

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

# first

Local  
Government  
Association

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# Care where we live

## King's Speech

Implications of new  
legislative programme **p11**

## Planning reforms

Creating communities,  
not just homes **p16**

## Elections preview

Multi-party politics makes  
results tough to call **p30**

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## Democracy in action

**Good luck to everyone** standing for election, or helping run council ballots across England or Senedd elections in Wales.

In this month's **first**, Professors Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher warn that multi-party politics is making it harder to call the results on 7 May (p30).

The LGA offers peer support and training for councillors and officers navigating changes in political control and leadership roles (p14).

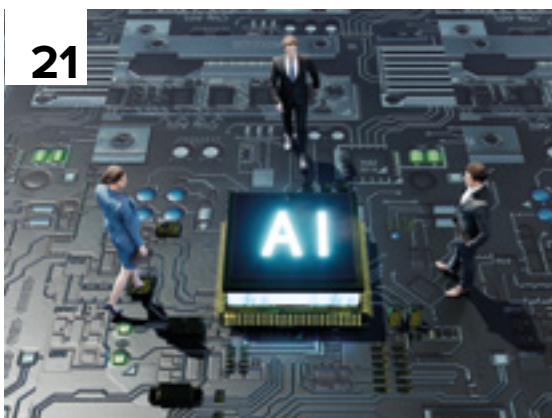
The elections will be swiftly followed by the King's Speech – we have predictions for future legislation affecting councils (p11) – and the UK's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum in Leeds, where I will lead an LGA team showcasing local leadership and supporting councils to unlock investment (p15).

We have some interim findings from our 'Care where we live' conversations with the sector, which will help shape the LGA's response to Baroness Casey's Independent Commission on Adult Social Care (p12).

You can also read about the LGA's response to major reforms of the planning system (p16), including on proposed geographies for producing spatial development strategies (p18).

Elsewhere, we look at police governance (p19), the responsible use of AI in public services (p21), and our media campaign to increase court fines for fly-tipping (p22). ●

**Councillor Louise Gittins**  
is LGA Chair



## FEATURES

- 12 Adult social care**  
Findings from LGA engagement
- 14 Post-election support**  
Peer mentoring central to LGA's offer
- 15 Local leadership**  
Helping councils unlock investment
- 16 Planning reforms**  
Creating communities, not just homes
- 18 Keeping it local**  
Council expertise and regional planning
- 19 Police governance**  
Getting the balance right for communities
- 20 Fire and rescue services**  
Navigating change, risk and reform
- 21 Trusted and safe**  
Leading responsible use of AI
- 22 Fly-tipping fines**  
Media campaign drew national attention
- 23 Strategic authorities**  
New devolution and LGR resources

## COMMENT

- 25 Challenge and change**  
Standing up for local government
- 28 Windrush scandal**  
New council network to provide support
- 28 Serial flooding**  
The health impact on residents

## REGULARS

- 04 LGA chair's comment**
- 04 News**
- 10 Parliament – Armed Forces**
- 11 Parliament – King's Speech**
- 26 LGA group leaders**
- 29 Local by-elections**
- 30 Local elections preview**



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# Elections and appointments



Councillor Louise Gittins  
is Chair of the LGA

**I am pleased** to confirm that Jenny Rowlands has been appointed as the LGA's Interim Chief Executive.

Jenny will join us on 11 May, leading the organisation during the absence of our current Chief Executive, Joanna Killian. Joanna continues to have the full support of the LGA, and we will continue to offer her that support during this time away.

Alongside her many leadership roles – most recently as Chief Executive of Camden Council – Jenny has significant experience supporting councils through improvement and recovery, and has been influential in shaping new approaches to sector-led improvement nationally.

She also brings valuable insight into the future of place-based policy and public service reform, at a time when the LGA and the sector are both entering a period of significant change.

Jenny's appointment comes at a critical

time for us as an organisation and she will provide much-needed continuity, stability and strategic direction as we continue to deliver our priorities, support our members and take forward the LGA's own transformation. I look forward to working with her.

For now, with local elections looming on 7 May, I wanted to acknowledge what an important and demanding time this is for council teams, and how grateful I am for the professionalism shown across local government.

The LGA is here to support councils at every stage, both in the lead-up to polling day and after, providing practical guidance and resources for members and officers, alongside induction and development programmes for new and returning councillors (see next month's **first**).

This includes tailored support for councils experiencing changes in leadership or governance arrangements, and peer support and sector-led improvement to help navigate transition effectively (see **p14**).

Our aim is to ensure continuity, stability and strong local leadership, so councils can continue delivering for their communities during this period of change and beyond. ●



## Tributes paid to first LGA chair

**Tributes have been** paid to Lord Jeremy Beecham, the LGA's first chair, who died in April, aged 81.

Lord Beecham (Lab) was first elected to Newcastle City Council in 1967, aged 22. He went on to become its longest-serving leader, from 1977 to 1994.

He chaired the Association of Metropolitan Authorities from 1991 and, as such, helped lead the creation of the Local Government Association in 1997 – serving as the new organisation's first chair to 2004 and, thereafter, as an LGA vice-chair.

He was knighted in 1994, became a life peer in 2010, and retired from politics because of ill health in 2022.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "We are deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Lord Beecham, whose long career in local government included 55 years as a councillor in Newcastle and being instrumental to the setting up of the LGA as our first chair.

"He played a pivotal role in shaping the voice of local authorities, and his leadership, vision and unwavering commitment to public service leaves an enduring mark on local government across the country.

"The thoughts of all of us in local government are with his family, friends and all those who had the privilege of working alongside him. His legacy will continue to guide and inspire future generations in local government." ●

## Review into care-leaver deaths

**The Government has** announced a review into the deaths of young people leaving the care system.

The review will be led by experienced social worker Clare Chamberlain and care-experienced author and broadcaster Ashley John-Baptiste.



It was launched following data published in May 2025 that showed 91 notifications of care-leaver deaths in 2024/25, with the majority aged between 16 and 21.

The Government said it was determined to change this as part of wider efforts to improve the lives of young people.

Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Chair of the LGA's Children, Young People and Families Committee, said: "While many people leave care and go on to live happy and fulfilling lives, it is tragic that any young person leaving care dies.

"Councils do everything they can to support all care leavers, providing help with housing, finding a job and financial assistance as they move towards an independent life.

"Councils are ready to play a part in the review to ensure that all care leavers get the support they need and councils have resources to support care leavers and vulnerable children." ●

## Planning reforms 'stop local response'

**Proposed changes to** planning committees could undermine local democratic decision-making, the LGA has warned.

Responding to a consultation from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the LGA said that some elements of the draft regulations risk limiting councils' ability to reflect local circumstances.

It cautioned against a nationally standardised scheme of delegation, arguing that excessive centralisation could weaken accountability to local communities.

The LGA also opposes proposals to impose a maximum size for planning committees, stating that effectiveness is not determined by numbers, and that strict caps could affect political and geographical representation, particularly in larger unitary authorities.

It also called for greater flexibility to allow planning applications with significant local impact to be referred to

committees, even where they fall below national thresholds.

In addition, concerns were raised about the proposed 'gateway test', with the LGA warning that defaulting decisions to officers where agreement cannot be reached risks bypassing democratic oversight.

Cllr Carl Cashman, Vice-Chair of the LGA's Inclusive Growth Committee, said: "While we broadly support the Government's intention to streamline and speed up the planning system, we are concerned these proposals risk eroding the core democratic mandate of planning committees and stop councils from responding properly to local circumstances.

"Councils need to be able to make arrangements that suit their needs... These decisions are best when done at the local level. For these changes to improve the planning system... local government's views must be central." ●

● See p16, p18



## Interim CEX appointed to LGA

**The LGA has** appointed former Camden Chief Executive Jenny Rowlands as its Interim Chief Executive. She will take up the role on 11 May.

LGA Chief Executive Joanna Killian remains on leave for personal reasons and continues to have the full support of the organisation.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "This appointment will ensure stability and continuity of leadership on our priorities and the LGA's Future Operating Model.

"Jenny brings a strong track record of leadership in local government, most recently as Chief Executive of Camden, and has provided improvement support to many other councils. This experience will help ensure we continue to prioritise the needs of our member councils as they face the challenges ahead."

Ms Rowlands said: "I feel privileged to be joining the LGA at such an important time for both the organisation and the wider local government sector.

"Having led councils in LGA membership for many years, I know from first-hand experience how respected the organisation is and the tremendous support it provides to our sector every day.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to join the LGA at a pivotal moment in its own transformation, and at a time when local government is playing an increasingly important role in shaping the future of place-based policy and public service reform." ●

## News in brief

**Call for highways peers**

The LGA has been commissioned by the Department for Transport to deliver a programme of targeted peer challenges in 2026/27. The Strategic Highways Peer Challenge programme aims to support a small number of councils to strengthen strategic alignment, service delivery, and operational leadership and effectiveness of highways maintenance. To support its delivery, we are seeking peers with experience of leading highways services at a senior level. If you are interested in registering to be a peer, please contact your LGA political group office (see [local.gov.uk/political-groups](https://www.local.gov.uk/political-groups)) or Ernest Opuni at [ernest.opuni@local.gov.uk](mailto:ernest.opuni@local.gov.uk)

**Council staff pay offer**

Council employees have been offered a 3.30 per cent pay increase from 1 April 2026. Cllr James Lewis, Chair of the National Employers for local government services, said: “We are acutely aware of the additional pressure this offer will place on already hard-pressed council finances, as it would need to be paid for from existing budgets. However, National Employers believe their offer is fair to employees given the wider economic backdrop.”

**Sector support**

The LGA has launched its Sector Support Programme for 2026/27 for local and combined authorities, funded by the UK Government. The programme includes support on governance, finance and workforce, alongside development opportunities for councillors and officers, and research and data support. See next month's **first** to find out more, or visit [local.gov.uk/our-support](https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support)

# LGA to lead new public health programme

**The LGA has** been chosen to lead a major new public health improvement and support programme for councils in England, funded by the Department of Health and Social Care.

The three-year programme, which includes public health peer reviews, launches in June and will support local public health teams to improve health outcomes for their communities.

Developed in partnership with councils and directors of public health, the initiative will provide a sector-led improvement offer tailored to local needs, and help councils deliver on their statutory duties and public health outcome priorities.

It will support the Government's 10 Year Health Plan for England, in which local government plays a central role.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said:

“Councils are committed to improving the lives of local people across the country through locally tailored services that prevent illness, address the root causes of poor health and reduce inequalities.

“This programme will give councils the space, support and insight they need to celebrate what's working, tackle what's getting in the way and accelerate progress for their communities.

“The LGA's councillor and officer peers are at the heart of the LGA's sector support offers and continue to provide highly valued, expert support. It's about learning together, improving together and unlocking the full potential of local public health.

“We look forward to working with the Government through this programme and more widely to deliver the 10 Year Health Plan for England.” ●

## Councils 'key to women's health'

**The Government has** updated its Women's Health Strategy, which aims to help women access the healthcare they need in England.

The strategy is expected to cut waiting lists for diagnoses and treatment through expanded care in the community, introduce a new standard of care for pain relief during invasive procedures, and link patient feedback to funding for providers.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: “We support the ambition to put women's voices and lived experience at the heart of healthcare.

“Councils have a vital role in improving women's health outcomes through public health, community services, commissioning of sexual and reproductive health services, and wider action on prevention and inequalities.

“Many councils are already working with local partners to improve access to gynaecology, contraception,



menopause support and perinatal mental health services, and to ensure women are listened to and supported throughout their lives.

“We look forward to working with government and the NHS to ensure local government is fully involved in the design and delivery of these reforms, and in championing a whole-system, place based approach to women's health, recognising that housing, employment, education, safety and access to community support all play a critical role.” ●

## Better-connected transport

The Government has set out a long-term plan to deliver simpler, more reliable and better-integrated journeys across England.

'Better Connected: a strategy for integrated transport' was published in April. It outlines a vision for a transport system that aims to 'put people first' and is safe, affordable and accessible, with a strong emphasis on joining up services, improving reliability, and using technology such as integrated ticketing and real-time travel information.

The plan also includes a package of funded commitments aimed at modernising infrastructure and improving passenger experience, while supporting economic growth and access to opportunity.

The LGA has welcomed the focus on integration and partnership working, noting that councils are already collaborating with combined authorities,



operators and technology providers to improve connectivity.

An LGA spokesperson said sufficient and long-term funding certainty will be "vital" to enable councils to deliver resilient and modern local transport networks, adding that improved guidance should help areas realise their ambitions for better-connected services. ●

## Budget challenges 'could impact future housebuilding'

The financial outlook for social housing budgets is beginning to improve, although significant challenges remain that could impact future housebuilding.

That's according to a recent LGA survey of councils with housing revenue accounts (HRAs), which found that fewer councils expect to rely on reserves to balance their HRAs – with 46 per cent anticipating doing so in 2026/27, down from 72 per cent last year.

Confidence in balancing budgets has also increased, alongside a rise in councils reporting they can maintain and repair existing housing stock.

Despite this more positive picture, almost half of councils warned that ongoing budget pressures could affect their ability to build new homes.

The LGA said that, while improvements

are welcome, financial pressures on HRAs remain "acute" and continue to constrain investment in new and existing housing.

The LGA is calling on government to provide further support to ease pressures on council housing finances. This includes measures to strengthen HRAs and enable councils to deliver more social housing, at a time when demand continues to rise.

An LGA spokesperson said councils are committed to maintaining and expanding social housing, but warned that without additional funding and long-term certainty, progress could stall.

The findings come amid wider concerns about the capacity of councils and housing providers to boost housebuilding and meet national housing targets, with financial constraints continuing to pose a significant barrier. ●

## Families in homes 'unfit for humans'

A cross-party group of MPs has called for urgent government action to address poor conditions in temporary accommodation, warning that too many families are living in homes "unfit for human habitation".

A report from the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee highlights rising numbers of households in temporary accommodation, including tens of thousands of children, with some facing damp, overcrowding and unsafe living conditions.

The committee is urging ministers to strengthen protections, phase out unsuitable forms of accommodation and develop long-term plans to increase the supply of safe, decent temporary housing.

The LGA said councils are committed to providing suitable homes, but face mounting financial and demand pressures.

Cllr Carl Cashman, Vice-Chair of the LGA's Inclusive Growth Committee, said: "Everyone deserves a safe, warm and good-quality home... However, increasing numbers of people are seeking support from their local authority while budgets decrease."

He warned that a growing funding gap – already £1.5 billion – between what councils spend on temporary accommodation and what they are reimbursed by government is worsening the crisis.

The LGA is calling for reforms to the local housing allowance rate, alongside wider action to tackle the housing shortage driving demand for temporary accommodation. ●



# The Housing Network



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## Concordat on firefighters' health

**Firefighters are to** receive tailor-made, research-backed health checks and monitoring aimed at improving their physical and mental health during and after service.

The Firefighters Concordat on Health and Wellbeing brings together government, fire and rescue services, employers and unions to improve prevention, early diagnosis and long-term support.

Cllr Mick Barton, Chair of the LGA's Fire and Rescue Authority Committee, said: "We are pleased to see that the health and wellbeing of firefighters is being given the priority that these brave emergency workers deserve.

"This new concordat will support

work between the fire minister and the Secretary of State for Health, with the full support of the sector via the Ministerial Advisory Group for Fire, ensuring a joined-up, evidence-based and focused support offer, which will work to directly support firefighters.

"However, as we build the evidence base on what interventions improve the long-term health and wellbeing of firefighters, the fire and rescue sector needs the funding to be able deliver better outcomes.

"This could include, for example, capital investment to improve facilities for removing contaminants when firefighters return to their stations." ●

● See p20

## Educational psychologists shortage warning

**The LGA has** called for clarity from ministers on how educational psychologists and other specialists can be attracted into education in the face of staff shortages.

New research commissioned by the British Psychological Society (BPS) warns the Government's reforms of the special educational needs and disability (SEND) system are at risk if the shortage of educational psychologists isn't urgently tackled.

The new report, 'Educational psychologists in England', from the Education Policy Institute, reveals some areas have one professional for every 480 pupils, while those with the lowest levels of provision have just one for every 9,400.

The BPS says that bringing the 96 authorities with below-benchmark staffing up to this level would require an extra 1,400 full-time educational psychologists.

This would represent a 40 per cent increase in the current workforce, at an estimated annual cost of £140 million – a "modest investment relative to the wider costs of a failing SEND system", according to the BPS.

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



Families Committee, said: "To integrate the SEND system within mainstream education, it is vital there is a workforce with the right skills that can provide the support children and young people with SEND need, to help improve their educational outcomes.

"However, as this report highlights, there is a stark shortage of educational psychologists, which could undermine these efforts.

"We would like to see clarity from government on how new cohorts of specialists, including educational psychologists and speech and language therapists, can be attracted into the education and SEND system." ●



## Fewer pupils 'creating financial risk'

**Falling pupil numbers** have "significant implications for the value for money of the school system", according to a new report from the National Audit Office (NAO).

Nationally, demand for primary school places fell 3 per cent between 2018/19 and 2024/25, with the Department for Education (DfE) projecting a further 7 per cent fall from 2025 to 2030.

The NAO found that the DfE has not taken "timely action" to set out how it will support the sector to respond to falling pupil numbers – albeit has begun to respond as part of its recent estates strategy, focusing on setting out how unneeded space could best be used.

To secure value for money, and maximise funding spent on educational outcomes, local authorities need to assess the places needed now and in the future, the report says.

Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Chair of the LGA's Children, Young People and Families Committee, said: "The DfE should ensure that all schools, including academies, work together to manage the implications of a fall in pupil numbers, and to minimise the impact on children's long-term educational attainment.

"Schools are at the heart of communities and should remain open wherever possible and used where they can. The DfE should see that there are arrangements in place to ensure flexibility in how any spare space is used, so they benefit communities." ●

# Armed Forces: turning commitment into delivery

**T**he Armed Forces Bill represents a significant opportunity to build on the UK's commitment to those who serve and have served, and their families.

As the bill continues its passage through Parliament – and with expectations it will be carried over into the next parliamentary session – attention is turning to how its provisions can be implemented on the ground effectively.

For local government, the focus is clear: ensuring that the legislation strengthens, rather than complicates, the delivery of support to Armed Forces communities.

Councils already play a central role in delivering the Armed Forces Covenant,

working with local partners to ensure that serving personnel, veterans and their families are not disadvantaged.

This includes support across key areas such as housing, education, health and social care – often coordinated through dedicated officers and local partnerships.

The LGA's written evidence at the bill's committee stage in the Commons highlighted that while there is strong commitment across local government, delivery remains uneven.

Differences in local capacity, awareness and resources mean that support can vary between areas – creating inconsistencies for Armed Forces communities.

A key theme that emerged in our submission is the need for clearer national guidance and stronger coordination.

Councils have called for greater clarity on roles and responsibilities across different parts of government, alongside consistent statutory guidance that supports effective local implementation.

Without this, there is a risk that the bill's ambitions are undermined by a lack of alignment between national policy and local delivery. Ensuring that all partners are working to the same expectations will be critical to achieving more consistent outcomes.

Financial pressures facing councils also remain a significant constraint. The LGA has emphasised that any expansion of duties or expectations linked to the covenant must be accompanied by adequate, long-term funding.

In many areas, councils rely on a combination of local budgets, external grants and voluntary sector support to deliver services. While this has enabled innovation and flexibility, it also creates uncertainty and limits the ability to plan for the long term.

Sustainable funding arrangements will be essential if the bill is to deliver meaningful improvements.

The success of the Armed Forces Bill will ultimately depend on effective partnership working. Councils, central government, the NHS and the voluntary sector all have a role to play in ensuring that the covenant is delivered consistently and effectively.

Our message is clear: legislative change must be matched by practical support for those responsible for delivery. This includes clear guidance, sustainable funding and ongoing engagement with local government.

As the bill progresses, there is time to ensure that its provisions are workable and deliverable. By addressing the challenges identified by councils, Parliament can help create a stronger, more consistent framework of support for Armed Forces communities.

Local government stands ready to play its part. With the right support in place, the Armed Forces Bill can build on existing strengths, and ensure that those who serve and have served receive the recognition and support they deserve. ●





The Government's first parliamentary session is coming to a close, having started on 17 July 2024 – an uncommonly long period.

A King's Speech, marking the beginning of a new session, will be delivered at the State Opening of Parliament on 13 May. Expectations are for a more focused legislative programme than that announced in 2024, but while the number of bills may be limited, the implications for local government could be significant.

Our analysis suggests a session shaped as much by what is carried over – and what has yet to be delivered – as by any new announcements. For councils, this creates both uncertainty and opportunity.

Several commitments from the previous King's Speech remain unresolved.

Notably, proposals on audit and corporate governance reform have been dropped, while planned legislation on regulation of artificial intelligence and ransomware has yet to materialise. This leaves councils facing continued uncertainty around assurance, cyber resilience and regulatory frameworks.

At the same time, several major bills currently progressing through Parliament may not complete their passage before the new session. These include legislation on children's wellbeing and schools, crime and policing, electoral reform, and asylum policy.

This reliance on carry-over legislation reinforces the importance of sustained engagement. For local government, the detail of how these bills evolve will be as important as any new measures announced.

Among the most significant

anticipated developments is a forthcoming NHS reform bill. Early intelligence points to changes in system governance, data sharing and the structure of patient-voice arrangements.

For councils, the stakes are high. There is strong interest in ensuring that health reforms maintain place-based accountability, retain a meaningful local citizen voice, and support genuine integration between health, social care and wider public services.

Proposals such as the single patient record will need to reflect the full breadth of local services, not just NHS provision.

Other additional legislative areas likely to come into focus include potential reforms to councillor standards and accountability, new flexibilities in local taxation and changes to business rates.

There is also the prospect of further legislation linked to asylum, safeguarding, and environmental regulation.

While some of these measures may not appear as standalone bills, they are likely to emerge through a combination of primary and secondary legislation.

This growing volume of secondary legislation – particularly linked to employment rights and sector-specific reforms – will require ongoing attention, as its cumulative impact on councils could be substantial.

Across all portfolios, a clear set of priorities underpins the LGA's approach. These include securing long-term financial sustainability, strengthening the role of councils in public service reform, enabling effective devolution, and improving outcomes in housing and homelessness.

Alongside this, there is a strong focus on supporting

digital transformation, building workforce capacity and reinforcing local democratic leadership. These are not new challenges, but the legislative programme provides a critical opportunity to address them in a more coordinated way.

Our overarching message is clear: national policy ambitions will only succeed if they are grounded in local delivery. Councils bring deep understanding of their communities and play a central role in shaping place-based solutions.

The focus must be on ensuring that legislation, whether new or carried over, supports this role.

With the right framework in place, local government can help turn legislative intent into tangible improvements for communities. ●

# Looking ahead to the King's Speech

**i** A full LGA briefing will be produced within 24 hours of the King's Speech being delivered on 13 May – see [local.gov.uk/parliament](https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament)



# Changing adult social care

## Early findings from LGA engagement



Councillor Louise Gittins  
is Chair of the LGA

**A**dult social care reform in England has been on the national agenda for years, yet meaningful change has remained difficult to achieve.

Pressures have continued to grow, with more people needing care, ongoing workforce shortages, provider markets remaining fragile, and funding challenges continuing to impact on people who draw on care and support.

The Independent Commission on Adult Social Care, chaired by Baroness Casey, offers a renewed opportunity to take stock and reset the direction of travel.

As Baroness Casey outlines her early thinking, the LGA's 'Care where we live'

engagement series has been a timely opportunity to hear from councils in England, as well as partners, people who draw on care and unpaid carers, about local government's future role – and several themes have emerged.

There is strong consensus that adult social care should remain rooted in local government. Councils are uniquely placed to connect care with the wider determinants of wellbeing – housing, public health, transport, community safety and leisure services.

This convening role enables councils to work effectively with the NHS, the voluntary and community sector, and other partners to build the 'ecosystem' of support that enables people to live well.

Just as importantly, councils provide democratic accountability. Visible and accountable leadership structures enable decisions about care and support that shape people's lives.

Many contributors see reform as an opportunity to deepen integration across health, care and housing. In some areas, local government reorganisation could offer a route to align strategic planning with health systems, while

retaining strong community connections.

Recurrently, the system is described as one that too often responds when people reach crisis, rather than supporting them to stay independent. There is a clear need to rebalance towards prevention.

Good social care is not a set of services, but the ability to live well, where there is easier access to advice, that adapts to changing needs, and where one can stay living at home and maintain relationships and routines.

Closer alignment with NHS prevention programmes and investment in community connection approaches are seen as important. Trusted relationships also matter – continuity of care workers and professionals who listen and understand individual needs are consistently highlighted as central to a positive care experience.

At present, many councils are managing, rather than actively shaping, local care provision. Fragmented markets, variable quality and workforce pressures point to the need for a stronger stewardship role.

Councils need stronger powers to develop sustainable local care markets.

This includes moving beyond traditional market position statements towards a more proactive approach – fairer pay and better conditions for care workers, strengthening commissioning capability, and strategic oversight.

The workforce is widely recognised as the heart of the system and the ‘critical infrastructure’ of adult social care.

There is ongoing debate about the balance between national frameworks and local delivery. There is support for a national care service, provided it focuses on setting clear national standards, consistent rights and better shared infrastructure, including data sharing, financial assessments, and technology and equipment.

Views expressed as part of ‘Care where we live’ were that delivery should remain locally led, so services reflect the needs, assets and priorities of individual communities. Strengthening local partnerships will be critical. There is particular interest in enhancing the statutory role of health and wellbeing boards, with oversight of integrated health and care planning, and a focus on improving people’s care experiences.

Whether the focus is prevention, funding or governance, the shared ambition is the same: a system that enables people to live the dignified and independent lives they choose, supported by strong communities and coordinated services.

These key themes are a useful indication of how the sector, and the public, are beginning to envisage the future of adult social care. While all councils continue to strive for improved performance and quality of social care delivery, these findings underline the vital role they will continue to play in shaping that future.

This is our moment to ensure local government has its voice heard clearly: the system must feel human, responsive and be centred on people’s lives, not organisational boundaries.

The next steps are for the LGA to analyse all engagement and views and form a collective view on behalf of the sector to share with Baroness Casey – who will be speaking at the LGA’s annual conference in July (see [local.gov.uk/conference](https://www.local.gov.uk/conference) to book your place). ●

## Smith Square debate – the money question

The LGA’s ‘Care where we live’ engagement with the sector culminated in a Smith Square Debate confronting the defining question for adult social care: what kind of system do we want, and how do we build it before the current one collapses under its own weight?

Among the debate’s panel members, one consensus emerged – adult social care is no longer just a public service crisis; it has become a national question about identity, infrastructure and the future country we want to be.

Dr Clenton Farquharson CBE, Associate Director of the national partnership Think Local Act Personal, reminded the debate that good care starts with humanity, not budgets. Most people want a home that feels like theirs, with the people they love around them, with peace, purpose and a life that feels like their own. That isn’t a luxury, it’s just life.

Challenging long-held assumptions that social care is about organising and managing people, Dr Farquharson argued that it should be about backing people, and supporting work, community, rest, family and connection.

Across the discussion, a recurring theme surfaced – that adult social care reform has repeatedly started with the

money, and not with a shared vision of what care should do.

Richard Humphries, a Senior Policy Advisor at the Health Foundation, argued that the country must decide whether it wants a universal system that supports people to live well or a basic emergency service that steps in only when people hit crisis.

Former First Secretary of State Damian Green described the current funding model as unsustainable, stating that council tax cannot carry the weight. Proposing a national funding settlement, underpinned by a national assessment of need, he said local government should act as the glue holding together local delivery, commissioning and market shaping.

Urging the sector to build public support for social care as a priority, Mr Green warned that without a stronger national voice reform will always be politically fragile.

Dame Patricia Hewitt, drawing on her experience as a former Secretary of State for Health, argued that far too little is spent on social care. Describing how many older people occupying hospital beds would be better supported at home, she argued that the system will continue to fail individuals and the taxpayer without redirecting investment upstream.



# Post-election support

## Expert support for navigating transitions and new roles

Local elections can bring significant change. New administrations, new leadership teams and new councillors all create fresh opportunities, while also placing additional pressure on councils to adapt quickly and continue delivering for their communities.

Every council will respond in its own way, shaped by local circumstances, political make-up and organisational culture. However, experience shows that learning from others and drawing on proven support can help councils manage these transitions more smoothly and effectively.

Post-election periods are a critical time for councils. They set the tone for political relationships, decision-making and ways of working throughout the electoral cycle.

Investing early in support for both councillors and officers helps establish shared understanding, build trust and strengthen leadership at a time when expectations are high and capacity can be stretched.

The LGA offers a comprehensive range of post-election support designed to help council leaders, councillors and senior officers navigate change and deliver effectively in their roles.

This support is flexible and tailored, recognising that no two councils face the same challenges.

It is delivered through our regional teams and a network of experienced councillor and officer peers who understand the realities of local government leadership.

Our bespoke support and advice is shaped around the specific needs of each council.

This can include help with governance arrangements, organisational leadership, decision-making structures, member-officer relations, and adapting to new political dynamics.

Whether a council is experiencing a change in control, an expanded cohort of new councillors or shifts in leadership



roles, targeted advice can help create clarity and confidence during periods of transition.

Peer mentoring is a central element of our offer. Experienced councillors and officers provide one-to-one and small-group mentoring, offering practical insight and reassurance to those stepping into new or expanded roles.

This trusted peer support helps individuals reflect on challenges, develop their leadership approach and build resilience as they navigate the demands of public office.

For councils with new administrations or refreshed political leadership teams, top-team development provides dedicated support for senior political leaders.

These sessions focus on strengthening collective leadership, improving decision-making and clarifying priorities. They

create space for leaders to establish how they will work together, set expectations and align political ambition with organisational capacity.

We also deliver a range of councillor leadership programmes, supporting both newly elected and experienced members to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to be effective community leaders. These programmes cover core leadership competencies while reflecting the evolving role of councillors in complex local systems.

Post-election transitions can be challenging, but they also present an opportunity to reset, strengthen governance and invest in leadership for the future.

Drawing on external support and the experience of peers can help councils make the most of this moment. ●

**i** For more information on our support for councillors, please visit our councillor hub at [local.gov.uk/councillor-hub](https://www.local.gov.uk/councillor-hub). For post-election support and how it can be tailored to your council, please contact your LGA regional team – see [local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-principal-advisers-and-regional-teams](https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-principal-advisers-and-regional-teams). See also p30 for our local elections preview



Councillor Louise Gittins is Chair of the LGA

# Showcasing local leadership

## Supporting councils to unlock investment

Later this month, I, along with senior leaders from the LGA, will be attending the UK's Real Estate Investment & Infrastructure Forum (UKREiiF) in Leeds, where we will be building on a strong and well-received first-time presence at last year's conference.

We will be showcasing local government leadership, strengthening relationships, and promoting the LGA's place-based programmes that support councils to unlock investment and deliver change – all emphasising our strategic and results-driven approach.

UKREiiF has become a key national platform for the real estate, property and infrastructure sectors, bringing together local and national government, investors, developers and the wider built environment industry.

This year, the LGA is an Associate Partner for UKREiiF 2026, reflecting the importance of the conference as a space to champion the role of councils in shaping places and driving inclusive growth.

Our programme of events is shaped by our member councils' priorities and mirrors the 'golden thread' that will be running through our own annual conference later this year – 'From neighbourhoods to nations: building lasting futures locally'.

This theme runs throughout our UKREiiF sessions, focusing on how councils shape places, unlock growth and deliver long-term outcomes for communities.

The programme is also closely aligned with the LGA's new LG Horizons work (see [bit.ly/4mBDZq8](https://bit.ly/4mBDZq8)), which aims to help the sector shape its own future.

A central part of our presence will be to use UKREiiF as a platform to explore the future of local government and public sector reform, and what councils need to remain effective, investable and resilient over the long term. It's important that we create and preserve the conditions that foster inward investment.



UKREiiF 2026 is being held at the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds

Crucially, our approach blends LGA policy leadership with our sector support and improvement programmes, ensuring sessions are grounded in the practical tools and support we offer councils – from housing and planning to land, regeneration, productivity and innovation.

The LGA will deliver and support a wide range of panels, roundtables and high-profile conversations, including:

- discussions on devolution and public sector reform
- a roundtable on unlocking 'patient capital' (long-term investment) to support housing and communities

- sessions on designing for neighbourhoods and community cohesion
- LG Horizons events to promote our new work programme
- panels on spatial development strategies, digital innovation and 'PropTech' – digital tools and software used to streamline, manage and optimise the real estate sector
- a panel on local government's role in driving growth and innovation.

Additionally, we will be highlighting the work of some of our place-based programmes at UKREiiF, including: the Council Housebuilding Support Service, a fully funded national improvement programme helping councils strengthen their capacity, capability and confidence to deliver more council homes; the national fire safety Joint Inspection Team, hosted by the LGA and funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG); our award-winning One Public Estate programme – delivered in partnership by the LGA, the Office of Government Property within the Cabinet Office, and MHCLG; and the Planning Advisory Service, which runs 14 projects funded by MHCLG.

Together, these sessions and programmes showcase councils as leaders, convenors and delivery partners, and highlight the value of local leadership in shaping national outcomes.

I am looking forward to attending this huge event, and I hope to see many of you there. ●

**i** To find out more, including details and timings of LGA panels and events, please visit [bit.ly/4cz55cN](https://bit.ly/4cz55cN)



# Reforming the planning system

Creating communities, not just homes

**W**ith more than 1.3 million households on social housing waiting lists and record numbers of children living in temporary accommodation, councils in England are operating at the very sharp end of this emergency.

Local government fully shares the Government’s commitment to boost housebuilding significantly, and stands ready to work constructively with ministers, communities and developers to deliver the 1.5 million safe, decent and genuinely affordable homes that the country urgently needs.

To tackle this crisis successfully and turn these shared ambitions into reality, it is vital that councils are equipped with the right powers through the planning

system, along with the skills, resources and long-term funding to take effective local action.

The Government has proposed the largest shake-up of planning policy since the National Planning Policy Framework was introduced in 2012.

Given the breadth of changes proposed and the potential implications each change could have, the LGA has strongly urged ministers to take careful heed

**“Planning is about creating communities linked with the right economic activity and public services”**

of our, and our member councils’, consultation responses, as those most intrinsically involved in plan-making and decision-taking.

Planning is about creating communities linked with the right economic activity and public services, while conserving and enhancing the natural and local environment. Critically, local authorities must be empowered to take their residents along with them on this journey to develop and build more homes.

That is because it is not just homes that are required to create thriving, attractive and desirable places and communities in which to live, but the accompanying local and national infrastructure – to be developed both now and phased at early and timely stages alongside the development of new homes – which is of primary concern for residents.

Additionally, the Government must take urgent action and work with the development and housebuilding industry to ensure there is a suitable pipeline of sustainable sites, which – once allocated in a local plan and/or given planning permission – are indeed built out. People cannot and do not live in planning permissions.

## Plan-making policies

**Key points in the LGA's response to the government consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) include the following, in respect of plan-making policies...**

### National decision-making policies

These must not become a rigid substitute for local decision-making. The local plan must remain the primary vehicle for shaping places, and national policies must leave room for local discretion to address site-specific constraints that national rules cannot anticipate... If a local authority has the evidence to set a higher standard, regarding environmental standards, design or density, for example, they must retain the primacy to modify or amplify national policy to suit local needs.

### Local plans

The LGA supports the plan-led system and the clear definition of the local plan's role. However, the expectation that plans are prepared and adopted within 30 months is extremely ambitious given the current resourcing crisis in local planning departments, with 79 per cent facing recruitment difficulties.

### Plan evidence

The LGA warmly welcomes the explicit policy direction to 'reuse or update existing evidence' rather than commissioning wholly new studies. This will significantly reduce the resource burden on councils and accelerate plan adoption. We urge the Planning Inspectorate to apply this

policy robustly during examinations to prevent unnecessary requests for additional evidence.

### Limiting local standards

Councils should be able to respond to local conditions. One-size-fits-all national policies can have perverse outcomes in highly specific local circumstances. If they are introduced, they must be limited to technical matters and not restrict local authorities from setting higher standards where there is local ambition to do so.

### National bodies need to cooperate

Effective strategic planning requires that infrastructure providers (such as water companies and National Highways) are not just consultees, but active partners. The LGA is concerned that without stronger powers to compel infrastructure providers to align their investment plans with local growth strategies and spatial development strategies (SDS), the envisaged cooperation will not deliver the necessary infrastructure to support growth.

### Viability assessments

We strongly support the move towards 'standardised inputs'. The LGA has long called for reform to prevent developers from using viability assessments to negotiate down contributions towards affordable housing and infrastructure. We urge the Government to ensure these standardised inputs specifically prevent the price paid for land from justifying a failure to comply with policy.

### Review mechanisms

Local plans should set out the specific circumstances for review mechanisms, but national policy must set a high bar for their use to ensure they remain exceptional rather than routine. Review mechanisms are a necessary tool where viability is genuinely challenged by unforeseen economic shifts, but they should not be a safety net for developers who have overpaid for land.

### Energy efficiency standards

Restricting local authorities from setting energy efficiency standards above Building Regulations undermines local climate leadership and the Government's own climate ambitions. Many councils have declared climate emergencies and wish to push for energy-efficient and affordable-to-heat homes faster than national minimums allow. The NPPF should be suitably flexible to accommodate this local ambition, rather than capping it.

**i** Our full response – which can be read at [local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses](https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses) – also covers proposed changes to decision-making policies, achieving sustainable development, delivering a sufficient supply of homes, ensuring the vitality of town centres, securing clean energy and water, making effective use of land, protecting Green Belt land, achieving well-designed places, managing flood risk and coastal change, conserving and enhancing the historic environment, and much more.

Local authorities must be given greater powers to ensure prompt build-out of sites with planning permission and we urge the Government to come forward with the outcomes of two consultations from last year regarding build-out.

Councils should not be subject to punitive measures regarding the delivery of housing, which undermine the plan-led system, including the five-year housing land supply test and the housing delivery test.

While we support the Government's aim to improve the efficiency and consistency

of the planning system, we have significant concerns about the limited flexibility within the proposed reforms for planning committees.

A standardised approach does not account for the diversity across local planning authorities, and it is essential that councils retain the ability to tailor decision-making processes to reflect the specific needs of their communities.

The involvement of elected councillors in planning decisions is the backbone of the English planning system and our

reservations about a national scheme of delegation centre on this role potentially being eroded.

Government must also remain mindful that – with devolution, widespread local government reorganisation and the introduction of spatial development strategies led by combined authorities, and with two approaches to plan-making with definitive backstop dates in place – this is a period of significant flux, change and uncertainty within local planning authorities. ●

# Keeping it local

Planning authority expertise must be reflected in regional plans



The Government has been consulting on proposed geographies for producing spatial development strategies (SDSs).

SDSs are high-level regional plans looking ahead at least 20 years, which will be led by combined authorities – or county councils/unitaries where combined authorities are not yet established.

They will set the framework for councils' local plans (see p16), which will have to be in general conformity with the relevant SDS.

SDSs, according to the consultation, will ensure that sub-regional areas can plan effectively to: meet their housing needs; coordinate the provision of strategic infrastructure; grow their economies; and improve the environment and climate resilience.

The LGA welcomes the commitment to achieve universal coverage of SDSs across England to tackle genuinely cross-boundary challenges such as housing and infrastructure.

However, it is vital that these strategies are led at a local or locally agreed appropriate level: it should be ensured that all constituent local authorities, and local communities, have a meaningful voice and role

within regional approaches to spatial planning.

Local authorities are best placed to work collaboratively and tackle cross-boundary challenges such as housebuilding, delivering infrastructure and resilience.

Any mayoral power to determine an application of potential strategic importance should not override the role, knowledge and leadership of democratically accountable, elected local councillors and their communities.

The success of SDSs is dependent on constituent councils and communities being heard and represented throughout the preparation of the plan.

Not permitting a seat at the table or a voting role for planning authorities on SDSs could have significant implications on a strategic area's ability to meet housing need, as local knowledge and evidence may be overlooked. Appropriate consideration should be made to proportionality and agreed at a local level.

The LGA has significant concerns regarding the governance arrangements, set out in the Planning and Infrastructure Act, that underpin SDSs. Specifically, we do not support powers

## “The success of SDSs is dependent on councils and communities being heard”

for the Secretary of State to approve a strategy where a resolution to adopt it is not passed by local leaders. This undermines the democratic role of local government, particularly if the Secretary of State can override a unanimous vote against adoption.

We are concerned that the grounds for intervention (where a strategy 'may be' failing) effectively grant the Secretary of State a blank cheque to intervene. Intervention should be reserved for exceptional circumstances only.

Constituent local authorities must also have a statutory right to appear, and be heard, at the public examination of an SDS. Currently, this right is limited to the strategic planning authority, which risks marginalising the voices

of individual councils and their communities.

The LGA also has concerns about the move to simple majority voting in strategic authorities, and urges the Government to remove the mayor's casting vote in instances where decision-making is tied for SDSs.

This is a period of significant flux, change and uncertainty within local planning authorities, with devolution, widespread local government reorganisation, the introduction of SDSs, and the largest shake-up of planning policy since 2012 (see p16-17).

It is essential that councils, with their local knowledge and expertise, have a key role in shaping the geographies that are right for them and in preparing spatial development strategies.

The LGA calls on the Government to take a coordinated approach to boundary changes, safeguard effective and balanced decision-making, and ensure that the role and expertise of local authorities are fully engaged. ●

**i** 'LGA submission to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's consultation on areas for producing spatial development strategies' can be read in full at [local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses](http://local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses)

**F**ew would disagree that policing in England and Wales needs to improve.

The Government's proposed reforms are ambitious and far-reaching. While the demise of police and crime commissioners (PCCs) leads to questions about democratic oversight, the enhanced role of mayors and council leaders offers an opportunity to strengthen performance, rebuild public confidence and restore the visible neighbourhood policing that communities value so highly.

As with any major reform, however, success will depend on getting the balance right.

From a local government perspective, policing does not operate in a vacuum. Councils are at the heart of community safety – working with police, probation, health partners and the voluntary sector to prevent crime, support victims and tackle the root causes of offending.

So, it is essential that any new system of police governance strengthens local democratic accountability and partnership working, rather than weakens them.

A clearer national framework, stronger performance management and a renewed focus on neighbourhood policing are all welcome. However, these ambitions must be matched by governance arrangements that are rooted in place and responsive to local needs.

In areas with directly elected mayors, it is right that they take on responsibility for policing where boundaries align. But where new police and crime boards are proposed, they must not become a second-

# Improving police governance

## Getting the balance right for our communities



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

tier model. We must ensure we don't return to the governance arrangements that led to the creation of PCCs at the start of the last decade.

Police and crime boards need equivalent powers, clear leadership and robust scrutiny if they are to command public confidence. Accountability should be consistent, transparent and meaningful, regardless of geography.

Strong governance can help build trust in the police. This matters not just for governance, but for outcomes.

Clear local accountability helps ensure that policing priorities reflect the concerns of residents – whether that is tackling antisocial behaviour, addressing serious violence or supporting vulnerable victims. It also underpins the

partnerships that are critical to prevention.

We must also be realistic about the practical implications of change. Transitioning to a new system will carry costs – financial, organisational and operational. It is vital that these are fully funded by government.

Local authorities are already under significant pressure and there should be no expectation that councils will absorb additional burdens or liabilities.

Equally important is the question of scrutiny. The current proposals raise legitimate concerns about how key decisions – such as police budgets and leadership appointments – will be challenged and overseen.

Strong governance depends on strong scrutiny, and new arrangements must provide the checks and balances the public rightly expects.

These reforms are taking place alongside devolution and local government reorganisation. That makes it even more important that the new system is coherent, flexible and designed with local government, not simply for it.

As Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Committee, I am overseeing our work with government to help get these reforms right.

Our guiding principle is simple: reform must deliver safer communities by strengthening local accountability, supporting partnership working and ensuring that resources are focused where they make the greatest difference – on the ground and in our neighbourhoods. ●



**i** To find out more about the LGA's work on stronger and safer communities, please visit [local.gov.uk/community-safety](https://www.local.gov.uk/community-safety)



Councillor Mick Barton is Chair of the LGA's Fire and Rescue Authority Committee

**I**n March, I hosted the LGA's annual fire conference, bringing together senior leaders, officers and sector experts for two days of discussion, collaboration and forward-looking debate.

It was my first fire conference, and it really highlighted for me the rapid pace of change within the sector and the willingness of fire services to deliver that change for the benefit of their communities.

The commitment, hard work and initiative of the sector was on full display over the two days, as we discussed current and future risks and opportunities.

The keynote address, from Fire Minister Samantha Dixon MBE MP, highlighted the Government's reform programme, and touched on a wide range of issues, including governance, funding the changing risks facing the country and modernisation.

Ms Dixon outlined the role that a new college of fire and rescue could play in supporting the sector, as well as a refreshed Fire and Rescue National Framework for England – both of which the Government will be consulting on this year.

The conference's first plenary explored how the landscape has changed in the seven years since the last national framework was published, with the introduction of inspection and the Fire Standards Board, as well as other changes in terms of culture and governance.

Other workshops highlighted the significant period of change the sector is undergoing, with discussions on local government reorganisation and devolution, and the impact on the sector so far.

Pay structure and role reform, led by the National Employers and the Fire Brigades Union, was another key workshop. It focused on the partnership work that's under way to ensure the role of the firefighter is enhanced professionally and is responsive to existing and future threats.

Funding was a key theme throughout the



# Fire service challenges

## Navigating change, risk and reform

two days, with a detailed finance plenary highlighting the sector's continuing financial challenges and government work with the sector on a future funding model.

The on-call service, suicide prevention, pensions reform, technology and the use of artificial intelligence, local remediation acceleration plans, the community infrastructure levy and the fire role in planning were all part of the wider conversation at conference.

The real highlight for me was a session on civil protection, hearing from Peter Arnevall, Chief Fire Officer of the Stockholm Fire Service, and London Fire Brigade's Assistant Commissioner Patrick Goulbourne.

Both talked about the shifting risks and vulnerabilities associated with natural disasters and those linked to human behaviour, for which we, as a country and as a sector, can be preparing.

It highlighted how the fire service could

use its current capabilities in a different way to support community resilience. I know many people went away from the conference still discussing that session.

Across the conference, one message resonated clearly: fire and rescue services – and the LGA – are not waiting passively for reform.

There is a strong, proactive appetite to shape the future, ensuring that pay, roles, governance, culture and operational capacity evolve at the pace required by today's risks.

The shared sense of purpose was unmistakable: a commitment to managing change not as a challenge, but as an opportunity to strengthen the service for the communities it protects. ●

**i** To find out more about the LGA's work on fire and rescue, please visit [local.gov.uk/topics/fire-and-rescue](https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/fire-and-rescue)

# Trusted and safe

## Leading responsible use of AI in public services

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly becoming integral to how councils manage rising demand, deliver services and support communities.

With stretched workforces, complex caseloads and growing expectations for personalised public services, councils are now exploring how AI can streamline customer contact, improve decision-making and free up staff for frontline work.

Local government's breadth of services makes it one of the most fertile environments for innovation. However, because councils serve everyone, including people receiving social care, temporary accommodation or crisis support, the bar for AI use must be high.

Efficiency alone is not enough. AI systems used in public services must be safe, transparent and trusted.

The Horizon IT scandal affecting UK sub-postmasters and the Dutch childcare benefits case show how poorly governed automation can cause serious harm, particularly to our most vulnerable residents.

As AI begins to influence decisions in social care, housing, planning and benefits, councils must embed and lead responsible use.

Local government understands cumulative risk

better than any other part of the public sector and its democratic mandate gives it a unique responsibility to get this right.

In recognition of this crucial role, the LGA has been appointed to the UK Government Digital Service's (GDS's) Responsible AI Advisory Panel.

Established by the GDS within the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, the panel brings together expertise from the public sector, industry, academia and civil society to guide the responsible use of AI in government.

The LGA's presence ensures the realities of local service delivery, community needs and democratic accountability are embedded in the national conversation from the outset.

Councils are already laying strong foundations.

The LGA's 2025 State of the Sector AI Survey shows local government is undergoing rapid change, with 95 per cent of participating councils using or exploring AI.

Almost half (49 per cent) of current AI use sits within health and social care, while 38 per cent supports advice, customer contact and benefits-related services. While this demonstrates ambition, it also highlights exposure to sensitive environments in



which mistakes can have serious consequences.

Encouragingly, councils are responding with strengthened governance: nearly half are adapting existing data-protection frameworks to cover AI; 41 per cent have introduced AI-specific policies; and 38 per cent have appointed a senior responsible owner for AI to ensure oversight and accountability.

Democratic engagement is also emerging as a defining strength. The Liverpool City Region AI Charter is ensuring residents' voices guide decision-making, while North Yorkshire and Dorset are embedding ethical AI principles directly into corporate governance, demonstrating what responsible innovation looks like in practice.

Despite this progress, responsible AI adoption

remains uneven across councils, underpinned by a fragmented national policy landscape. Councils need clearer expectations, practical tools, and improved coordination from government to ensure AI becomes a tool for inclusion rather than exclusion.

Over the coming months, the LGA will engage its membership to feed council perspectives into the panel's work, ensuring recommendations are grounded in the complexity and diversity of public services at the local level.

As the UK shapes the next generation of digital public services, the inclusion of local government at the heart of AI policy making will strengthen accountability, transparency and public confidence in this significant transformation. ●

# Tougher on fly-tipping

## An LGA media campaign drew national attention

An LGA campaign this spring put a long-standing frustration for councils firmly in the national spotlight: in too many cases, fly-tippers taken to court are fined less than the penalties councils issue in the first place.

The campaign was built around new figures that show fly-tipping is still rising, with councils in England dealing with 1.26 million incidents in 2024/25.

At the same time, the average court fine was £539, compared with an average fixed penalty notice of £626 issued by councils.

For councils, low fines weaken deterrence, make enforcement harder to justify, and can leave authorities out of pocket after spending time and money investigating and prosecuting offences.

It also makes it harder to explain to residents why cases are being taken to court if the outcome is a lower penalty.

The issue itself is not new. The LGA has raised concerns about sentencing for fly-tipping for some time.

But this campaign was designed to do something different, by turning it into a clear, compelling national story, backed up by real

examples from councils.

Those examples were key to helping the issue cut through.

In York, two offenders were each fined £300 by magistrates, despite receiving fixed penalty notices of £600 and £1,000.

In Wiltshire, a fly-tipper who failed to pay a £1,000 penalty was fined just £80 in court.

In Chelmsford, two offenders were fined £300 each after prosecution, less than the £400 penalties originally issued.

These are not isolated cases. They reflect a wider pattern councils are seeing on the ground, where significant effort goes into pursuing offenders but the final outcome does not match the seriousness of the offence.

To maximise impact, the LGA combined national media work with coordinated local activity.

Alongside a national press release, councils were provided with a ready-made communications pack. This included a template press release, social media content, graphics and briefing

lines, making it as easy as possible for councils to take part and highlight their own experiences. This coordinated approach helped create a strong national and local moment.

On launch day, the story led BBC Breakfast, with an LGA spokesperson interviewed alongside one from Wiltshire Council. The campaign also secured coverage on Sky News, LBC, BBC national radio and BBC regional outlets, and in the Daily Express. Local BBC stations linked up with councils for further interviews, helping extend the story across the country.

The campaign has also helped keep momentum on the issue. Since launch, the LGA has held two roundtables with councils on fly-tipping to gather further insight and build the case for change.

The Government's Waste Crime Action Plan, published in March, includes a commitment to strengthen the approach to penalties and improve deterrence, which aligns with concerns raised by councils.

For councillors, the campaign is a strong example of how long-standing issues can gain wider attention when national data is combined with local experience and a coordinated communications approach.

It shows the value of working together across the sector to make a clear, consistent case for change. ●



**i** If you are interested in working more closely with the LGA on similar media campaigns, please get in touch by emailing [mediaoffice@local.gov.uk](mailto:mediaoffice@local.gov.uk)

# Local government reorganisation

## Support for councils and strategic authorities

In the latest developments on devolution and local government reorganisation (LGR), new unitary councils have been announced across a number of areas.

Fifteen new councils are set to be created in the south and east of England, replacing 43 counties and districts in Essex, Hampshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk.

Elections to shadow authorities are expected to take place next May, with the new councils coming into effect from April 2028.

The Government has written to the relevant authorities and confirmed the allocation of £63 million of transition funding, with each new unitary receiving at least £900,000 to help establish effective services and governance arrangements.

Meanwhile, elections take place on 7 May to shadow unitaries for East Surrey and West Surrey, with the new councils coming into effect from April 2027.

Decisions on LGR in a further 16 council areas are expected in July.

The LGA recognises the considerable effort from teams across local government who are working at pace to navigate these changes while continuing to deliver vital services for their communities.

We continue to engage constructively with government and support councils through this transition, including through the LGA's sector support offer (see [bit.ly/3Owf6jb](https://bit.ly/3Owf6jb)).

Support available includes:

- an LGR-specific Digital 360 offer involving a tailored, peer-led review delivering a holistic assessment of digital and organisational readiness



- 'top team' workshops and 'critical friend' challenge and support from the LGA's regional teams
- HR and employment law advice.

The LGA is also running a series of free webinars for councillors and officers from local and combined authorities, including on implementation planning and prioritisation (20 May), the experience of being a unitary councillor (10 June), and council housing aggregation, disaggregation and practical implications for delivery (14 July).

Presentation slides, video recordings, and summaries from previous LGR events – including on asset management, children's services, and data – are also available.

Our LGR Toolkit – developed for the LGA by Local Partnerships, with councils who have already been through reorganisation – also collates a wide range of resources, from templates and webinars to guidance notes and lessons learned from previous reorganisations (see [local.gov.uk/lgr-toolkit](https://local.gov.uk/lgr-toolkit)).

Resources are broken down by themes, such as finance, leadership and

governance, and the toolkit includes a checklist of actions to be completed at different stages of the LGR journey.

Finally, we have also launched a strategic authorities hub – a dedicated space bringing together information, resources and support for existing and emerging strategic authorities (see [local.gov.uk/strategic-authorities-hub](https://local.gov.uk/strategic-authorities-hub)).

This includes foundational strategic authorities, mayoral strategic authorities and non-mayoral combined authorities.

The hub includes a resources and video case studies section, in which representatives of strategic authorities share their learning and examples of good practice on how strategic authorities can add value to a region.

New case studies will be available following the pre-election period. In the meantime, we would love to hear your feedback on this new resource. Contact us at [localism@local.gov.uk](mailto:localism@local.gov.uk) with your thoughts and suggestions. ●

**i** Contact your LGA regional team to find out more about how we can help, see [bit.ly/3QDCnAg](https://bit.ly/3QDCnAg)



## Power Government Work with Community Voices

We help government teams do their work better by providing clear, defensible insight into what their communities are experiencing – embedding that insight directly into the decisions, actions and communications local authorities are accountable for everyday.

### LISTEN

Monitor community sentiment across social, news and organic channels.

### ASK

Run statistically representative surveys to get answers you can trust and build upon.

### COMMUNICATE

Reach the right residents with the right message, and measure ongoing impact.

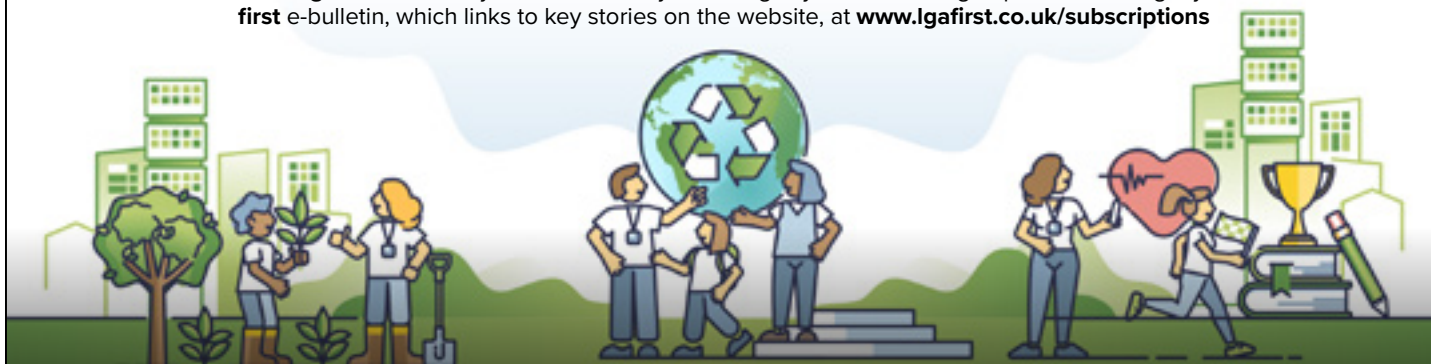
[zencity.io/uk](http://zencity.io/uk) - Visit us at Stand P6a

# 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**

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# Standing up for councils



**Councillor Richard Wright is Chair of the Local Councils Network**

**Local government should** never stand still and the same is true of the bodies that represent it.

So, I'm pleased to say that the District Councils' Network, the organisation I have chaired since last year, has recently transformed into the Local Councils Network.

While this transition is, in part, a response to district councils in England being set to disappear in local government reorganisation (LGR), it also offers a chance to build something new.

The Local Councils Network (LCN), which was launched at our annual conference in March, is a new body to stand up for councils. Our members include unitary councils and, for as long as they continue to exist, districts.

We're very much a cross-party organisation and we're bound together by our passion for genuinely local government. We remain a special interest group of the LGA.

It's our job to represent the views of our member councils at the highest levels of government to influence policy, securing them the best outcomes.

This is more vital work than ever – we're operating at a time of unprecedented change, in which councils need as much support as they can get.

It's not just LGR that is changing the world in which we operate. The speed of technological change is dizzying, the public spending outlook is bleak, and the political and economic climate has never felt more volatile.

However, while there are pitfalls everywhere that we need to avoid, there is also significant opportunity.

Local public sector reform to integrate or coordinate local government services with



**“Reform to... coordinate local government services with those of the NHS, police and others could be revolutionary”**

those of the NHS, police and others could be revolutionary.

There's scope not just to derive efficiency savings, but also to reinvent and reshape services around the needs of service users and the public more broadly, and to shift services onto a preventative, rather than a reactive, footing.

Accountability of all service providers – to local areas and individuals – could be transformed.

Local democracy could be coherently extended into service areas in which the views of communities haven't so far been loudly heard. Done well, local government reorganisation can be the catalyst for this.

The digital revolution and artificial intelligence can make a reality of the integration dream. Meaningful

devolution can bring about the bottom-up transformation of England.

I firmly believe that the answers to our problems, including too few homes and the absence of economic growth in our communities, lie close to home.

As councils, we cannot overcome pressures and seize opportunities in isolation. Despite the dedication and expertise of our teams, as individual councils we can only influence so much. It's through discussing our problems, sharing insight and co-creating solutions that we can withstand our pressures and flourish.

We need to operate within strong networks – such as the LCN and the LGA – for this to happen. Whether or not you've worked with us in the past, we're keen to collaborate with you in the future.

Let's work together to create a bright new future for everyone in our communities. ●

● To find out more about the work of the Local Councils Network, please visit [localcouncilsnetwork.gov.uk](http://localcouncilsnetwork.gov.uk)

## GROUP LEADERS



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

### Renters' rights come into effect

On 1 May, this Labour Government's Renters' Rights Act came into force in England, marking the beginning of a changed system for all.

More than 11 million people in England rent privately and, until now, had the threat of unfair and sudden eviction, excessive rent hikes at a moment's notice, and the risk of serious hazards without expectation of when they would be rectified.

None of this is conducive to a modern, safe and egalitarian society that believes everyone has the right to a safe and secure home, whether they rent or buy.

The Labour Government not only believes this, but has acted on it, introducing a simpler, more secure



tenancy structure, the right for tenants to appeal against excessive above-market rents, applying Awaab's Law to the private rented sector, and ending the practice of rental bidding, so people can find a home to live in in the first place.

Real-world action leading to real-world change is the marker of a serious political party, and as parts of the country go to the polls in less than a week, candidates

### "Everyone has the right to a safe and secure home, whether they rent or buy"

should remember that behind every door knocked and postal vote ticked is an individual with complications and unique needs.

Good luck to all Labour candidates standing on 7 May, and a safe campaign to all.

I also want to celebrate any first-time candidates and pay tribute to Labour councillors standing down this year, including some who have been cornerstones of our movement for many years and have dedicated huge amounts of time and energy to their local areas.

To represent your values to your communities and to work to support the areas you care about is a great contribution and one worthy of celebration.

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



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

### Support for change of control

I know that Conservative councillors across the country will be campaigning hard on the doorstep.

While the weeks and months following May are unlikely to be on people's minds, I did want to remind councillors of the support they can access through the LGA's Conservative Group as part of our 'change of control' support offer.

Primarily, we know that many Conservative councillors may go into new positions of leadership for the first time, for example, becoming a cabinet

member, committee chair or a new group leader.

The LGA Conservative Group can provide mentoring for those councillors with another Conservative councillor from our member peer pool, who has lots of knowledge in that subject area.

All Conservative group leaders going through elections have been briefed on the specific tailored packages of support they can receive, but as a reminder, for any enquiries on support, please contact the LGA Conservative Group Office or your regional peer (see [local.gov.uk/political/lga-conservatives](https://www.local.gov.uk/political/lga-conservatives)).

The English Devolution Bill continues to make its way through Parliament and is currently in its 'ping-pong' stage between the Commons and the Lords.

Our Conservative Peers, working with our Conservative councillors, have managed to secure several important amendments to the bill in the Lords.

With thanks to Lord Jamieson, former LGA Chairman, a Conservative

### "We can provide mentoring for... Conservative councillors in new positions of leadership"

amendment, 'Brownfield land priority', was voted through – which means a mayoral combined authority may not designate green spaces for development unless it is satisfied that no more brownfield sites exist locally.

The LGA Conservative Group is also backing our Leader, Kemi Badenoch MP, in supporting the campaign to encourage local authorities to issue strong advice to school governing bodies to establish specific policies within schools to ban the use of social media in school time.

This will empower teachers to crack on with the job in hand of educating the next generation.



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

## Major change in the political landscape

As polling day approaches, I wanted to say a big thank you for all that you are doing on the election trail – it's not long now!

We are looking forward to welcoming hundreds of new Liberal Democrat councillors to our local government family and increasing the list of councils we control or in which we have influence.

The list of issues being raised on the doorsteps is endless, but there are no surprises, whether that is potholes, lack of affordable housing, cost-of-living, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or pressures in adult social care.

## “We are looking forward to welcoming hundreds of new councillors”

I have heard heartwarming stories of our councillors going the extra mile every day to help residents in difficult situations. I have seen for myself the great work that you are doing and know the difference that you are making.

We are seeing a major change in the political landscape; there will be winners and losers. We need to remember to treat each other with respect and dignity, including our opponents and the staff we work with, and to put into practice what we preach.

Lastly, for those retiring, or who are not returned, and putting politics aside – thank you for everything you have done. You have made a difference during your time and should be proud of what you achieved. Once again, good luck and thank you!



Councillor Adam Paynter is the LGA Independent Group's National Lead Peer

## Supporting your local leadership

With the local elections fast approaching, members will rightly be focused on door knocking, connecting with residents and reinforcing the shared achievements that have made a difference in their communities.

This is also a moment to look ahead, setting out a clear vision for what comes next, and how you will continue to deliver for the people you represent.

## “This is a moment to look ahead, setting out a clear vision for what comes next”

I want to remind members that I, and my team of regional lead peers across the country, are here to support and guide you through this period and beyond.

Thank you to everyone who attended our recent 'Local elections and change of control' session, where we discussed the practical help available before, during and after polling day. That support includes tailored advice shaped to your local context, governance and organisational leadership support, and access to high-quality training, events and online resources.

Members can also benefit from mentoring and coaching by experienced peers who understand the challenges of leadership, as well as top team development for both senior member and officer teams. The LGA additionally offers comprehensive councillor development, including induction for new councillors and guidance on being an effective opposition where required.

Whatever the results of the local elections, I, the regional lead peers, the group office and our group leadership are here to support you.



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

## Government must listen on LGR

As we enter those final few days before our residents cast their votes in the local elections, I know many colleagues will be in the throes of a final campaign push before the ballot boxes open.

This is an important time for local government, as people up and down the country make their voices heard.

Irrespective of the outcome of these local elections, it is so important that we do not lose sight of local government reorganisation (LGR), and we continue to hold the Government to account.

The Government's plans for LGR now look vastly different from what it originally set out. Guiding principles for scale have been abandoned and we are likely to see a significant fragmentation of services, as well as the financial challenge this may bring.

## “We are likely to see a significant fragmentation of services”

Countless voices in the sector are urging the Government to listen. The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services has raised serious concerns about the risk posed by current LGR plans to the millions who rely on adult social care.

This is just one voice among many.

The period following elections is uncertain, and as councils adjust to new administrations, and residents set clear new mandates for their local areas, the Government's insistence that LGR must go ahead poses serious concerns.

The Government must listen and put people first. ●

# Support for Windrush communities



The Reverend Clive Foster MBE is the Independent Windrush Commissioner

The Home Office Windrush scandal caused profound harm to thousands of people who had every right to call Britain home.

Many are still living with the consequences – uncertainty, lost documentation and damaged trust in the very institutions that should have protected them. That is why I took the decision to create the Windrush Councils Network, bringing together local authorities to take collective action.

Across the UK, 14 councils have come together to share what they are doing to support Windrush communities, and to learn from one another.

The impact of the scandal is felt locally. Residents often come to their council first



for guidance or support. This network is a vital part of the broader effort to restore justice for those affected, and its purpose is simple: to coordinate consistent support for survivors, share what works, build trust, raise awareness in communities, and ensure that every resident receives clear and accessible help.

Together, we are focused on improving access to services and support, developing a Windrush Local Government Charter, and

raising awareness of status, compensation entitlements and the enormous contribution the Windrush generations have made to this country.

A community and engagement advisory panel will ensure those with lived experience remain at the heart of everything we do.

My hope is that this network becomes a genuine force for change – that councils feel better equipped, better connected, and more confident in reaching the communities that need them most.

We are only at the beginning, and I encourage any council not yet involved to get in touch and join us. The Windrush generations helped build this country. Every local authority has a responsibility to support them. ●

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**i** To find out more, or to join the Windrush Councils Network, please email [info@windrushcommissioner.independent.gov.uk](mailto:info@windrushcommissioner.independent.gov.uk)

# Flooding: it's not about the water



Councillor Dr John Doddy (Ref) is Deputy Leader of Nottinghamshire County Council

I recently requested a joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) from our local health and wellbeing board, into the impact of flooding on the mental and physical health of affected residents.

Having worked as a GP and local county councillor, it has become obvious to me that there is a knowledge gap around this area. It started with serially flooded residents telling me they had 'issues'. There is the challenge of living in temporary accommodation, resulting in poor eating habits – where do you

store food? It's easier to eat out and have takeaways, resulting in weight gain, obesity and poor diabetic control.

People feel anxious the whole time – expressed in excess smoking, heavy drinking, marital stress, estrangement, divorce and separation, anxiety and depression, feeling suicidal, poor medication compliance, worsening blood pressure, and increased GP and hospital appointments.

Going on holidays becomes a non-starter during winter, for fear of coming home to a flooded residence.

And the feeling of being trapped in a once-loved home can become unbearable when house sales fall through when potential buyers find out about the flooding issues and challenges with insurance.

Being flooded once is quite distressing. Imagine living on a flood plain and being

repeatedly flooded, with no agreement between the various local and national authorities and bodies as to who will take responsibility.

People who are flooded are serially traumatised effectively, but the trauma is often unrecognised. Everything is presumed to be okay because the insurance company will replace everything and things will go 'back to normal'.

We need to treat the victims of flooding like victims of other disasters, and recognise the consequences. We need to prioritise the most vulnerable – those with existing physical or mental illness – and introduce a traffic light system for those most susceptible to complications.

I hope requesting a JSNA will lead to the development of public health best practice for the future support of all those affected by flooding. ●

# Winners and losers



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



A record 68 per cent of local by-elections were lost by the defending party in the first quarter of 2026, with all parties featuring among the winners and losers.

Labour and Conservatives are bearing the brunt of losses as the two-party establishment erodes. Since last May, Labour has lost almost eight in 10 of its by-election defences, and the Conservatives two in every three of theirs.

Reform UK continues to make gains from all the main parties as well as Independents, beating six competitors and the incumbent Lincolnshire Independents in North Kesteven's Sleaford Westholme ward.

In North Lincolnshire, the Conservatives retained their seat in Axholme Central, but Labour was defeated in Brumby, where Reform picked up more than half the votes from a standing start. Bury's Conservative-held Tottington ward also fell to Reform.

There was a rare Reform gain from Liberal Democrat in Luton's Wigmore ward. Subsequent to the sitting councillor's disqualification, the Liberal Democrats' vote share collapsed, which favoured the Greens, but Reform maximised the advantage.

A less surprising Liberal Democrat loss, to Conservative, occurred in

Vale of White Horse's Stanford ward, but the council remains firmly in the former's hands.

Almost five candidates on average contest each seat on 7 May, the same ratio as last year. Electors eager to shop around – average turnout is 38 per cent, its highest for almost 30 years – find bulging candidate lists, which produce unlikely winners: the average vote share for by-election winners has fallen below 40 per cent for the first time.

Eight candidates contested the vacant Pembrokeshire seat of Milford Hakin. Three Independents were joined by five parties, but it was Reform who won with 27 per cent of the vote.

However, since last May, Reform has had to defend seats, including three here.

The vacancy for Kent's Thanet-based Cliftonville division featured four current or former councillors. The victor was Rob Yates, a former Labour councillor for Margate but now transferred to the Green party.

A second Reform seat fell to the Conservatives in Northumberland's

Cramlington South West seat, but in Leicestershire's Narborough and Whetstone division, Reform held off the challenge from Conservatives and Greens.

There is declining interest in a progressive alliance between the Liberal Democrats and the Greens. Vale of White Horse saw a pact between the two for the 2023 elections, resulting in each party securing a council seat in Abingdon Abbey Northcourt ward.

The Green incumbent's resignation saw the Liberal Democrats challenge and win this time around.

But the Greens are having a run of success, evidenced by two further gains, one from the Liberal Democrats, another from Labour. In Liverpool's Aigburth ward, the Greens moved from a distant third in 2023 to secure the seat.

Rossendale's Labour-defended Hareholme and Waterfoot ward revealed more electoral volatility, with support for both main parties declining. Reform garnered a third of the votes, but last time's second-placed Greens did enough to make the gain.

There was an unusual open seat in North Devon's Fremington ward, where four Independents stood in 2023 but none this time around. The Liberal Democrats, who finished seventh and last previously, led five party candidates who contested the by-election. ●

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

## By-election results

**Bury, Tottington**  
REF GAIN FROM CON  
12.8% over Con | Turnout 30.7%

**Cotswold, The Beeches**  
LIB DEM HELD  
30.0% over Ref | Turnout 33.8%

**Kent, Cliftonville**  
GREEN GAIN FROM REF  
5.6% over Ref | Turnout 37.7%

**Leicestershire, Narborough and Whetstone**  
REF HELD  
3.5% over Con | Turnout 29.6%

**Liverpool, Aigburth**  
GREEN GAIN FROM LIB DEM  
8.3% over Lib Dem | Turnout 42.7%

**Luton, Wigmore**  
REF GAIN FROM LIB DEM  
2.5% over Lib Dem | Turnout 25.7%

**North Devon, Fremington**  
LIB DEM GAIN FROM IND  
17.0% over Ref | Turnout 34.7%

**North Kesteven, Sleaford Westholme**  
REF GAIN FROM LINCS IND  
17.0% over Ind | Turnout 26.1%

**North Lincolnshire, Axholme Central**  
CON HELD  
13.7% over Ref | Turnout 31.2%

**North Lincolnshire, Brumby**  
REF GAIN FROM LAB  
24.4% over Lab | Turnout 17.4%

**Northumberland, Cramlington South West**  
CON GAIN FROM REF  
8.1% over Ref | Turnout 26.9%

**Pembrokeshire, Milford Hakin**  
REF GAIN FROM IND  
5.3% over Con | Turnout 32.7%

**Rossendale, Hareholme and Waterfoot**  
GREEN GAIN FROM LAB  
3.2% over Ref | Turnout 30.7%

**Sevenoaks, Halstead Knockholt and Badgers Mount**  
CON HELD  
14.4% over Ref | Turnout 45.0%

**Vale of White Horse, Abingdon Abbey Northcourt**  
LIB DEM GAIN FROM GREEN  
11.3% over Green | Turnout 31.6%

**Vale of White Horse, Stanford**  
CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM  
18.7% over Lib Dem | Turnout 43.4%

**Westmorland and Furness, Penrith South**  
LIB DEM HELD  
9.3% over Ref | Turnout 23.5%

# Multi-party politics makes results difficult to call



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

With almost a third of all English council seats falling vacant on 7 May, and nearly half the electorate able to cast a vote, there is scope for quite radical change to the pattern of local government.

The fact that 63 of 136 councils have all-out elections also makes it more likely that new leadership teams could emerge.

As in 2025, both Labour and the Conservatives could lose seats and council control, with a range of parties (and Independents) on both the left and right poised to take advantage.

The proportion of councillors belonging to one of the two 'big' parties has already fallen from more than 80 per cent in 2016 to just 60 per cent now, with the Liberal Democrats having a majority in more councils than the Conservatives.

Reform UK's electoral success in 2025 saw it pass the threshold to become a formal political group within the LGA; the Greens could achieve the same goal this time.

Their recent local by-election gains, from Reform in Kent and from Labour in Rossendale, are indicative of what seems to be growing support.

In all, more than 5,000 seats are being contested, with Labour defending half, the Conservatives a quarter and the Liberal Democrats about one in eight.

The Greens defend fewer than 150 seats, whereas Reform won less than a handful at the comparable previous elections.

The reality of the new five-party politics is reflected in the Conservatives, Labour and Reform each fielding candidates in well over 90 per cent of all seats, with the Greens present in nearly 90 per cent



**“In all, more than 5,000 seats are being contested, with Labour defending half, the Conservatives a quarter and the Liberal Democrats about one in eight”**

and the Liberal Democrats just shy of 80 per cent.

Labour's challenge this year is daunting as it defends traditional strongholds in London and the metropolitan boroughs.

In 2022, the party won a higher proportion of the seats in London than at any time for half a century and took Westminster for the first time ever.

Its performance in the mets was comparatively underwhelming, but it still emerged in control of 26 of the 33 boroughs that went to the polls.

In the 2025 local elections, the Conservatives lost two-thirds of their county and county unitary councillors, and their majority in all 16 authorities they previously controlled. They will be keen to avoid a repeat in the six counties where the elections were postponed until this year.

As at the 2024 general election, the

Liberal Democrats made ground in 2025, despite their overall share of the vote rising only modestly. Their secret, as always, was targeting, as they gained control in Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire and Shropshire.

The biggest threat to Labour in London is from the left, with many Labour majorities being nibbled away at best.

Already, councillors in Brent, Greenwich, Hackney, Lewisham and Southwark have defected to the Greens, and the Labour mayoralties in Hackney and Lewisham may be at risk.

With mayors currently elected on the first-past-the-post system, the possibility of someone winning with a tiny majority and a minimal share of the vote cannot be ruled out.

The Aspire party no longer has an overall majority in Tower Hamlets, but may be

boosted by the endorsement of Jeremy Corbyn's Your Party. The latter is also championing the Newham Independents Party, which is fielding candidates in every ward and for mayor in a traditionally Labour council.

The Conservatives may hope for some success in Wandsworth and Westminster, but must battle Reform in parts of outer London, such as Bexley and Bromley, which border that party's 2025 stronghold in Kent.

In Havering, long a bastion of Residents' groups, the defection of Romford Conservative MP Andrew Rosindell to Reform may influence some voters. In every ward there is a full slate of both Residents' and Reform candidates.

In adjacent Barking and Dagenham, Reform could also mount a challenge, but this time to Labour in a borough held by the party with huge majorities since 1964.

The south-west of London will remain safe for the Liberal Democrats, but they could make further in-roads in Merton following their convincing general election success in Wimbledon.

Reform is likely to be Labour's key opponent in the 32 metropolitan boroughs. All-out elections in half of them mean there is the potential to overturn the status quo at a stroke. In 12 of those cases, Labour currently enjoys a clear majority.

Barnsley, Sunderland and Wakefield have been under Labour control since they were established in 1974. At the 2024 general election, they were all in the top 20 Reform party shares.

Birmingham, Sandwell and Walsall in the West Midlands also have whole-council contests.

In Birmingham, Labour faces a challenge from the left, with the Workers' Party coming a close second in two constituencies in 2024.

## The reality of the new five-party politics is reflected in the Conservatives, Labour and Reform each fielding candidates in well over 90 per cent of all seats

Sandwell was very briefly held by the Conservatives in 1978, but has been Labour ever since, with the party currently holding almost nine in 10 seats.

Walsall is one of just two metropolitan boroughs with a Conservative majority. Reform gained a seat following a big swing at a by-election last September, but the winning candidate has now defected to Rupert Lowe's rival Restore Britain party. Multi-party politics here, as elsewhere, makes these elections very difficult to call.

Green councillors number in double figures in four of the boroughs that go to the polls. The party won four council seats in May 2024, in both Bradford and South Tyneside; in Sheffield, they won six and came second in the popular vote.

The Greens will be hoping to advance based on recent favourable publicity, but their success is likely to be greater in those areas with a younger, more educated demographic.

In the counties, the Conservatives and Reform go head-to-head in parts of Essex and Norfolk in particular, but some success for the Liberal Democrats and Greens should not be ruled out.

The Liberal Democrats gained several constituencies in East and West Sussex, and in Hampshire, in 2024, and the Greens have control of Mid Suffolk District Council and are the largest party in

neighbouring East Suffolk and in Babergh.

Much of this could change again next year, with elections to new unitary authorities. These are smaller than originally envisaged, but will still reflect political loyalties at the time.

This year, the first iteration of this local government reorganisation comes in Surrey, with elections to East Surrey and West Surrey councils. Both Liberal Democrats and Residents' groups are entrenched in different parts of the county.

In West Surrey, for example, the Liberal Democrats already control, or are by far the largest party, in four of its six constituent districts.

Elsewhere among the unitary authorities, Labour faces an Independent challenge in several of the seats it won in Blackburn in 2022.

In Halton, by contrast, its majority is unassailable, and in Plymouth, Reading and Southampton it would have to lose half or more of the seats being defended before coming close to sacrificing control.

Reform will look to increase its representation in Hartlepool and in North East Lincolnshire, which both voted 70-30 to leave the EU in 2016.

There is less scope for wholesale turnovers in the district council elections, with three-quarters only choosing a third of their councillors.

However, both Huntingdonshire and Newcastle-under-Lyme have opted for a four-yearly cycle, and both present an opportunity for Reform. The party topped the poll in the 2025 county contests in the former and won eight of the nine county divisions in the latter.

On the other side of the political divide, Hastings – which chooses half its councillors – could become the second council under Green overall control.

The Labour performance in Adur is also worth attention. In 2022, the party took five of 14 seats; in 2024, it won every ward except three.

In Burnley, where defections from Labour to an Independent group have become commonplace, Labour's position as the largest party is at risk. ●

### England local elections 2026

**5,013\* seats in 136 councils (22 with boundary changes) comprising six county councils, 32 London boroughs, 32 metropolitan boroughs, 18 unitary authorities and 48 district councils.**

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Ind/Other	No overall control
<b>Councils controlled</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Seats being defended*</b>	<b>1,362</b>	<b>2,557</b>	<b>684</b>	<b>410</b>	

*\*Accounting for boundary changes but not casual vacancies/defections*

See next month's **first** for Professors Rallings and Thrasher's review of the 7 May local election results



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

**The comprehensive three-day programme for the LGA Annual Conference and Exhibition is now live!**

Visit our website to view the latest sessions covering a huge array of topics relating to this year's theme, 'From neighbourhoods to nations – building lasting futures locally.'

**Confirmed speakers include**

**Sarah Jones MP**

Minister for Policing and Crime

**Baroness Casey of Blackstock DBE CB**

Chair, Independent Commission on Adult Social Care

**Rt Hon Sir James Cleverly TD VR MP**

Shadow Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

**Zöe Franklin MP**

Liberal Democrat Local Government Spokesperson

**Luke Rodgers BEM**

Founder and Chief Executive Officer, The Care Leaders

**Maddy Desforges OBE**

Chief Executive Officer, National Association for Voluntary and Community Action



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+ EXHIBITION

7-9 July 2026  
Bournemouth

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