding certainty will help

councils plan more effectively for future maintenance schemes – focusing on preventative measures, which will ultimately save the taxpayer money – and invest in innovation." ●

Pothole data

The AA attended 613,638 pothole-related incidents in 2025 – an average of more than 1,600 a day, according to data released by the breakdown company, underscoring the ongoing issue of road maintenance and safety. The LGA stressed that councils take road maintenance responsibilities seriously, but face "ever-increasing pressure on budgets" that limits their capacity to do more. Sustained investment and innovation are key to tackling road wear and tear, it added.

Rail to power northern growth

The Government has launched a new Northern Growth Strategy, with Northern Powerhouse Rail at its heart.

The Treasury has allocated £1.1 billion over the current Spending Review period, with the first phase of the programme delivering improved rail connections between Sheffield and Leeds, Leeds and York, and Leeds and Bradford.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "Transport infrastructure is absolutely vital for unlocking growth, and strong, well-planned networks are the backbone of inclusive, sustainable and thriving local economies. These announcements are therefore very positive for local authorities in the North.

"To ensure this major investment maximises the potential for economic expansion in the region, councils in the North stand ready to work closely with central government, mayors and regional partners to deliver these opportunities for local communities.

"The Government must now pull all levers to see this through to delivery.



"This announcement builds on recently published LGA-commissioned research, which underlines the pivotal role councils play in driving inclusive growth and reveals there is £276 billion of untapped local economic opportunity ready to be unlocked by tackling local barriers and investing in stronger, place-based strategies." ●

Fair pay agreement for social care 'unworkable'

The Government's proposed adult social care Fair Pay Agreement (FPA) will be unworkable without full, sustainable funding and meaningful local government involvement, the LGA has warned.

The Government has allocated £500 million for the first FPA in England in 2028, drawn from an existing £4 billion package that includes income from council tax rises. However, with 1.6 million adult social care workers potentially in scope, the LGA argues this funding is insufficient and risks increasing pressure on already overstretched services.

In its submission to the consultation on the adult social care FPA, the LGA is calling for full central government funding to cover all costs – implementation, legal liabilities and administrative burdens – and for direct local government representation

on the Adult Social Care Negotiating Body.

Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA's Local Government Resources Committee, said: "Improving pay in adult social care is a vital step towards securing long-term sustainability for the sector and its workforce. However, the current funding proposal is not likely to be sufficient to cover the full cost of an FPA and councils cannot be expected to fork out for the additional costs associated with implementation.

"Local government has a critical role in adult social care for local people, but is proposed to have minimal engagement in the development of an FPA. It needs to be part of decision-making to avoid a scenario where the introduction of an FPA jeopardises the supply of care and the sustainability of council finances." ●

News in brief

Graduate recruitment

Councils are being urged to sign up to Impact, the LGA's flagship graduate programme, before the 27 February deadline. The programme recruits talented graduates who can meaningfully contribute to strategic projects and support host authorities to be future-focused through change. A record number of applications were received from graduates keen to kickstart their careers in local government, creating a real opportunity for councils to take part and maximise placements. Get in touch via impact@local.gov.uk and visit www.local.gov.uk/impact-local-government-graduate-programme-councils to find out more.

Postponed elections

Twenty-nine council elections in England will be postponed this May as part of the Government's plan to reorganise local authorities, the Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary, Steve Reed, has confirmed. While the majority of elections will proceed as scheduled, the postponements affect several city, county and district councils, with councillors' terms extended until elections are held in 2027 for the new unitary authorities.

AI training

Hundreds of free online AI courses will be made available to every adult in the UK under



a government scheme involving firms such as Google and Microsoft, with 14 industry-benchmarked courses offering digital badges on completion. The LGA, alongside the NHS and British Chambers of Commerce, will promote the training, which aims to reach 10 million workers by 2030.

High-speed digital

The key to inclusive growth



Digital connectivity underpins almost every aspect of modern life, from economic productivity and public services to education and healthcare. Yet the UK risks falling further behind global competitors unless long-standing gaps in mobile and broadband coverage are tackled and the digital landscape is fundamentally reformed.

This is the central warning from a new report from the Digital Communities All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), for which the LGA provides the secretariat.

The APPG highlights that an ongoing lack of mobile and broadband coverage in parts of the country is undermining national ambitions for economic growth, social inclusion, and global competitiveness.

As a cross-party group of parliamentarians, its mission is to champion the creation of digitally equipped places that support connected, healthy and productive communities.

Its latest report – ‘Reconnecting Britain: restoring trust, connecting communities

“Every £1 invested in digital inclusion delivers a return of £9.48 to the wider economy”

and driving inclusive growth’ – calls on the Government to commission an urgent, independent review of the UK’s digital connectivity landscape. It also urges stronger regulatory scrutiny by Ofcom, more strategic investment in connectivity as a driver of economic growth, and decisive action to encourage competition and innovation.

Helen Morgan MP, Chair of the Digital Communities APPG, said: “People in areas with persistently poor broadband or mobile coverage are left at a digital, social and economic disadvantage, and risk losing out on opportunities for skills development, employment and community engagement.”

She added that an independent review is essential “to restore trust, ensure

transparency and unlock the full potential of our economy”.

The report acknowledges that while progress has been made in expanding digital infrastructure, the UK risks falling behind other countries unless adoption of high-speed broadband and 5G networks accelerates.

In particular, it highlights previous sector research showing that the successful adoption of 5G and full-fibre could deliver gains worth more than £200 billion by 2035.

However, current coverage data relies heavily on operator-supplied modelling, which often fails to reflect real-world experiences and has led to policy decisions that do not align with actual need.

Across the UK’s digital infrastructure, there are significant structural barriers that stifle innovation, including inefficient planning processes and outdated legal frameworks.

Breaking down monopolies and fostering a level playing field will be critical to accelerating rollout and closing the digital divide.

Local government also has a critical role to play. The report calls on local authorities to streamline planning processes, simplify pre-application costs for mobile infrastructure, and revise pricing models to reflect the realities of different types of infrastructure and ownership.

Local government should audit existing connectivity levels, identify priority areas for investment, and must work closely with local skills providers, education institutions and industry to build a strong digital skills pipeline.

The potential rewards are substantial. Sector research highlights that closing rural connectivity gaps alone could generate an additional £19 billion in annual tax receipts and every £1 invested in digital inclusion delivers a return of £9.48 to the wider economy.

The challenge is significant, but without reliable access to high-speed digital services, the UK cannot meet its economic ambitions or deliver truly inclusive growth for the communities it serves. ●

i To read the APPG report in full, please visit bit.ly/4ak2mTG
See also www.local.gov.uk/parliament

LG Horizons

Shaping the future, not chasing it

Local government is at a pivotal moment. We're managing real pressures today, working within a tighter financial framework that was shaped 15 years ago.

But we also need to look ahead: where will we be in the next 15 years?

While we focus on immediate demands, the world around us is shifting – through neighbourhood renewal, the prospect of widespread unitary reorganisation and the emergence of a stronger regional tier of governance. These forces often pull in different directions.

Many residents value the traditions and identities that define their communities, yet increasingly expect modern, seamless services and smarter use of technology.

Balancing both sets of expectations grows more complex every year.

It's in this demanding environment that the LGA has launched LG Horizons – a two-year programme designed to help councils look beyond immediate pressures and actively prepare for the opportunities and risks of the decade ahead.

I see how difficult it is for councils to carve out time for long-term thinking when short-term pressures are relentless. Yet we're working within a public service model built for a different era, which isn't equipped for the demands of the 2030s and 2040s.

If we rely only on incremental change, we risk entrenching systems that are already outdated and missing wider shifts – such as climate change, demographic pressures, rising complexity of need and technological change – that will shape what communities need in the decades ahead.

LG Horizons gives councils space to step back and consider the bigger picture.

As we look ahead to 2040, what big changes will shape local government? How will the role and purpose of councils need to evolve? What needs to be in place for real, lasting change? How should councils rethink their relationships – with



Councillor Dan Swords is Chair of the LGA's Public Service Reform and Innovation Committee

“We risk entrenching systems that are already outdated and missing wider shifts that will shape what communities need in the decades ahead”



residents, partners and government? Through research, workshops and practical tools, LG Horizons creates a space for councils to explore these questions together.

Councils have been clear: we need support that goes beyond managing continual crises. We need the insight and head space to understand where the sector is heading and to influence the reforms that will shape our future.

LG Horizons aims to build futures capability across councils, share evidence and intelligence, and provide future-focused peer support – strengthening decision-making today while helping build more resilient communities for tomorrow.

A flagship part of the programme, LG2040, brings together councils, place-focused organisations and leading thinkers to explore the forces that will shape local government over the next 15 years.

The 2040 horizon is deliberate: far enough away to rise above day-to-day pressures, but close enough to inform the choices we're making now.

Crucially, LG2040 goes beyond visioning. Later phases will turn long-term thinking into practical, near-term decisions on service design, investment and local priorities.

LG Horizons also provides a platform for the LGA to amplify the voice of local government in national reform – ensuring councils help shape change, rather than simply adapt to it.

At a time of significant uncertainty, LG Horizons offers something essential: the ability to look ahead, understand what's coming and shape the future of local public services proactively.

As council leaders, we have a responsibility not only to manage today's pressures, but also to prepare confidently for the world our communities will inherit. As part of this work, we warmly invite you to an LGA Smith Square Debate, 'LG2040: the state of things to come' on 26 March, when we'll explore these long-term challenges and opportunities in more depth. It's an important chance for leaders from across the sector to shape the conversation – and the future – together.

For more information, contact lghorizons@local.gov.uk. ●

A tapestry of resilience

Hope and collaboration at Independents' conference



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

The LGA Independent Group Annual Political Conference 2026 was a powerful affirmation of hope and our political dynamism.

Our theme for the conference was 'Resilience for councillors, community and place' and, with this golden thread, over the two days we explored practical pathways to sustain ourselves, our councils, and the people we serve.

We examined finances, as our councils continue to navigate financial pressures

that often test our ability to deliver for our residents and communities.

We demystified artificial intelligence and digital transformation, so we can proactively shape technology to build resilient, connected communities.

We thought about climate change and our role in community engagement, understanding and leadership.

We reflected on resilience in our personal wellbeing, because the work we do is demanding, often emotionally heavy, and sometimes lonely – but we have to remain effective and still human in demanding times.

We considered the need for local leaders to understand and support their communities' mental wellbeing amid unprecedented global change, reinforcing that healthy communities start with supported leaders.

We heard about the LGA's work on social cohesion and resilience, and what we as councillors can do.

We took some time to share our thoughts on electoral resilience in this time of political pluralism, ensuring our democratic structures remain robust.

We concluded by looking forward,

imagining how we can build a world where future generations thrive, weaving every theme into a unified vision of hopeful and sustainable futures.

The real success of events such as these are the opportunities to share ideas, knowledge and personal experiences, not just being informed, but connected and inspired.

One delegate shared that when they had arrived at the conference, they had felt tired and emotional but were leaving excited and hopeful.

Resilience is not an abstract concept but the lived reality for many Independent and Green councillors – especially as they hold fast to their values when the political winds blow hard, recognising their courage to be distinctive voices in their councils.

I'd like to thank the amazing speakers who supported our event, including: Jo Wall, Senior Strategy Director at Local Partnerships; Matt Masters, Executive and Leadership Coach from the consultancy Truth about Local Government; Edward Davie from Better Mental Health Training and Tower Hamlets Council; Nadeem Siddique, Head of Service Community Relations and Cohesion at Leeds City Council; Dr Padi Obani, University of Bradford; Pam Duke, LGA Finance Improvement and Sustainability Associate; Cllr Dr Paul Harvey, Leader of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council; Justin Griggs, Head of Policy and Communications at the National Association of Local Councils; and Rob Hopkins, author and co-founder of the Transition Network.

We also had great support from several members of staff who shared how the LGA can continue to support our members.

The success of the 2026 LGA Independent Group Annual Conference was that in this time of uncertainty, a theme emerged: resilience is woven from strong collaboration, deep community bonds and our shared belief in the power of local government to deliver for our communities. ●



To find out more about the work of the LGA's Independent Group, please visit [local.gov.uk/political/lga-independent-group](https://www.local.gov.uk/political/lga-independent-group)

Care where we live

Councils' role in a reformed adult social care system



Councillor Dr Wendy Taylor MBE is Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee

At its best, adult social care helps ensure that people can pursue the things that matter most to them.

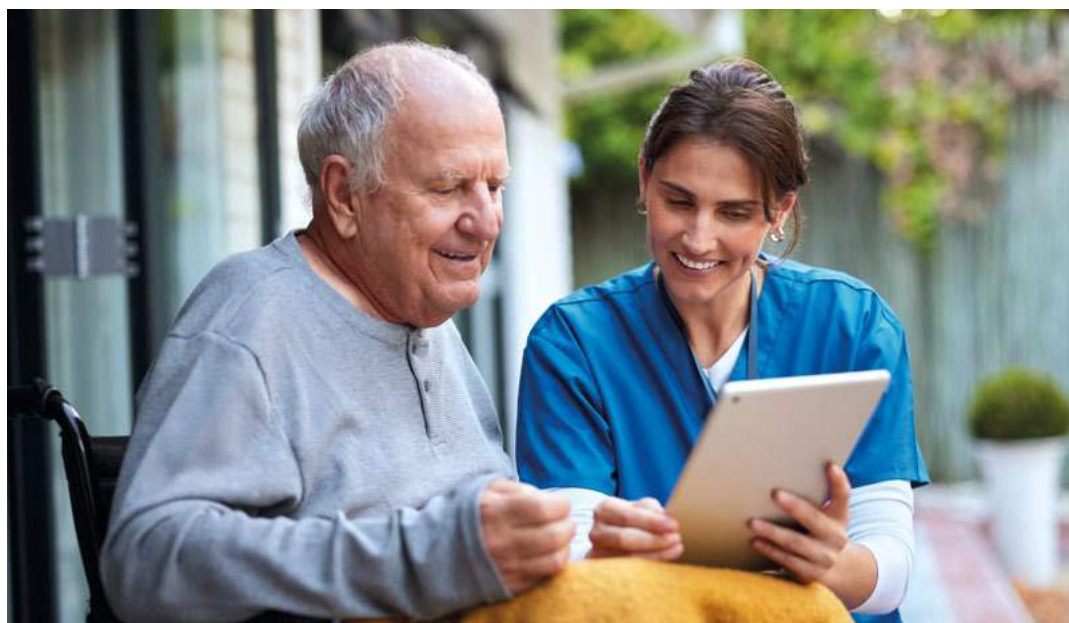
Yet we, as councils, know first hand that so often the system is unable to be the best it can.

More than two million requests for adult social care were made to councils in England in the past year alone, with subsequent services and support costing nearly £25 billion.

With a system that is too often hard to navigate and is experiencing workforce shortages alongside significant long-standing funding issues, it is clear there is a strong need for system reform that is rooted in prevention and personalised care to secure a sustainable future for all of us.

As the largest commissioners of adult social care in England, local authorities are a central part of this future. Any reform of the current system will depend on local government leadership, capacity and legitimacy.

This is why we are launching a series of conversation events



on the role of local government in a future system of adult social care.

This will help ensure that we build a strong, clear and collective response to the Independent Commission on Adult Social Care chaired by Baroness Casey.

Councils, frontline workers, sector stakeholders and people who draw on care and support, are strongly encouraged to share their views on six key questions at the heart of the debate about the future of the sector, including responsibility, commissioning and oversight, health and care integration, deliverability, and sustainability.

The LGA is hosting a series of online and in-person conversation events during February and March where local authority voices can have their say on the future of adult social care and how we can best support people to

live the lives they want to lead.

This is our chance to ensure the voice of local government is heard and fed directly into the Casey Commission and government thinking.

The voice of lived experience has long been vital to our work on adult social care, so we will be engaging closely with people who draw on care and support.

The main channel for people to share their thoughts and views is on our online conversation platform, available on the LGA's website at the link below. Here, local authority and sector voices can share anonymously their first-hand experience, local knowledge and understanding of the challenges and opportunities in adult social care.

Nearly all of us will need to draw on adult social care at some point in our lives or have a loved one who does.

This engagement process is therefore about ensuring local government has all it needs to enable people who draw on care and support to live the independent and dignified lives they want to in the places they love.

Everything is in scope, and nothing is off the table. So, I strongly encourage all councils to take part in this process – and encourage their local partners to do the same – so we can shape a strong and clear response to the Casey Commission together. I look forward to our conversations and to working together at this pivotal moment. ●

i Our first online event is on 25 February. To find out more, sign up and share your views, please visit [local.gov.uk/care-where-we-live](https://www.local.gov.uk/care-where-we-live)

Better health for all

Local leadership in action



Councillor Dr Wendy Taylor MBE is Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee

Public health in 2026 will feel less like a new agenda and more like a year of delivery.

This is the year when local government's convening power, commissioning responsibilities and place-based leadership will determine whether national ambition turns into tangible gains in our local communities.

The Covid Inquiry's Module 10, 'Impact on society', opens public hearings in mid-February, reflecting on the social, economic and health consequences of the pandemic. Its earlier reports have already concluded that the UK response was "too little, too late", citing unclear governance and poor communication across the country.

The practical implications for 2026 are likely to focus on how we embed

local public health expertise in national emergency frameworks, clarify accountability and ensure preparedness is sustainably funded rather than improvised in crisis.

Legislation is also shifting the ground. The Tobacco and Vapes Bill, having cleared critical Commons' stages in March 2025 and currently progressing in the Lords, will begin to reshape the retail and promotional environment this year.

Bans on vape advertising, sponsorship and vending machines start to roll out in 2026, with ministers retaining powers to regulate flavours, packaging and displays, and expand smokefree places, via secondary legislation.

From 1 January 2027, the 'smokefree generation' provision will also make it illegal to sell tobacco to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009.

Meanwhile, the 10 Year Health Plan for England is being put into operation through the NHS's medium-term planning framework for 2026/27 to 2028/29. It sets clear trajectories for elective recovery, urgent and emergency care, and cancer pathways, while pushing systems to rewire governance, finance and patient experience.

The promise of neighbourhood health – delivering more care at home or closer to home – is starting to materialise through



virtual wards and integrated teams, with new national frameworks supporting local adaptation. The test for 2026 is whether these shifts are felt by patients and frontline staff, not just recorded in board papers.

On funding, the Government has confirmed a three-year multi-year settlement for public health, providing a consolidated public health grant of £13.45 billion over the Spending Review period. The grant will remain ringfenced for exclusive use on public health, with additional service-specific ringfences for smoking cessation and drug and alcohol treatment funding.

As **first** was going to press, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) was due to publish the annual public health ringfenced grant circular for local authorities, setting out detailed allocations and guidance.

The DHSC's local authority peer review and external support offer is also due to go live in 2026/27, delivering 90 peer reviews over three years, universal toolkits and rapid improvement support.

In addition, NHS England's neighbourhood health guidance sets out the integrated approach between integrated care boards, councils, public health, social care and providers that many places have been developing, now with a clearer national scaffold.

There are moments this year that invite reflection as well as action, as 2026 is a centenary year for some formative public health debates and instruments.

These include: the 1926 Commons' debates on birth control and the legality of



Strengthening local leadership

The LGA and ADPH Public Health Conference 2026

Later this month, councillors, directors of public health, other senior colleagues and stakeholders, and their teams, will come together for the 2026 public health conference – a three-day online event focusing on issues shaping the health and wellbeing of local communities.

The conference, delivered by the LGA in partnership with the Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH), highlights the central role councils play in creating the conditions for good health – from planning and housing to early years support and public health services.

Last year, more than 1,200 delegates registered for the event across the three days, underlining how valuable this space is for colleagues across the country.

For councillors, it provides the insight, ideas and networks to strengthen their leadership at a moment when



local action will help shape the direction of public health in the years ahead.

The programme for 2026 has grown in response to extraordinary demand, with more than 90 expressions of interest for sessions – a clear sign of how important this moment feels across local government and public health.

The opening session will set the tone for the whole conference, with speakers – including Liverpool's Director of Public Health, Professor Matthew Ashton – discussing how councils can

lead neighbourhood-level health improvement.

The second day explores the broader policy environment that councils are navigating. A session on English devolution asks whether current reforms can genuinely help reverse inequalities or whether deeper structural issues risk being overlooked.

Planning is another major theme: attendees will hear about the role of the National Planning Policy Framework in managing the impact of fast-food outlets, while a practical

session led by colleagues from Watford and Hertfordshire will explore how healthy and safe places can be embedded into local planning strategies.

The third day begins with a forward-facing discussion on the implementation of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which is particularly relevant for councillors preparing for new local responsibilities around enforcement and population-level prevention.

Mental health also features strongly, with speakers from local government and the Centre for Mental Health sharing what has worked in improving mental wellbeing at community level.

The final day of the conference features a keynote from Public Health Minister Ashley Dalton and ADPH President Greg Fell, who will reflect on national priorities and how central government intends to support local areas in strengthening prevention and resilience.

“The test for 2026 is whether these shifts are felt by patients and staff”

contraceptive information, which framed early state engagement with reproductive health; and the Ministry of Health's use of provisional orders to enable rapid local interventions in housing, sanitation and health.

Fifty years ago, in spring 1976, the UK Government published 'Prevention and health: everybody's business'. It was a landmark discussion paper, calling for a shift from cure to prevention and urging action on smoking, diet, inactivity, alcohol, obesity and sexual health.

These anniversaries underscore how today's arguments about the balance between individual agency, public interest and local powers are not new; they are chapters in a long story of public health negotiating science, values and the tools of government.

Local government and the LGA will not be spectators when it comes to improving the public's health. Councils will be the enablers of national ambition through trading standards enforcement, commissioners of public health services and leadership of integrated neighbourhood health models. They will need to plan for multi-year public health grants, and embrace peer review as a tool for improvement and champion equity.

The LGA's task is to amplify the local voice, shape the improvement framework, and support members with practical guidance and advocacy.

In short, 2026 is the moment to demonstrate that prevention, resilience and health equity are built from the ground up, and that strong, well-resourced local public health leadership is the key to turning policy into impact. ●

i The LGA/ADPH Annual Public Health Conference 2026, 'Better health for all – local leadership in action', takes place virtually from 24-26 February. To find out more and book your place, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events

Policing crime against elected members

New LGA guidance sets out support for councillors

Protecting councillors and other locally elected representatives from intimidation, harassment and violence is essential to local democracy.

Operation Ford is a new policing provision aiming to strengthen protective security and policing support for councillors, elected mayors, police and crime commissioners (PCCs) and candidates for these roles.

Each police force now has at least one 'force elected official adviser' (FEOA) who will be responsible for delivering Operation Ford and coordinating responses to security concerns related to locally elected roles.

The FEOA also supports nationally elected politicians with their security, under Operation Bridger.

The FEOA: provides briefings on personal security to councillors, PCCs, mayors and candidates; helps coordinate relevant intelligence on threats or risks



to elected officials in local areas; and, during elections, will liaise with council returning officers to offer candidates timely security advice.

The FEOA is not responsible for taking reports of, or investigating, crimes. Crimes must still be reported via 999,

101 or online, making clear that the incident is an 'Operation Ford' incident. This allows for appropriate triage and response to the incident through the usual mechanisms, as well as ensuring the FEOA is aware that an Operation Ford incident has been reported.

It can be challenging for councillors to know when they should report an incident or safety concern to the police, their local authority and their party. However, if a councillor or member of staff believes that a criminal offence has been committed, they should report it as soon as possible.

In particular, councillors should contact the police and make a report if the following behaviours are present:

- communications, online or offline, contain excessive abuse or threatening language
- repeated unwanted contact that may constitute harassment or stalking
- sexist, racist, homophobic or other discriminatory abuse and threats.

Case study

Middlesbrough Council

Middlesbrough Council identified the risk of lone working and personal safety within its councillor community, and explored ways to provide more support, focusing on wellbeing and post-incident aftercare.

The council has a robust health and wellbeing package that it offers to council colleagues, which has been extended to councillors.

In addition, it provides councillors with: free-of-charge access to mental health professionals through a therapy network, to help them process and recover if an incident occurs; one-to-one space for private discussions, to decompress and work out a preventative approach to emerging issues; and wellbeing and mental health training, to help ensure councillors are resilient and prepared for their activities in the community.

- See bit.ly/4c78i4G to find out more.

‘Red flag’ indicators that may signal an escalation should be brought to the immediate attention of the local police force – for example:

- threat of imminent violence
- fixation on you
- access to weapons and weapons skills
- the release of information about you that is not already in the public domain.

After an incident, councillors should first make sure they are safe (if not, call 999).

Try to keep a record of the incident (for example, retaining documents posted through your letterbox or screenshotting emails), flag concerns with council officers and, where relevant, speak to peers to gain support and to understand

“Local authorities should develop mechanisms to flag issues proactively or reactively with policing colleagues as part of wider intelligence gathering, as well as with members”

if the issue is also affecting other councillors – pointing to a wider issue.

Different councils will have different processes in place for dealing with abuse, intimidation and harassment of elected members.

Monitoring officers or democratic service managers are often the first port of call for councillors experiencing these issues; however, some councils have a specific reporting process. It’s vital to understand what the local reporting system is and how to access it when needed.

After reporting an incident, officers may be able to provide advice about actions to take, which may or may not involve the police or the FEOA.

Councils have a role in supporting councillors at risk of or experiencing threats, intimidation, harassment or other forms of abuse, including where these incidents may be criminal and/or create concerns about risks to the physical or mental health of the elected member.

The LGA provides a range of resources for councils to assess and review the

Case study

Leeds City Council

Councillors represent their local communities, and spend much time engaging with residents through ward surgeries and other community and council events. Sometimes these can lead to challenging conversations and, occasionally, aggressive encounters. It is important that councillors feel equipped to manage this, including taking preventative steps to limit the risk of serious consequences.

Leeds City Council’s Health and Safety Team supports councillors to assess the suitability of venues they use for ward surgeries, to ensure they are safe and to find appropriate alternatives if necessary.

This involves a premises risk assessment, using the skills and competencies of council officers, which provides valuable information on conducting public meetings safely in that specific environment – even including a suggested seating plan and guidance on what equipment to use.

- See bit.ly/3O2MVaU to find out more.

Case study

Cardiff Council

Cardiff Council developed two lone-working solutions for councillors, supplemented by bespoke training to raise awareness of personal safety measures and suggest preventative actions to avoid confrontational situations, including tactics for de-escalation.

The first solution is a smartphone app that registers the councillor’s location and estimated meeting time, provides a notification either to the councillor’s selected contact or to the police in an emergency, and records the conversation – allowing emergency services to assess what level of response is needed.

The second solution is a discreet, physical, lone-working device, installed behind an ID card on a lanyard, which is easier to access in an emergency than the smartphone app, but works in a similar way.

The council has learned how critical recurrent training is and identified that, although technology can provide a great safety net, preventative training is essential to avoid or de-escalate difficult situations.

- See bit.ly/3ZHmMRs to find out more.

support they provide to councillors – including good-practice guidance, case studies and a self-assessment tool – as part of its Debate Not Hate campaign (see www.local.gov.uk/debate-not-hate).

Effective Operation Ford support can include maintaining and sharing FEOA contacts, having a simple route for reporting incidents, and clear responsibilities, roles and expectations for dealing with incidents.

Local authorities will have a good grasp of issues or announcements that are likely to cause concerns, sometimes ahead of publication. They

should develop mechanisms to flag issues proactively or reactively with policing colleagues as part of wider intelligence gathering, as well as with members, who should be supported to manage their public engagement around contentious issues.

Wellbeing support may be equally as important as policing action.

Political groups or parties may be able to provide mentoring or buddying support, and some councils make counselling support available to councillors through their employee assistance programme (see case studies above and opposite). ●

i This is a summary of the LGA’s ‘Must know: Operation Ford and policing crime against elected members’, which can be downloaded for free, in full, at www.local.gov.uk/publications

Social cohesion

Cohesive communities are safer and more resilient



A new guide to social cohesion for councils was launched late last month by the LGA, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Belong Network, a non-government organisation focused on social cohesion.

‘Common ground: building cohesive communities’ was funded by MHCLG, which will also support online training events for members, executive leaders and lead officers in England in the next couple of months, organised by the LGA and delivered by Belong.

Speaking at the launch, Miatta Fahnbulleh, Minister for Devolution, Faith and Communities, welcomed the guidance as “a practical toolkit grounded in evidence and real-world practice – to help councils and communities build a future of trust and belonging in every neighbourhood”.

The guidance comes at a time when many councils are looking for practical ways to strengthen trust, connection and

“Social cohesion is not self-sustaining – it has to be actively nurtured – and councils cannot do this alone; partnership working is essential”

resilience in their communities. Cohesive communities are safer, more resilient communities, better able to withstand shocks and respond to tension before it escalates.

The guidance has sections on developing a social cohesion strategy, partnerships and partner organisations, the role of councillors, addressing challenges and making the strategy sustainable.

Throughout, it recognises that social cohesion is not self-sustaining – it has to be actively nurtured – and that councils cannot do this alone; partnership working is essential.

It is not intended to be prescriptive, recognising that every place is different and that councils will draw on the tools that best fit their local context.

There are in excess of 70 case studies, highlighting good practice from Doncaster to Devon and Cornwall, drawing on Belong’s consultations with more than 150 organisations and shaped by an expert reference group of seven local authorities.

Kelly Fowler, Chief Executive of the Belong Network, said: “Councils have told us they need clear direction, practical guidance and a shared approach with partners – helping ensure social cohesion is truly everyone’s business.”

The MHCLG grant was also used to provide training on misinformation and disinformation to more than 500 officers via a series of online regional events, with a further session for members in the autumn.

MHCLG has awarded the LGA and Belong £500,000 for further cohesion-related work in the coming year.

To complement this work, the LGA’s Culture, Tourism and Sport Committee has published its new guide – ‘The role of sport, arts and culture in supporting community cohesion’.

This was commissioned by the committee after the disorder in England in summer 2024 and following feedback from member councils that culture had, or could have, a protective factor in some areas. The guide explores how this has been achieved and the new approaches being taken. The 10 councils interviewed were a mix of those who had disorder and those who didn’t.

Speaking at the launch of ‘Common ground’, LGA Chair Cllr Louise Gittins said: “Social cohesion is about place-making, and it is council services that contribute towards a shared sense of belonging.

“This practical guide will help support councils to go beyond statutory duties, work in partnership and build resilient, connected communities in which everyone can thrive.” ●

Go to [local.gov.uk/publications](https://www.local.gov.uk/publications) to download ‘Common ground: building cohesive communities’ and ‘The role of sport, arts and culture in supporting community cohesion’

Housebuilding support service

Delivering more social and affordable homes with confidence



Councillor Tim Pickstone is Vice-Chair of the LGA's Improvement Committee

We all know that housing is one of the issues residents frequently raise with councillors.

In some places, the pressure to deliver new homes is immediate and visible. In others, conversations about building can be more contested and complex.

But wherever we serve, delivering more social and affordable council homes has become a central challenge for local authorities of all political colours.

That is why the LGA has been working with councils in England through the Council Housebuilding Support Service (CHoSS) – a national, sector-led programme designed to help councils strengthen the capacity, confidence and leadership needed to deliver new homes for their communities.

CHoSS exists to support councillors and councils to lead housing delivery in a way that reflects their local priorities and political context – helping councils turn ambition into action, whatever stage they are at.

Set against the Government's ambition to deliver 1.5 million new homes this Parliament, CHoSS is fully funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and delivered by the LGA through a sector-led improvement model, by which councils

can access bespoke support at no cost.

For many councillors, the challenges to delivery will already be very familiar, emerging through conversations with officers about stalled schemes, stretched capacity, or the long-term risks and rewards of building more homes locally.

Since CHoSS was announced at the LGA's annual conference last July, the programme has moved firmly into delivery. We have worked intensively with 10 'vanguard' councils to help shape and refine the offer, and engaged with more than 80 authorities, with tailored support now live or mobilising in a growing number of places.

Councils involved range from those restarting housing delivery after many years, to those looking to scale up or unblock existing programmes.

What we are hearing consistently is that delivering at scale depends on having the right foundations in place: strong political commitment; clear governance; informed decision-making; and the organisational capability to deliver efficiently and sustainably over the long term.

For elected members, this matters. Housing delivery involves long-term investment, managing risk and navigating different delivery models, whether through housing revenue accounts, alternative delivery vehicles or partnerships.

CHoSS supports councils to step back, assess where they are and identify practical next steps that reflect local need

“This is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Councils are using the support in ways that reflect their political priorities, community pressures and ambitions”



while making best use of limited resources.

Crucially, this is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Councils are using the support in ways that reflect their political priorities, community pressures and housing ambitions.

In some areas, the focus is on accelerating delivery; in others, it is about rebuilding confidence, engaging members and laying the groundwork for future decisions.

The programme recognises that housing is political as well as practical, supporting councillors across parties to lead informed, place-based conversations about what delivery looks like for their communities.

Another strong theme emerging from early work is the value of learning from other councils.

Hearing directly from peers who have faced similar challenges – and understanding what has worked in practice – is helping councils move from aspiration to action.

As the programme continues to scale, CHoSS will support more councils to engage, reflect and act confidently, to deliver more homes and stronger communities for local residents. ●

To find out more about CHoSS, please visit local.gov.uk/choss and contact the team at choss@local.gov.uk

Celebrating apprenticeships

Could your apprentice be our 2026 champion?

Councils across the UK have once again been celebrating the apprentices who are helping to shape the future of local government, as part of National Apprenticeship Week (9-15 February).

Since 2020, councils in England have created in excess of 71,000 apprenticeships across more than 200 roles, demonstrating the scale and importance of early career development in the sector.

The LGA continues to support councils to run high-quality apprenticeship programmes, offering funded guidance, peer learning and programme health checks (see bit.ly/4t2i2DD).

This year also marks the sixth anniversary of the LGA's Local Government Apprentice of the Year

event, which, so far, has engaged with 533 apprentices from across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In 2025, more than 70 Level 2 and 3 apprentices took part, in an event focused on the vital theme of housing.

Over an intensive programme of team challenges, problem-solving tasks and networking, participants developed skills that will support them throughout their careers.

“The event continues to grow in reach and ambition, and offers a unique opportunity for professional growth”

Expert mentors guided them through the day, helping them build confidence, leadership capability and a deeper understanding of the sector.

The 2025 title was awarded to Eve Hind, a Level 3 Business Service Apprentice from Durham County Council. Eve took part to push herself outside her comfort zone and embraced the event's housing theme with enthusiasm.

“I was so happy by the end of the event,” she said. “I felt like I had accomplished so much, even just with building my confidence – which was the reason I participated.”

Durham County Council praised Eve's achievement, highlighting the strength of talent emerging through local government apprenticeships.

A spokesperson said: “We are committed to nurturing this potential, which is vital for our council and communities.”

With the success of the 2025 event still fresh, attention now turns to the next cohort of rising stars.

Bookings for the Local Government Apprentice of the Year 2026 are open, and close on 29 April. All Level 2 and 3 apprentices, including those who have qualified within the past 12 months, are eligible to take part.

Delivered in partnership by the LGA, Local Government East and South West Councils, the event continues to grow in reach and ambition, and offers a unique opportunity for professional growth, sector insight and national recognition.

Councils are encouraged to put forward their apprentices and showcase the talent developing within their organisations.

Places are available for £149 per apprentice, offering councils a cost-effective way to invest in their workforce and support the next generation of local government professionals.

As the search begins for the 2026 champion, this is an opportunity to shine a light on local government's emerging talent, helping apprentices take the next step in their careers. ●



To find out more about the Local Government Apprentice of the Year 2026, and to book places, please visit local.gov.uk/AOTY

Building tomorrow's workforce

Helping councils recruit planners and surveyors

Since its launch in 2023, the LGA's Pathways to Planning programme has brought in excess of 200 new planners into more than 100 local authorities in England, strengthening capacity in a profession with long-standing recruitment and retention difficulties.

Pathways to Planning is a government-funded graduate programme aimed at recruiting a diverse pipeline of talent into built environment careers in local authorities, statutory consultees and councils hosting nationally significant infrastructure projects.

This year, for the first time, the programme has expanded to deliver two pathways for employers – helping them recruit not just planners, but also surveyors.

The existing planning stream delivers graduates who train as planners or specialise in an adjacent discipline, such as architecture or ecology, to build speciality knowledge within a planning team.

A new dedicated surveying stream will deliver graduates to work as surveyors in local authorities, including in construction project-

management roles. Graduates on the surveying strand will train on a part-time Master's degree – selected by the employing local authority to meet their service needs – in either general surveying or construction project management, accredited by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

Participating councils receive a bursary of £10,000 per Pathways to Planning graduate, to help cover the cost of course fees. Support for the costs of employing a graduate is also available.

Local authorities with high housing delivery and local plan needs will be considered for salary bursaries when requesting a graduate planner. Bursaries valued at £40,000 per graduate are still available, and the programme offers increased support based on high planning need and organisational financial restrictions.

The surveying strand also has a limited number of £40,000 salary bursaries available to councils employing graduate surveyors and construction project managers. Applications for funding are made as part of



a council's application to the graduate scheme.

As councils across England continue to face acute workforce shortages and rising expectations for high-quality planning and development outcomes, the Pathways to Planning programme has become a critical sector intervention.

Planning capacity challenges are well documented: 91 per cent of planning departments report recruitment difficulties, while 72 per cent report retention challenges.

Findings from the LGA's 'Local government capacity survey: building control' demonstrated that one in four building control posts across England was vacant as of 1 October 2023, rising to one in three assistant or trainee

surveyor posts (see www.local.gov.uk/publications).

Pathways to Planning offers a more sustainable and financially resilient method of building in-house expertise.

Over time, supported graduates strengthen organisational development, reduce turnover and enable better workforce planning.

The next cohort of graduates will start work in September 2026 and can be hired into graduate planner and/or graduate surveyor roles.

Local authorities and statutory consultees have until the end of February to apply to hire a graduate. If you're interested in finding out more, visit local.gov.uk/pathways-planning-council-info or contact pathways.planning@local.gov.uk ●

Performance, finance and risk

The importance of an integrated approach

Local authorities want to make the best use of financial, performance and risk information to inform decision-making and, ultimately, to achieve better outcomes for residents and businesses in their communities.

Performance, finance and risk are closely connected: an authority that is performing well but that is financially unsustainable will not usually be able to maintain that performance level for long, and will be building up other risks.

Poorly managed risks are likely to lead to increased costs, poor performance and reputational damage in the longer term.

So, a decision that balances all three dimensions effectively is more likely to be robust.

Integration of performance, finance and risk reporting isn't an end in itself. But by achieving greater integration, authorities should be able to take better informed, more evidence-based decisions and build assurance in the right places and at the right times, by taking more targeted actions to address areas for improvement.

Considering risk, cost and desired performance levels can help inform difficult decisions.

Most authorities have a corporate plan that outlines their vision for the place, usually setting out some key financial and performance metrics associated with that plan.

Few will explicitly consider risk as part of that plan, yet all three dimensions are essential in 'telling the story' about the place – in other words, does the corporate plan and budget reflect the authority's risk appetite?

This isn't just relevant for the process of reporting information, informing decisions or formally seeking assurance; a good performance management culture can mitigate risk.



If there is a culture in which officers are encouraged to look for opportunities to learn and continually improve, they are more likely to flag current or potential problems.

Conversely, a culture of blame or mistrust can lead to issues being hidden, and risks growing until it's too late to address them without significant cost.

Senior managers should expect to be challenged – constructively – about their understanding of the data, risks and their actions to address any underperformance or non-delivery of savings.

A 'learning organisation' will also regularly review the effectiveness of its approach.

Elected members have a vital role to play in an integrated approach to performance, finance and risk, and should be meaningfully engaged throughout the process.

They should: understand the level of detail and style of presentation that works best for them, with opportunities for feedback to inform continuous improvement; inform the selection of key performance indicators; and meaningfully

challenge assumptions about relative risks – for example, when considering decision reports at cabinet and when reviewing the authority's strategic approach to risk at audit committee.

Scrutiny functions and the audit committee are vital components of the authority's governance framework – they help to keep it safe.

An understanding of areas of high risk or high spend will help inform the focus of 'deep dives' for scrutiny (to inform policy development or performance review) or for audit (to check the effectiveness of risk management), particularly when resources for this work are constrained. ●

i This is a summary of the LGA's 'Performance, finance and risk reporting: guidance and top tips', which can be downloaded in full, for free, at local.gov.uk/publications. It contains additional advice on what 'good' looks like, good decision-making and data, and includes council case studies and links to additional resources and support



**Councillor Richard Wright
is Leader of the
District Councils' Network**

Local government reorganisation challenges us all. The deadlines are daunting, the process is complicated and the workload is immense.

However, we must not lose sight of the fact that we are being presented with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rethink local government.

The onus is on us all to build new councils in our places that support our communities even more effectively.

A parallel challenge exists for sector bodies such as the District Councils' Network (DCN). We're proud of our work supporting our members, but with district councils – like county councils – due to disappear, we need to radically adapt as our member councils change.

We are rethinking our offer to reflect the needs of an all-unitary English local government. This is an opportunity to devise an even better system of sector support that helps councils and their communities through the challenges of the coming decades. We're up for the mission!

Some may ask 'why DCN?' The trust, insight and political neutrality that are the cornerstones of DCN's approach remain as relevant as ever in the new landscape.

The practical support that we offer has never been more valued by our members than



Rethinking local government

during the process of local government reorganisation – it will be equally essential for new unitary authorities.

Councils, whether district or unitary, may be distinct, sovereign organisations, but they operate best when they share expertise with peers, including through bodies such as the DCN.

Councils need support as they navigate devolution, seek to reform public services, and transform both themselves and their places.

Our aim is to be councils' trusted transformation partner – the home of shared learning and advice. We are enthusiastic proponents of transformation and possess an

innate optimism about what it can achieve.

While new unitary councils will be bigger than existing districts, the concept and value of place must remain integral to local government.

It's our role to articulate, defend and help modernise the role of councils, the democratic leaders of place. Devolution will fail if it's just about strategic authorities or mayors, neither of which have localised footprints.

Strong empowered councils are essential. Our role is to help give councils the confidence to operate alongside mayors, strategic authorities and central government in the new landscape.

We intend to carry forward DCN's policy and advocacy work, which brings results.

There was a strong example of this at the end of January, when the Government agreed to implement a measure on which we've long lobbied – to reduce the red tape thwarting council housebuilding.

DCN has led the campaign to raise the threshold at which councils must set up a housing revenue account from 200 to 1,000 homes. Our success has the potential to bring about thousands of new homes for those who need them most.

I'm proud of what DCN has achieved for our members. A new version of our organisation can achieve even more in future.

We're keen to work with new councils, to support them and share expertise and wisdom as we face unprecedented levels of change together.

Together, we're stronger. At times of change, the need for strength has never been greater. ●

“It's our role to articulate, defend and help modernise the role of councils”

GROUP LEADERS



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

Emissions costs for waste incineration

The Government's plans to plough ahead with its Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) will have dire consequences for councils.

For those who haven't heard of this, let me explain in short. The aviation industry currently forks out cash for the carbon emissions it emits and this is set at a standard market price.

The Government plans to expand this to other sectors, including waste incineration, which will clearly have a direct impact on councils.

"This will cripple our councils with responsibility for waste disposal"

With the support of the LGA Conservative Group, the LGA has pulled the numbers together and we believe this will hit local government to the tune of £747 million in 2028 alone and a further £1.1 billion by 2036.

The unavoidable costs for waste incineration services will just be passed onto councils.

Previous spending reviews have failed to acknowledge the direct impact on local government.

To that end, the LGA, through its Neighbourhoods Committee, and alongside other local authorities, has formally written to the Government asking for a review of the ETS implementation date and for a delay until there is a genuine commitment that councils will be recompensed for these costs.

Without it, I fear this will cripple our councils with responsibility for waste disposal. Plus, I am concerned about the unintended consequences: increases in fly-tipping, reduction in recycling rates, fewer household recycling centres – this could spiral out of control very quickly.

Separately, I am delighted to see that the LGA and the Conservative



frontbench team in the House of Lords have backed Lord Richard's amendment to the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill.

It will place a legal duty on public service providers such as utility companies to meet with strategic authorities to discuss issues of contention within local communities.

I sincerely hope the Government will accept it so it becomes part of the bill as we head into report stage.

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



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

Local government at the spring conferences

By the time you are reading this, we will be at our Liberal Democrat spring conference in York, where local government will be central to the party's debates.

Peter Taylor, the elected Mayor of Watford, has been lined up to give a speech that is expected to draw on his reputation as one of the most skilled campaigners in the party, against both

the Tories and Labour, as evidenced by the recent by-election victory in Watford's Tudor ward.

The conference will debate a long-overdue policy paper on regeneration and revitalising our high streets and town centres. This comes at just the right time, as the Government plans to announce its vision for the high street.

We should be proud and celebrate the successes of our councils, such as Sutton, Eastbourne and Portsmouth, in providing new homes, creating new community spaces, investing in the public realm and reinventing spaces for leisure at the heart of their vision for their areas. Such spaces are the engine rooms of our villages, towns and neighbourhoods, and we will do all we can to avoid them dying.

We expect local government finance and the crisis councils face to be highlighted, with colleagues from Somerset and Woking discussing the

"There is nothing fair about the Fair Funding Review 2.0"

catastrophic messes they inherited from former Tory administrations, which Liberal Democrat councillors are now sorting out.

Zöe Franklin MP, our Local Government Spokesperson, will no doubt also continue to remind us very strongly that there is nothing fair about the Fair Funding Review 2.0.

It isn't how you divide up the cake – the cake isn't big enough without a major overhaul of support for special educational needs and disabilities, and the funding of adult social care.

This Government just avoids and delays dealing with the issues, kicking the can down the road and leaving it for our grandkids to solve the problems.



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

Committed to a genuine partnership

Once again, Labour councillors from across England and Wales came together on the second weekend of February for our annual Labour Local Government Conference in Warwick.

We were proud to be joined by ministers from across government, including Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Steve Reed and Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister Darren Jones.

Continuing their commitment to a genuine partnership between central and local government, Labour ministers met leaders from every region of the country to discuss working together to deliver this Government's Plan for Change.

Attendees also took part in a variety of training sessions, from campaigning to casework and, importantly for current times, staying safe and well as a councillor.

"Labour councils are strengthening the sense of connection that people feel towards their communities"

At conference, the LGA Labour Group launched our new publication, 'Pride in your place: Labour, community and civic pride'. This collection of essays reflects on the importance of restoring civic pride, and the work that Labour councils are doing to strengthen the sense of belonging, pride and connection that people feel towards their communities.

You can download a copy of the publication from the LGA Labour Group's website (see local.gov.uk/political/lga-labour).

Thank you to all those who made our conference such a success. We look forward to seeing you again at Labour Local Government Conference 2027.



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

Developing democracy and future leaders

As we begin the year, the decision to delay some of the local elections has given many of us pause for thought.

Elections are never just a procedural detail. They shape how accountability is felt, how trust is built and how communities stay connected to the people who represent them.

"Democracy remains strongest when the people within it are supported, resilient and valued"

While this delay brings uncertainty, it also gives us a moment to reflect on how we sustain democratic engagement and support councillors who continue to serve without the certainty of a fixed electoral horizon.

Democracy remains strongest when the people within it are supported, resilient and valued, and that matters now more than ever.

That support of councillors is a key element of the LGA, and I'm especially looking forward to joining our current Next Generation cohort at their weekend final module.

Having graduated from the programme myself many years ago, I know how powerful it can be. I am still in touch with many of my colleagues on that programme, and we have all progressed in our local government careers.

Seeing a new cohort of talented, passionate and community-driven members step forward gives me genuine hope. They will learn from outstanding trainers and practitioners, building the confidence, skills and networks that will shape their leadership for years to come.

GROUP LEADERS



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

Postponed elections subvert democracy

We now know which councils will go ahead with their elections.

Despite the concerted effort by central government to subvert democracy, our Reform UK council candidates stand ready and waiting for the elections that are happening on 7 May.

However, huge swathes of the country will not be having their elections as planned. Millions of people who were looking forward to the opportunity to exercise their democratic right to vote have now been blocked from doing so.

This has been a crisis in democracy.

The majority of councils where elections are now postponed are Labour authorities, using this as an opportunity to escape accountability and to continue their administrations without a fresh mandate.

"People have been blocked from exercising their democratic right to vote"

Within the LGA, our Reform UK political group office has been a single voice against this.

For those councils where elections are going ahead, this will be an opportunity for people to make their voices heard: not just for themselves, but for fellow citizens who have been denied their votes by Labour and Conservative council leaders, and the Government that has agreed.

Democracy is too precious to ignore their actions.

Reform UK has now had the opportunity to show what they are capable of. Our council leaders up and down the country have delivered for local people. It is now up to voters to send a clear message. ●

first

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

But did you know that we publish all the stories from the magazine online each month, at www.lgafirst.co.uk? If you're not already receiving it, you can also sign up for our fortnightly **first** e-bulletin, which links to key stories on the website, at www.lgafirst.co.uk/subscriptions



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

Twenty-five years of scrutiny



Ian Parry is Director of Governance Services at the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

The Local Government Act 2000 marked one of the most significant shifts in English local democracy since the 1970s.

Replacing the age-old committee system with an executive model for most councils, it separated executive decision-making from scrutiny for the first time – with most councils setting up overview and scrutiny committees in 2001.

At the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), we've been along for most of the ride. Established in 2003, our role has been to support councils to deliver effective scrutiny and governance. So, how is scrutiny holding up after its first 25 years?

In many ways, it's come a long way.

Devolution, partnership working, integrated care systems and sustained financial pressure have reshaped the role of councils and how decisions are made.

Scrutiny has had to evolve, increasingly operating across organisational boundaries and examining whole systems, rather than individual services.

In many councils, scrutiny has become embedded as a constructive and respected part of decision-making, delivering real impact on policy making, and improving services.

But we should acknowledge that progress hasn't been uniform.

Scrutiny was envisaged as a driver of community voice and forward-looking policy development, but it has also been associated with post-decision review or weak, 11th-hour, pre-decision scrutiny.

While partnership working has grown, scrutiny's powers and practices have not always kept pace with the complexity of the systems being governed.

These lessons matter as local government enters another period of structural change, which offers a rare opportunity to rethink how accountability



“Too often in the past, scrutiny has been ‘bolted on’, after constitutions and executive arrangements were settled”

and democratic oversight are designed from the start.

Too often in the past, scrutiny has been ‘bolted on’, after constitutions and executive arrangements were settled.

Now, with local government reorganisation, there's a chance to do things differently: to embed clear expectations about scrutiny's independence, ensure it is properly resourced, and to design arrangements that are capable of examining whole-place systems as well as council services.

That will require the status, capacity and skill sets to match the ambition.

So, if the first 25 years of scrutiny were about making the model work, the next

phase must be about making it matter – consistently and visibly – and to drive forward its powers and practices.

This will be one of the conversations we will bring to our annual conference in March, where we'll mark 25 years of overview and scrutiny and the Local Government Act 2000.

The conference will reflect on how far scrutiny has come and explore what the next five, 10 and 25 years should look like for local democracy.

At a time of local government reorganisation and reform, it will offer a timely space for councillors and officers to share learning and help shape the future of effective scrutiny. ●

i The CfGS annual conference, ‘Learning from yesterday, leading for tomorrow’, is on Thursday 12 March at Millennium Point, Birmingham. Find out more and buy your ticket at cfgs.org.uk/home/cfgs-annual-conference-2026

Building a father-friendly borough



Councillor Annetonette Bramble (Lab) is Deputy Mayor of the London Borough of Hackney

“When my son was born, everyone asked how his mum was doing. No-one asked how I was coping. I didn’t think I was allowed to struggle, so I just stayed quiet.”

That sentiment, shared by a father during Hackney’s Perinatal Mental Health and Parent–Infant Relationship Needs Assessment, captures what approximately 1,000 fathers told us.

Fathers want to be involved, supportive and present, but too often feel invisible in services

promoted for families and, in practice, designed around the needs of mothers and children by default.

In response, Hackney is taking a system-wide approach to becoming a father-friendly borough, embedding father inclusion across children and family hubs rather than treating it as a specialist add-on.

The needs assessment provided a clear mandate: if we want better outcomes for children and families, fathers must be actively welcomed, engaged and supported.

Hackney’s response includes a newly developed Father Friendly Charter, which sets clear expectations for how services engage fathers, from first contact through to safeguarding and data collection. Alongside this, a

‘tiered peer-support model’ enables fathers with lived experience to contribute safely and meaningfully to service design, engagement and delivery.

For many fathers, the impact is tangible. One dad told us: “The first time someone said, you matter here too, it changed everything. I started showing up more, not just for my child, but for myself.”

This work is already driving change. Services are redesigning environments, communications and appointment systems to include fathers, while peer-led approaches, such as Fathers



Circle, are building trust with men who are least likely to engage with statutory services.

Hackney’s experience shows that father inclusion is not symbolic. It is a practical, evidence-led approach that strengthens early help, improves paternal mental health and supports healthier relationships for children. ●

Find out more about Hackney’s offer for fathers at anntaylorcfhub.hackney.gov.uk/father-friendly-borough-1

Domestic abuse: changing behaviours



Kuljit Sandhu is Chief Executive Officer of RISE Mutual CIC

People can make meaningful changes to their lives – even after causing harm to those closest to them.

Domestic abuse exists in every community and must be tackled with equal seriousness wherever it occurs. Yet, as councils know, this is far easier to say than to deliver in practice.

RISE Mutual Community Interest Company works with

councils, police forces and other authorities, designing and delivering programmes to support those who have caused harm to change their behaviour, while prioritising the safety and needs of those impacted by domestic abuse.

One of those programmes – the Culturally Integrated Family Approach (CIFA) to domestic abuse, coordinated by Barnet Council – has supported 1,003 service users from 10 (and counting) London boroughs since launching in 2021.

CIFA’s key feature is its ability to adapt to marginalised or overlooked groups, including those requiring interpreter support, exploring how

gender, race, sexuality, health, neurodivergence, immigration status and other factors shape people’s experiences.

CIFA works, through tailored one-to-one programmes, with people who have caused harm and victim-survivors.

Supporting both groups is essential to victim-survivor safety, given that they may remain in contact or even in the same household.

A new evaluation by the University of Kent and Hearth Consultancy provides evidence for significant improvements in service users’ ability to take responsibility and to react safely to situations.

One told researchers how useful it was to have space to discuss masculinity outside his community.

Another, a refugee, was now openly challenging

gendered norms and traditional expectations, having been supported to understand how western expectations differed from his country of origin.

Victim-survivors reported feeling safer and noticing significant changes in those who had abused them previously.

The financial case is compelling: for every £1 invested in CIFA, £39.16 is saved through reduced costs for police, justice, health and other services.

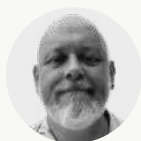
If you want to discuss reducing the harm caused by domestic abuse in your area, we’d be delighted to talk. ●

To find out more, please visit risemutual.org



Terry Stacy MBE (l), Chair of Tonic Housing, with Tonic supporters Lorraine Shears and Paul Symes at Pride in London 2025

An LGBTQ+ 'first' for housing



Terry Stacy MBE is Chair of the Board of Tonic Housing

It was the warm July evening of London Pride last year when we received the news that Tonic Housing is now officially the UK's first LGBTQ+ registered provider of social housing.

After four years of dedicated hard work to reach this goal, we unintentionally had the perfect celebration lined up.

Tonic secured a £5.7 million loan in the spring of 2021, from the Mayor of London, to enable the purchase of 19

apartments at Bankhouse, a riverside extra-care retirement scheme in Vauxhall, south London.

Sales of one- and two-bedroom shared-ownership homes began in summer 2021 and affordable rentals were launched in autumn 2024.

We are now fully occupied at Tonic@ Bankhouse, with 17 shared-ownership apartments sold, enabling us to pay back the Greater London Authority loan in full. The remaining two homes have been let to older LGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness.

Originally provided through a partnership with housing association Riverside, these tenancies are now held directly by Tonic – a UK first for an LGBTQ+ housing provider and a sign of what's to come.

Tonic has created a unique offering of housing with care that celebrates LGBTQ+ identities, with the community at the very heart of their homes, so no-one else has to go back in the closet as they get older.

We co-create events and activities with residents based on their interests, including collaborations with other LGBTQ+ organisations and support providers.

We offer accommodation and safe social spaces where older LGBTQ+ people are supported, gain life-affirming social connections and access culturally appropriate services.

We are driven by the demand of older LGBTQ+ people for better choices in housing, support and care, recognising that 'a one-size-fits-all' approach does not meet the needs of diverse communities.

As a registered provider, Tonic can now expand its impact by directly delivering social and affordable homes, and accessing new development, investment and partnership opportunities.

This status is a springboard for growth, enabling Tonic to meet the urgent and growing demand for housing that affirms and supports older LGBTQ+ people across the UK, especially those from intersectional marginalised backgrounds.

Tonic's expansion comes at a critical moment.

Our 'Precarious lives' report, published last year, revealed the severe financial hardship, isolation and health inequalities facing older LGBTQ+ people in London – challenging the myth of the 'affluent gay retiree'. With high rates of poverty, disability and limited support networks, the need for LGBTQ+ affirming, affordable housing is clear.

Becoming a registered provider enables Tonic to meet this need at scale, delivering homes that offer not just safety, but dignity and belonging.

Our vision is bold: a future where LGBTQ+ affirming housing is no longer the exception, but a normal part of communities across the country. ●

i To find out more, please visit tonichousing.org.uk. Terry Stacy is also Head of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group Office

Multiple challengers affecting election outcomes



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

The first by-elections of the year suggest a continuation of the 2025 pattern when new records were set.

A key feature of last year was multiple challengers; in more than a third of cases, ballot papers listed between six and eight candidates.

The average percentage of vote share

required to win a seat dropped to just 44 per cent, and more than a handful of seats saw the winner poll less than three in 10 votes.

Results were often close. The long-term average percentage gap between first and second-placed candidates is 21 per cent, whereas last year's average saw the margin of victory fall to just 16 per cent.

More vacancies than ever before (80 per cent) arose because of the incumbent's resignation rather than death or disqualification, although half of this very small sample of January by-elections followed the death of a sitting councillor.

Already, some councillors in areas affected by local government

reorganisation and the postponement of elections have resigned in protest. If others were to follow, it could lead to a higher number of by-elections than is usual.

By-election results and national polls agree that support for both major parties is hovering around the 20 per cent mark, eclipsed by Reform UK's momentum and its ability to win seats even in areas it has not contested before.

The Liberal Democrats are not immune, as the result in Gosport's Bridgemary ward attests. This is normally a contest between the defending party and the Conservatives. Reform contested for the first time, squeezed all of its competitors (especially the Conservatives), winning



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





a 43 per cent share of the vote and a winning margin of just 29 votes.

Amber Valley's last five by-elections have seen seats change hands. The latest district seat to switch is Codnor, Langley Mill & Aldercar ward.

In 2023, Labour took control of the council after benefiting from a split that saw Conservatives defect to Reform. But that dynamic has now been replaced with falling support for both major parties and a Reform gain courtesy of a 22 per cent swing against Labour.

The second by-election in Amber Valley was for the county division of Horsley. Reform gained control of Derbyshire last May, winning 42 of 64 seats.

The party retained Long Eaton North division in a December by-election but lost Horsley to the Greens, although retaining much of its previous vote share.

The drop in the combined share for Labour and the Conservatives mirrored the rise for the winning Green candidate.

Both of these contests saw the first candidates standing for Advance UK, formerly the Integrity party, led by Ben Habib, a former deputy leader of Reform UK.

The district council contest produced the better result with the new party taking third place and one in eight votes. A feature of coming months may be the battle for votes between Reform and Advance.

An excellent example of what can happen when multiple candidates challenge is the by-election in Flintshire's Leeswood ward.

The vacancy arose after the death of Labour's Ray Hughes, a veteran of 50 years' service in local government.

Eight candidates contested the vacancy, including Flintshire People's Voice, a group that split from Labour. Whether a consequence of this schism or not, Labour's vote fell, pushing it from first to fourth place.

Reform's Kristian Salkeld withstood the competition from two Independents for

his victory. The winner's share was just 22.3 per cent of the poll, with 25 votes separating the first three home.

The Rissingtons, a ward in Cotswold District Council, is normally an example of cooperation between the Greens and Liberal Democrats. Both parties contested the 2015 election, won by the Conservatives.

In 2019, when the Greens captured the seat, and again in 2023 when they retained it, the Liberal Democrats stood aside.

This vacancy saw cooperation suspended. The effect was dramatic, with the Green vote falling from 57 per cent to just 5 per cent (from first to fourth place) while the Liberal Democrats won the seat convincingly with 37 per cent from a standing start. ●

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

By-election results

<p>Amber Valley, Codnor, Langley Mill & Aldercar REF GAIN FROM LAB 27.4% over Lab Turnout 18.3%</p>	<p>Cotswold, The Rissingtons LIB DEM GAIN FROM GREEN 6.2% over Con Turnout 42.8%</p>	<p>Flintshire, Leeswood REF GAIN FROM LAB 3.1% over Ind Turnout 44.0%</p>	<p>South Norfolk, Central Wymondham CON HELD 5.2% over Green Turnout 37.6%</p>
<p>Cheshire West and Chester, Willaston and Thornton CON HELD 36.6% over Lab Turnout 42.7%</p>	<p>Derbyshire, Horsley GREEN GAIN FROM REF 8.1% over Ref Turnout 29.4%</p>	<p>Gosport, Bridgemary REF GAIN FROM LIB DEM 2.0% over Lib Dem Turnout 32.0%</p>	<p>York, Heworth LAB HELD 16.6% over Ref Turnout 31.6%</p>



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Building lasting futures locally