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Helping councils deliver

Inclusive growth

Investment that ensures all areas prosper **p11**

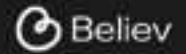
New member support

Courses to kick off your council career **p12**

Local politics upended

May's contests show a split electorate **p30**

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Wednesday 8th July, 8am Purbeck Lounge
(Breakfast included!)





Welcome to local government

Welcome to newly elected councillors receiving this magazine for the first time!

You can read about the LGA's support for new members (p12), and also about our wider sector-led support offer that includes help for councils facing changes in leadership and political control (p16).

It has been a busy period since the 7 May local elections, with the King's Speech setting out the Government's legislative programme for the current parliamentary session (p9).

I was delighted to lead an LGA delegation to the UK Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum in Leeds last month (p11), where our new guidance for councils on attracting investment and boosting local growth was launched (p6).

Prior to the elections, I visited the headquarters of the Congress of the Council of Europe, where the LGA's campaign on civility in public life was praised by international speakers (p21). You can also hear in this edition from the LGA's very own Civility in Public Life Ambassador, Cllr Hannah Dalton (p19).

Our lead comment looks at the evidence for what works in local government (p27), and we have analysis of the local election results from Professors Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher (p30). ●

Councillor Louise Gittins
is LGA Chair

12



16



21



25



FEATURES

- 11 Inclusive growth**
Investment that helps all areas to prosper
- 12 Support for new councillors**
The LGA is here to help
- 14 SEND reforms**
The LGA's response to government proposals
- 16 Sector support**
Helping councils deliver for their communities
- 19 New civility ambassador**
Abuse of councillors and staff is unacceptable
- 20 Policing review**
Redrawing the blue lines
- 21 An international voice**
Learning from European partners
- 22 Growing our own**
How apprentices are shaping local government
- 23 Officer creativity**
Developing the skills needed by future leaders
- 25 Innovation Zone 2026**
Navigating change and delivering locally

COMMENT

- 26 Innovating with AI**
Trialling new technologies
- 27 Evaluating the evidence**
What works in local government?

REGULARS

- 04 Chair's comment**
- 04 News**
- 09 Parliament – King's Speech**
- 28 LGA group leaders**
- 30 Local elections**



Editor Karen Thornton
Design CPL One www.cplone.co.uk
Advertising chris.dixon@cplone.co.uk

Write to **first**:
Local Government Association,
18 Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ
Email karen.thornton@local.gov.uk

Tel editorial 07464 652610
Tel advertising 01223 378 047
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Leaders of our places



Councillor Louise Gittins
is Chair of the LGA

I was delighted to lead an LGA delegation to the UK Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UKREiIF) in Leeds last month.

The forum brings together leaders from national, regional and local government, including combined authorities, with investors, developers and senior figures from across the built environment sector (see p6, p10).

The LGA was there to promote councils as leaders of their places. We worked with partners to showcase best practice, highlight our sector-led improvement offers (see p16) and demonstrate leadership in policy advocacy – all with partnership working at the core.

It's been almost a month since the 7 May local elections, but the LGA continues to support councils with the development of new political arrangements in areas affected by changes in political control, moves to no overall control, or changes in local priorities and leadership.

This is an incredibly demanding period for leaders and their teams, and the LGA is here to help you every step of the way. Please visit our councillor hub to find out more about our support for councillors, from newly elected to longer-serving leaders (local.gov.uk/councillor-hub).

Following the local elections, the LGA's political proportionality has changed (see p6), and I look forward to welcoming and working with our newest group – the Green Party.

As chair, I am committed to working cross-party, with all our political groups, to strengthen our sector and champion our member councils in leading thriving communities.

Finally, I wanted to pay tribute to Cllr Joe Harris, who has stepped down as Vice-Chair of the LGA and Leader of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group after five years. Joe has worked tirelessly to support councils and deliver progress on your priorities, working constructively across party lines. I wish him every success for the future.

I welcome and congratulate his successor, Cllr Bridget Smith, with whom I've worked on the LGA Board. I know the deep expertise she offers to our sector and her commitment to our organisation, its cross-party tradition and our members. ●



From l to r: the Yorkshire Post's Greg Wright and the LGA's Cllr Richard Wright and Cllr Louise Gittins at UKREiIF



Post-16 local offer 'needs to improve'

Councils must be at the heart of solving the youth unemployment crisis, the LGA has said in response to Alan Milburn's independent interim report on young people and work.

The former health secretary has warned of a 'lost generation' of young adults, with one in six set to be out of work, education or training (NEET) in five years unless action is taken.

He said young people are facing a "perfect storm" of challenges, including a decline in entry-level jobs, with nearly a million currently NEET at an estimated cost to them and society of £125 billion.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "This review is urgent and lays bare the stark challenge of tackling the youth unemployment crisis.

"Any solution must have councils at the heart of the effort. As trusted convenors, they are already working with partners in schools, further and higher education providers, health, jobcentres, employers and the voluntary sector.

"Councils know their residents and communities and understand the needs of the local economy. They are best placed to support with early identification and prevention to get young people back on track to learning and earning.

"Key measures need to include a stronger role for local government to help ensure the local offer at post-16 improves, and a focus on a place-based integrated service that enables us to tailor provision to the needs of our local young people." ●

'Neighbourhood guarantee' on local services

The Government has announced a new Neighbourhood Guarantee scheme aimed at ensuring councils meet public service targets.

The scheme includes an online tool to monitor council performance on services such as pothole repairs, and plans to cap profits in children's social care.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "We have long called for action to address the unsustainable cost pressures in children's social care and greater powers for councils to shape thriving local communities.

"Councils share the Government's

ambition to ensure vulnerable children receive the care and support they deserve, while tackling excessive profiteering in parts of the children's placement market, which has placed huge financial strain on local authorities."

She added: "Meaningful devolution, backed by sufficient and sustainable funding for councils, is key to giving communities greater control over local priorities, from regenerating high streets to improving neighbourhood services.

"We are encouraged by the Government's focus on neighbourhoods and place and will work with them to secure the additional funding that is needed.

"Local leaders know their places best, and with the right powers and resources, councils can deliver the change residents want to see." ●

Replacement needed for Healthwatch, says LGA

The LGA is calling on the Government to retain a statutory independent local patient 'voice' and work with councils to develop a model for patient and public voice that ensures accountability and independence across health and social care.

The NHS Modernisation Bill, announced in the King's Speech, removes the current Healthwatch system for patient and public voice, without setting out an independent replacement.

NHS bodies and adult social care providers would gather and act on feedback about their own services.

The LGA warns this is a significant step back from the accountability framework established following the 2013 Francis Report into preventable failures in care at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust.

Without an independent, local voice to challenge and represent communities, there is a risk of duplication and accountability gaps, and splitting responsibilities could create fragmentation.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "The current proposals to disband Healthwatch and allow health and social care services to gather and respond to



feedback, rather than being challenged by an independent voice, risks organisations being seen to mark their own homework.

"It could also create confusion and frustration for people who, if drawing on both health and care, will need to approach two different parts of the system to share their views.

"We call on the Government to pause and work with local government and partners to develop a clear and workable model for local patient and public voice that maintains independence, joins up insight across health and social care, and delivers meaningful accountability." ●

● See p9



School nurseries scheme faces 'reality gap'

There is a "sizeable reality gap" between the Government's policy intentions and progress on opening new school-based nurseries, according to a recent report by the Sutton Trust and the Social Market Foundation.

The Department for Education aims to create 3,000 new or expanded nurseries on school sites in England, using spare space. However, the report reveals "limited appetite" among schools to set up nurseries if they don't already have one, with 70 per cent saying it's unlikely they will do so and only 20 per cent already having a plan in place or likely to open one.

Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Chair of the LGA's Children, Young People and Families Committee, said: "It's vitally important we improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged children as they will benefit most from early education and childcare. This will be crucial to achieving the Government's 'good level of development' target.

"While school-based nurseries can be right for some areas, all types of early years provision should be supported to grow in areas of need.

"As part of its review of early education and childcare entitlements funding, government should review who is entitled to free childcare hours, to address the potential disparity in support and ensure those on lower incomes do not miss out.

"The entitlements should also be extended to parents and carers who are studying and/or in training, and foster carers and kinship carers, regardless of work or training status." ●



New guide to help councils attract investment

The LGA has launched a guide to help councils work with the private sector, attract investment and support growth.

‘Attracting investment for inclusive growth: a guide for councils’, produced by Henham Strategy for the LGA, was launched at the UK Real Estate, Investment and Infrastructure Forum in Leeds last month.

The guide sets out steps councils can take to strengthen their offer to business, from acting as a ‘single front door’ for investors to using property and regeneration vehicles, development corporations and incentives.

It highlights how councils can bridge viability gaps, de-risk investment and deliver infrastructure to support local growth. The guide focuses on inclusive growth and investment – growth shared more fairly across communities and helping all areas to prosper.

Cllr Carl Cashman, Vice-Chair of the LGA’s Inclusive Growth Committee, said: “Councils and the private sector are natural partners – both need and support each other, and when they are in sync the return on investment far outstrips what they put in to begin with.

“This guide provides essential knowledge, insight and information about what the private sector needs and expects from local government. Through implementing its findings, councils can create the foundation for further business growth that benefits entire communities.” ●

● See p11

LGA’s new political balance confirmed

The Green Party is to establish a group office at the LGA, following the 7 May elections in which it exceeded the required 5 per cent threshold.

It will be the second new LGA political group in two years, after Reform UK set up an office after the May 2025 elections.

Labour remains the largest party at the LGA, on 24.6 per cent, so continues to nominate the organisation’s chair.

The Conservatives are on 20 per cent, Reform UK 18.7 per cent, Liberal Democrats 17.6 per cent, Independents 10.9 per cent and Greens 8.2 per cent.

Membership of the LGA Board, and of boards and policy committees across the organisation, will now be recalculated in line with the updated political balance.

The new board will be elected at the

LGA’s General Assembly on 7 July, ahead of its annual conference in Bournemouth (see [local.gov.uk/conference](https://www.local.gov.uk/conference)).

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: “Local government is at its strongest when we speak with one voice to national government on the many challenges facing our sector right now, including the acute pressures that councils face, along with the ever-increasing demand for their services that so many people rely on every day.

“As cross-party chair, I am committed to working with all our political groups to strengthen local government, champion our member councils in leading thriving communities, and offer our full support to the sector for the years ahead.” ●

● See p30, local elections



Clarity on Right to Buy reforms

The LGA has said government reforms to Right to Buy (RTB) are a step in the right direction for councils seeking greater control over housing stock.

Ministers have confirmed they will legislate to extend the minimum eligibility period from three to 10 years, change discount rules and exempt newly built social homes from sale for 35 years.

Councils can now retain 100 per cent of RTB receipts and combine them with grant funding to build or buy replacement homes.

An LGA spokesperson said: “While Right to Buy has supported many into

homeownership, the scheme has impacted council housing stock significantly as councils struggle to deliver homes needed to replace those bought through the scheme.

“The recent reforms to RTB – something the LGA has long called for – are a step in the right direction for councils as they seek greater control over their housing stock. This announcement provides useful clarity for councils.

“We urge government to ensure the legislation needed to reform the scheme is brought forward soon.” ●

Ofsted framework ‘penalises’ inclusive schools’

The new Ofsted inspection framework unfairly penalises schools serving deprived populations or with high levels of special needs (SEND) inclusion, according to analysis undertaken by the National Association of Head Teachers.

The school leaders’ union warns that this “raises alarm bells for the Government’s ambition of more SEND inclusion in mainstream schools”.

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

Families Committee, said: “For the SEND reforms to succeed, it is vital that children with SEND who require support receive this in a mainstream setting where appropriate. Ofsted’s inspection framework should place greater focus on inclusive practice and whether an individual school meets the needs of the community that it serves when inspected.

“Schools that are not playing a meaningful role in supporting vulnerable children, including those with SEND and who are care-experienced, should be held to account for their lack of action.” ●

● See p14 for the LGA’s response to the Government’s consultation on the Schools White Paper, ‘Every child achieving and thriving’, and its SEND reform proposals

‘Extend playground vaping ban’ – LGA

The LGA has called for an extension to the proposed ban on smoking and vaping in children’s playgrounds to include all playgrounds, not just those managed by councils.

Responding to a government consultation on smoke-free and vape-free spaces, the LGA warned that excluding publicly accessible playgrounds that are not managed by local authorities – such as those in new housing estates, national parks and country parks – risks gaps in protection and exposing children to harmful second-hand smoke and vapour.

The LGA has also called for: mandatory minimum standards for signage; clear guidance on the siting of designated smoking and vaping areas to minimise concentrated exposure at entrances and boundaries; an extension of the vaping exemption to include all commissioned smoking cessation services to support people with quitting smoking; and adequate funding to cover local authority enforcement.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA’s Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: “No child should be exposed to second-hand smoke or vapour clouds in public spaces designed for their health, education and play.



“Reducing the visibility of smoking and vaping is an important step in our approach to prevention.

“Many councils are already introducing smoke- and vape-free spaces, particularly play spaces, sports sidelines and school gates.

“National consistency across settings would help protect children, health and care patients, and non-users from harmful exposure. Councils must be adequately funded to implement and enforce these measures.” ●

● See local.gov.uk/parliament for the LGA’s latest briefings and consultation responses

A smokefree generation

The LGA has hailed the passing of the Tobacco and Vapes Act as a “landmark moment for public health”.

The act will now result in the introduction of a smokefree generation. From 2027, it will be illegal to sell tobacco products to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009.

Among other changes, the act legislates for a retail licensing scheme, a ban on advertising and sponsorship of consumer nicotine products, powers to regulate flavours and packaging of vapes and nicotine, and powers to extend the ban on smoking in some outdoor public spaces.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA’s Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: “This is a landmark moment for public health and will help tackle the deep health inequalities caused by smoking.

“Preventing young people from ever starting to smoke is one of the most effective ways to improve health outcomes and manage future pressure on our health and care services.

“Reducing the appeal of vapes to children with tighter controls on flavours, packaging and promotion is an important step in addressing the concerning rise in youth vaping.

“The comprehensive licensing scheme for retailers selling tobacco and vape products will support councils to prevent underage sales and curb the illicit market.

“Councils must be properly resourced to enforce the new regulations, deliver stop-smoking services, and protect communities from harmful and illegal products.” ●



News in brief

Mental health strategy

The Government has launched a call for evidence of best practice in communities to support a new mental health strategy for England focused on prevention. The LGA backs this preventative focus, and Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "Councils hold a crucial role in the delivery of local mental health services, working with the NHS and voluntary and community services. We look forward to working with government to ensure this local leadership is reflected in the strategy to ensure people are best supported to live full and healthy lives." The call for evidence closes on 10 July.

Councillor pensions

Councillors in England under the age of 75 and in receipt of allowances can now apply to join the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). The LGA has long campaigned for this change, which came into effect on 11 May. Councillors in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland already have access to the LGPS. An LGA spokesperson said: "Fair remuneration, including pension provision, is vital so that people from all walks of life feel able to stand for public office."

Council tax surcharge

A consultation has opened on government plans for a high-value council tax surcharge on residential properties worth £2 million or more in England. Councils will be funded to administer the charge, but the revenue raised will go to the Treasury, to "help fund vital local government services and... to make the system fairer for households". The LGA has previously called for any additional funding raised through the council tax system to be made available to support local authorities.

Social work students 'need financial support'

The LGA has called for financial support for social work students in England to be brought in line with nursing, teaching and allied health professions, warning that the current system risks undermining the future workforce.

New survey findings highlight growing pressures across the sector, with 52 per cent of adult social workers reporting increasingly complex caseloads, while resources and capacity are failing to keep pace with demand.

Councils are facing high vacancy rates, retention challenges and shortages of placement opportunities, affecting the pipeline of new recruits.

In a submission to a government consultation on reforms to the Social Work Bursary and Education Support Grant, the LGA stressed that both schemes are essential and must be strengthened rather than reduced.

To maintain a supply of social workers,

there is a need to support undergraduate and postgraduate training routes, and for targeted financial support to widen access for students from low-income backgrounds, disabled people, and those with caring responsibilities.

An LGA spokesperson said: "We must protect overall investment in our future social workers to secure a stable pipeline of talent for the sector.

"Councils and higher education providers need stable, predictable funding that enables effective planning and supports students to choose social work and stay in the profession, so we can continue delivering vital services for local people.

"Social workers deliver an essential public service in every community. The financial backing for this workforce should recognise that contribution and align social work support models with equivalent public service professions." ●

New deepfake resource launched

The LGA has launched a series of educational videos for councillors and council officers to help identify the growing risks posed by deepfakes and other forms of synthetic media.

The LGA's 2025 survey on artificial intelligence use in councils found that a third of respondents viewed deepfake-driven disinformation as a risk 'to a great extent' – second only to cybersecurity – while a further 37 per cent saw it as a 'moderate' risk.

In an internal study, the LGA outlined 14 categories of risk facing local government, warning that these challenges are increasing rapidly as synthetic media technologies become more accessible and more sophisticated.

Cllr Richard Clewer, Chairman of the LGA's Public Service Reform and Innovation Committee, said: "Synthetic media and deepfakes are no longer abstract technological concepts, but real risks that councils are already beginning



to face. This is particularly pertinent for elections and other future democratic engagement, where misinformation, disinformation and malinformation are likely to spread further.

"The LGA's new video series will help colleagues across local government build their understanding, strengthen their resilience and protect the integrity of local democracy." ●

● See [local.gov.uk/deepfakes-and-synthetic-media-unpacked](https://www.local.gov.uk/deepfakes-and-synthetic-media-unpacked)

The King's Speech

What comes next for councils?

Last month's King's Speech set out the Government's legislative programme for the new parliamentary session, with a wide range of bills that will have direct implications for local government.

For councils, the focus now moves from anticipation to implementation; ensuring that the measures announced are workable, properly resourced and shaped by local need.

The LGA welcomed a number of priorities that councils have long called for, including reforms to special educational needs (SEND) provision and social housing. However, as with any major legislative programme, the detail will matter.

New responsibilities for councils must be accompanied by updated burdens assessments, with post-implementation scrutiny to ensure local authorities are not required to divert resources away from existing statutory services.

One of the most significant announcements for local government is the Education for All Bill.

Councils have long called for reform so that more children and young people with SEND can have their needs met in mainstream settings, where appropriate, and without the need for a statutory plan.

The LGA is clear that these reforms must be co-produced with parents, carers, and children and young people themselves, with a clear focus on improving outcomes (see p14).

However, reform will need to be phased in carefully. Need must continue to be met within the existing statutory framework, timescales must remain realistic, and sufficient funding will be required to build capacity now and support transition to a new system.

The Social Housing Renewal Bill is also a welcome step.

Measures to reform Right to Buy, protect new-build social housing and streamline housing consents could help councils



rebuild and retain desperately needed social housing stock.

The NHS Modernisation Bill, also known as the Health Bill, also carries significant implications for councils.

The requirement for integrated care boards (ICBs) and partners to develop neighbourhood-level plans rightly reflects the importance of locally tailored approaches.

Local government will be critical to this, bringing detailed knowledge of communities and the ability to convene partners around joined-up, place-based care. However, we have warned that removing mandatory local authority representation from ICBs would be a step backwards, risking a weaker link between system decision-making and local need.

Any 'single patient record' must also be interoperable across health and care, including social care, and developed alongside a sustained commitment to digital inclusion.

Several bills also speak directly to councils' role in building safer, more resilient communities.

The Police Reform Bill maintains the important link between policing and local

communities, with proposals for local authority-led policing boards.

The Cyber Security and Resilience Bill could support improved threat intelligence, incident reporting and supply chain resilience, but councils will need clear guidance and proportionate support.

The Digital Access to Services Bill offers opportunities to improve access to public services, but must work for every resident.

Councils should be recognised as essential partners in shaping a national digital ID system, with non-digital routes and assisted support remaining available.

The King's Speech has opened a new phase of legislative activity. The task for us now is to ensure that national ambition translates into practical improvements for communities.

Councils stand ready to work with government, but successful delivery will depend on genuine partnership, sustainable funding, and reforms that reflect the realities of local places. ●

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

Leading your area through the SEND reforms: how strong digital foundations protect children, families and councils

The Government's recent Schools White Paper and the accompanying SEND reform proposals represent a significant shift for local areas

Although much of the national detail is still developing, the direction is clear: councils will need to demonstrate greater consistency, transparency and coordination across settings. For local leaders, this presents both challenge and opportunity – and places digital capability at the heart of delivering a responsive, joined-up service.

At Idox, we have been working closely with local authorities to understand their reflections on the proposals and what the next few years may require. Many councils tell us they are already evaluating the impact on documentation, workloads and multi-agency communication. They also want confidence that the systems they rely on will evolve in step with the reforms. These conversations continue to shape our roadmap and the priorities we are investing in.

One proposed change attracting considerable attention is the potential introduction of Individual Support Plans for all children with identified needs. While final policy decisions remain under consultation, the implications for scale, workflow and record-keeping are already clear. Councils want tools that support consistency across settings, streamline contributions from professionals and reduce duplication for families.

Idox's cloud-based SEND case management platform is already supporting transparent workflows, statutory compliance and coordinated decision-making across England. But what most distinguishes our approach is the collaborative relationship we maintain with users. Through working groups, research activity and structured product feedback,

local authorities directly influence new features, enhancements and long-term priorities. This ensures our technology reflects real operational pressures and supports teams to work efficiently.

We are also investing in the digital foundations that local areas tell us matter most: secure information sharing, visibility of timelines, better support for early intervention and improved communication with education settings. These priorities align closely with the national direction of travel, giving councils confidence that their digital infrastructure is stable, future-ready and capable of adapting as the reforms take shape.

As Jamie Rowell, Idox Head of Product & Strategy (Social Care), notes, "The proposed move towards ISPs will significantly increase documentation and coordination. Our focus is on ensuring authorities have systems that can adapt as policy evolves – and that support early, fair and effective help for children." ●

Upcoming Idox Webinar – 11 June

NextGen SEND Case Management:
Preparing for ISPs & the 2026 Reforms

Join Idox and a guest SEN Service Manager for a practical, peer-led session on what's next for SEND – and how to prepare now.

Register now: idoxgroup.com/send-webinar

The coming years will bring meaningful change. With Idox as a trusted digital partner, local areas can plan with confidence, supported by technology and expertise that help deliver better outcomes for children, young people and families.

Transform SEND Case Management. Deliver Better Outcomes, Faster.

EHC Hub gives your team control, clarity, and confidence – at every stage of the EHCP journey.



Inclusive growth

Investment that helps all areas to prosper



Councillor Louise Gittins is Chair of the LGA

Inclusive economic growth requires a strong partnership between the public and private sectors.

That is the consistent theme that emerged from last month's UK Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UKREiiF) in Leeds, attended by thousands of delegates from across local and regional government, business, housing and infrastructure.

I was delighted to lead an LGA delegation to the conference, where we held a series of excellent events, offering a timely reminder of the increasingly central role councils play in driving growth, shaping places, supporting cohesion and delivering the homes and infrastructure communities need.



LGA 'Designing for neighbourhoods' session, UKREiiF

The LGA used the forum to showcase council innovation and leadership, but also to underline the importance of strong partnerships between the public and private sectors in tackling some of the country's biggest long-term challenges – from housing delivery and planning reform to digital transformation and demographic change. This is a partnership with business, and it requires the two to be aligned to deliver results.

The core issue of housing delivery, and how to tackle the shortage of homes we have in this country, featured prominently throughout the week.

Our events looked at planning, unlocking capital to build homes and foster community, and larger-scale issues such as spatial development strategies and planning reform.

Other highlights included the Great North Investment Summit – showcasing the importance of local partnerships, opportunities for growth, collaboration and improving outcomes in our communities – and the engagement with mayors, combined authorities and local leaders throughout the week.

© Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority



Cllr Gittins (right) at the Great North Investment Summit

It was clear that delegates thought of councils not as passive observers of the growth agenda, but as a crucial part of the delivery mechanism.

Whether through planning, regeneration, transport, housing or skills, local authorities are central to building the places where people live, work and socialise.

Figures from local government and business alike highlighted the importance of the public and private sectors working hand-in-glove – the local knowledge and democratic, community focus of councils combining with developer expertise to drive growth.

This was most clear when we launched our new guidance to help local authorities engage more effectively with the private sector, curate their area and services to better support businesses, and attract investment and growth.

'Attracting investment for inclusive growth: a guide for councils' provides essential context and practical steps for local government to create the best offer to business and bring

investment to local areas.

It highlights inclusive growth and investment – that is, growth and investment that is shared more fairly across a community and helps all areas prosper.

Alongside this, the LGA highlighted its wider sector support work (see **p16**) and LG Horizons, a flagship programme exploring what local government could look like by 2040.

From the pressures of an ageing population to the opportunities and disruption created by artificial intelligence and digital transformation, the programme aims to help councils prepare for profound long-term change that is led by local leaders and shaped for, and by, local residents and businesses.

Looking back, UKREiiF served as more than a networking event or investment conference. It became a platform for demonstrating the key role of councils in economic growth, and how a solid partnership between local government and the private sector is the cornerstone of inclusive growth. ●

Support for new councillors

The LGA offers a wide range of courses and resources

The votes are counted. The results are in. And all that hard work delivering leaflets, knocking on doors and speaking to residents has finally paid off.

Congratulations and welcome to local government!

Becoming a councillor, and representing and advocating for your residents, businesses and local organisations, is one of the most important public services you can perform. It is both rewarding and challenging, and you will find yourself with many different hats

to wear and responsibilities to manage.

Your community will be made up of a diverse range of people with differing opinions – all of whom will expect you to represent them fairly and understand their needs, provide answers to questions about how the council is run and how it spends its (their!) money, and what you will do to support and advocate for them.

Every day, you will be expected to balance the needs of your local area, your political party (if you belong to one) and your council – in addition to your own personal, family and workplace commitments.

While all this might appear to be a daunting prospect, we at the LGA are here to help you.

In addition to the induction and training provided by your council and your



political party, by becoming a councillor in England you are automatically eligible to access the LGA's wide-ranging support for elected members.

Our councillor hub (local.gov.uk/councillor-hub) is your first port of call for learning, leadership and development opportunities that can help you progress your local government career.

There, you will find a Briefing for New Councillors, an overview of the information, resources and support you need to get started. This covers the role of local government and the councillor, council governance, working with officers, and the Public Sector Equality Duty, as well as an introduction to the LGA and its sector support offer (see **p16**).

Also on the hub is a link to our councillor e-learning platform, with a choice of free e-learning modules on everything from influencing skills and scrutiny for councillors to supporting your constituents and being an effective councillor for your ward.

Our Local Leadership Framework for Councillors helps you think about the skills you need as a new councillor, and to map out the things you might want to explore through induction and beyond.

The hub also includes a link to our Civility in Public Life programme, providing tailored advice for councillors on handling abuse and intimidation, and managing personal safety.

Away from the hub, if you are interested in specific council policy

Events for newly elected councillors

- New member induction event with Local Government East – 9 June, 10am-12pm.
- Introduction to council audit committees – 9 June, 2-3.30pm.
- Local government reorganisation support: the experience of being a unitary councillor – 10 June, 2-3.15pm.
- How do councils work? An introduction to governance for new councillors – 17 June, 2-3.30pm.
- Regional welcome event for newly elected councillors in London (hybrid) – 17 June, 5.30-7.30pm.
- Hitting the ground running: a development session for newly elected councillors in the North East and Yorkshire and Humber – 14 July, 5-8.15pm in Leeds; and 15 July,



9.45am-1pm in Newcastle upon Tyne.

- All in local government: what councillors need to know – 16 July, 3.30pm.
- LGA sector support: an introduction for new councillors – 8 September, 5-6.30pm.

See local.gov.uk/events to book your free place on these and other LGA events, and local.gov.uk/councillor-hub for additional and forthcoming events for new councillors.



run bespoke programmes to increase representation and support your development to become leaders within local government.

Our Next Generation programme supports and encourages you to be a bold, confident political leader; Boosting Middle Leaders enables leaders and officers to learn together; and Leadership Essentials provides bespoke support on key portfolio and service areas – such as children’s services, finance, and planning – aimed at new and aspiring cabinet members.

You can find out about all these programmes and more at local.gov.uk/our-support/councillor-and-officer-development.

As councillors, you are uniquely placed to make a real difference to residents’ lives and shape your local area.

The LGA is here to help you do this, with opportunities to develop your skills throughout your councillor journey, from newly elected to new leader.

To find out more and access the support you need, contact your LGA regional team and principal adviser: see local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-principal-advisers-and-regional-teams. ●

and service areas, we would encourage you to subscribe to the relevant LGA e-bulletin at local.gov.uk/e-bulletins. These documents cover everything from apprenticeships and devolution to transformation and workforce.

Once you’ve got yourself established, don’t forget that the LGA provides training and support programmes relevant to your development throughout your time in local government.

You can network with and learn from councillors with shared characteristics on our Focus on Leadership events for black, Asian and ethnic minority councillors, LGBTQ+ councillors, opposition leaders and deputy leaders, and young councillors (those aged under 40). For disabled councillors and candidates, we

Useful links and resources

- LG Inform – the LGA’s free data benchmarking platform, providing up-to-date published data about your local area and how your council’s performance compares with other authorities: see local.gov.uk/lginform.
- Case studies database – the LGA regularly captures and publishes council good practice: see local.gov.uk/case-studies.
- **first** magazine – the LGA’s monthly membership magazine includes policy and improvement updates, and our regular local elections analysis: see local.gov.uk/first. Email karen.thornton@local.gov.uk to get your print copy sent to your home address or if your contact details have changed.
- Councillor induction essentials – our new guide for officers working with councillors to develop their council’s councillor induction programme: see local.gov.uk/our-support/councillor-and-officer-development

Your questions answered

See below for some frequently asked questions from new councillors. You can find more questions and top tips at local.gov.uk/new-councillors-frequently-asked-questions.

Q: I receive a lot of invitations. How do I decide which ones to accept or decline?

A: A good tip is to accept once, and then you can assess whether this is a valuable forum/event to attend on a regular basis. Immerse yourself – but realise there will come a point when you’ll know where you can best spend your time. If you are in a multi-member ward, you may be able to divide the engagements up between yourselves.

Q: How do I manage all the different demands on my time?

A: When you first become a councillor, it can be completely overwhelming, especially if you have other commitments, such as employment or caring responsibilities. It is up to you how long you spend on your councillor duties, and what type of councillor you see yourself being. Most councillors are very keen to spend time in their communities as well as in the town hall. This is a difficult balancing act and tends to change as you progress in your councillor career.

Q: What are some top tips for managing casework?

A: Identify what the problem is, avoid promising to sort out every problem, refer the problem to the appropriate council department, provide feedback, consider the wider issues, and let your co-members know. A number of similar concerns raised with members may suggest that an issue needs to be dealt with by a new or revised policy, or a scrutiny review. Where you have had a success, it is also worth letting your fellow ward members know, in case they face a similar situation.



Delivering SEND reforms

Putting children and young people first

Consultations have closed on the Government's proposals for a more inclusive education system in England, with children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) at its centre.

The LGA is clear that the reforms – set out in the recent Schools White Paper, 'Every child achieving and thriving' and an associated SEND consultation (see **first** 713) – are a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get this right for our children.

For them to be successful, the Government must work closely with councils as key partners to deliver reforms and ensure they are empowered to drive changes that improve the lives and

outcomes of children and young people with SEND.

We welcome the principles of the proposed reforms and want to work with government and all SEND partners to ensure they are implemented and delivered successfully and that the practical implementation challenges can be resolved.

First, working in partnership with clear accountability is critical: all partners must continue to work together positively to make these reforms a success.

Tackling the SEND crisis requires a cross-government response, and we look forward to working with all relevant departments as well as partners in health, education, early years and post-16 settings, parent-carers, and children and young people themselves, to co-produce these reforms with a clear focus on improving outcomes.

SEND reform will be taking place at

the same time as closely linked reforms to children's social care, early years, integrated care boards (ICBs) and local government reorganisation.

We want to work with government to ensure that councils are sufficiently resourced and supported to deliver across all these reform agendas.

It is equally important that reforms take into account the recommendations made in last year's Curriculum and Assessment Review, and that Ofsted's school inspection activity has a strengthened focus on encouraging inclusive practices in mainstream settings.

To succeed, government must ensure that meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND is a core function and priority for ICBs, that they have capacity to deliver this function, and that there are robust accountability measures in place if they do not.

We acknowledge the challenges facing ICBs as they go through their own reforms, which have reduced capacity to work strategically on SEND and heightened anxiety of their role in reform – but the role of health partners is critical in effective joint working in local SEND systems.

Second, timescales need to be kept under review to ensure they are realistic, and sufficient funding will be needed to both

build capacity now and ensure that the transition to the new system is effective.

The DfE's timescales for responding to the White Paper consultation and for councils to submit local SEND reform plans (due in on 19 June) were, and are, ambitious, particularly in the absence of critical supporting documents such as detailed guidance on the 'Experts at Hand' programme of specialist support.

These documents must be issued as a matter of urgency to support the development of effective plans.

Third, councils need sufficient powers, resourcing and capacity to deliver.

The LGA has already welcomed the inclusion of the early years in the reforms, the national roll-out of Best Start Family Hubs with a specific role for supporting SEND families, changes to the law on independent special schools and the costs of pupil placements, and £1.8 billion over three years to fund 'Experts at Hand'.

Our recommendation is for this latter funding to sit with councils, who can

then use it to commission ICBs to provide specialist support.

Councils, as leaders of place and with a strong understanding of local need, are ideally placed to hold this funding while the number of ICBs is shrinking, resulting in them working across many council areas.

Councils are already reporting shortages of specialists, as evidenced by research undertaken by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and the Education Policy Institute.

We want to work with government to develop cohorts of specialists and build on work already being undertaken by councils working with local universities and other education providers.

Local innovation must be supported by a clear national ambition that emphasises the importance of this work and without which risks undermining the 'Experts at Hand' programme.

As per our initial response, SEND reforms must be financially sustainable

to ensure they can deliver the right outcomes for children both now and in the future. This must include writing off all councils' dedicated school grant deficits, ahead of the statutory override ending in March 2028.

Additional funding will be needed to meet the growing need for home-to-school transport in the short to medium-term, before we start seeing more children with SEND being educated in their local mainstream school as reforms are implemented.

The LGA is also calling for a review of home-to-school transport legislation to make it fit for the 21st century and reflective of our education system – for example, that education and training is now compulsory to the age of 18. ●

i You can read the LGA's full response to the SEND consultation at local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses

first

**Local
Government
Association**

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

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



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

Sector support

The LGA's new offer for councils and combined authorities



Councillor Peter Mason is Chair of the LGA's Improvement Committee

Just before this edition of **first** went to press, we launched the LGA's Sector Support Offer for 2026/27.

The offer sets out the wide-ranging support that councils and combined authorities are able to access across the LGA's improvement programmes, including practical help, peer learning and expert advice.

It is based on sector-led improvement principles, recognising the unique value of support for the sector, by the sector.

Peer-led support is at the heart of this model, drawing on the direct experience, knowledge and credibility of councillors, officers and peers who understand the realities of leading local services and responding to change. This year's offer is informed by direct engagement with councillors and officers and shaped around the priorities and challenges local and combined authorities are facing now.

The LGA's regional teams continue to work directly with every council and combined authority in England – providing tailored support, improvement advice and access to experienced member and officer peers to assist with all nature of challenges. Be it navigating a new role or council organisational performance challenges, a range of

universal and bespoke offerings is available, including access to learning and development opportunities, mentoring and direct support across areas including governance, finance and service level issues.

Additionally, councillors can access trusted and confidential advice through their relevant LGA political group office (see [local.gov.uk/political-groups](https://www.local.gov.uk/political-groups)).

A major focus of this year's offer is helping councils navigate change.

Following the local elections, many councils are adapting to new administrations, changes in political leadership or new councillors entering leadership roles for the first time.

At the same time, devolution and local government reorganisation (LGR) are moving from planning into implementation in many areas.

For authorities impacted by these changes, support is available across a range of areas including governance arrangements, political leadership, workforce planning, organisational change and service transition.

Peer-focused learning continues to play a very important role in this work, helping councils to learn directly from members and officers with direct experience of these processes. More about this support can be read on our devolution and LGR reorganisation hub ([local.gov.uk/devolution-hub](https://www.local.gov.uk/devolution-hub)), featuring our growing LGR toolkit, which brings together key resources from across the sector.

Corporate peer challenge (CPC) remains a cornerstone of our wider sector support offer, with its focus on corporate improvement, resilience and performance.

The strengthened CPC framework introduced last year continues in 2026/27, with a strong emphasis on leadership, governance, culture, performance and financial sustainability.



CPCs and progress reviews are tailored to reflect local circumstances, including adapting approaches where councils are undergoing LGR. In 2025/26, 100 per cent of councils receiving a CPC reported positive impacts for their authority.

Councils can also access wider governance, finance and organisational improvement support. Our financial improvement and sustainability advisers are current or former chief finance officers, with unique experience and knowledge to advise and support authorities with any financial challenges they may be facing.

Governance and scrutiny support is delivered with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, our expert partners, to help strengthen accountability, assurance and decision-making.

Councillor development remains a central aspect of this year's offer, including our highly valued Leadership Academy, Leadership Essentials and Next Generation programmes.

In 2025/26, more than 2,500 councillors attended LGA training and development opportunities.

Officer leadership development also continues to grow. Delivered

“This offer draws on the direct experience, knowledge and credibility of councillors, officers and peers who understand the realities of leading local services”



with partners including Solace, the members' network for local government and public sector professionals, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, and Lawyers in Local Government, the offer includes support for chief executives, statutory officers and middle managers, helping strengthen leadership capacity across the sector.

This year's programme includes the development of a new Aspiring Chief Executive programme, alongside established programmes such as Springboard, Amplify, Total Leadership, Ignite and the Chief Executive Foundation programme, which are all co-designed and delivered by Solace.

There is continued emphasis on strengthening the 'golden triangle' relationship between chief executives, section 151 officers and monitoring officers, recognising the importance of strong governance and collective leadership during periods of change.

The LGA's workforce and HR support has also been expanded for 2026/27, with councils and combined authorities preparing for significant employment reforms, including Make Work Pay and new employment equality legislation.

The offer includes practical tools, guidance, workshops, networks and specialist help with such topics as equal pay, industrial relations, workforce planning, recruitment and retention.

The LGA's graduate programmes continue to help build local government capacity by attracting and developing talent within the sector, including Impact: The Local Government Graduate Programme, the Impact Finance Stream, and Pathways to Planning.

The Be A Councillor campaign also continues to support councils and political groups to encourage more people from different backgrounds and communities to stand for election.

The LGA is continuing to invest in areas including digital capability, cyber resilience, research, data and performance management.

LG Inform remains an integral part of this offer, providing councils with access to benchmarking, comparative insight and local-level data in order to support evidence-led decision-making (see lginform.local.gov.uk).

LG Inform now maps to the Government's Local Outcomes Framework, where metrics are available, supporting local authorities to monitor progress and performance.

The Sector Support Offer also includes a wide range of specialist and service-specific improvement programmes.

These include help for councils to strengthen their adult social care and public health services – including support ahead of Care Quality Commission inspections – through Partners in Care and Health, delivered jointly with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services.

This year, the LGA introduces peer challenge offers in public health and strategic highways, helping councils strengthen leadership and service improvement across these vital areas.

Councils and combined authorities can also access targeted support across

children's services, planning, housing, culture and sport, sustainability and community cohesion.

Help is available for council-led housebuilding through the Council Housebuilding Support Service, for regeneration and public service collaboration through One Public Estate, for planning support through the Planning Advisory Service, and for helping councils progress towards local net zero and adaptation goals through the Sustainability Improvement programme.

Specialist technical support remains available, for example on digital transformation, cyber resilience and data capability, helping local government respond to an evolving technological landscape, including both the opportunities and challenges increasingly presented by artificial intelligence. In 2026/27, this offer will include an expanded range of tools and support.

Other specialist support includes the Joint Inspection Team, which provides expert fire safety advice to councils, our procurement and communications support offers, and the new Local Resilience programme, offering resilience and crisis management training for local government officers.

Across more than 1,500 survey responses evaluating LGA support in 2025/26, 99 per cent of respondents said it had had a positive impact, while 97 per cent said it improved their knowledge, understanding and skills.

The strength of the LGA's Sector Support Offer is that it evolves hand-in-hand with the sector itself. It brings together national expertise, practical tools and direct peer experience to help councils improve services, strengthen local leadership and respond to change.

As local government continues to navigate reform and transformation, the LGA will continue to work alongside the sector to ensure councils have access to the support, learning and expertise they need to deliver for their communities. ●

i See local.gov.uk/publications/sector-support-offer-local-authorities-202627 to find out more about how the LGA offer might support your council. For further information, please contact your LGA regional team or political group office – see bit.ly/3PGAjYj and local.gov.uk/political-groups

How Warsop health hub is redefining social value in community leisure

Delivering **£487,950** in social value in 2025 – the equivalent of £260 per person, surpassing the national average of £230 – Warsop Health Hub is proving that well-designed community leisure can have a measurable and transformative impact.

The £9.1 million facility in North Nottinghamshire was delivered by Alliance Leisure on behalf of Mansfield District Council to address deep-rooted health inequalities in a community of around 12,000 residents. In Warsop, 25 per cent of people live with a limiting long-term illness, life expectancy for men is seven years below the national average, and 64 per cent of residents live in health deprivation hotspots. The closure of Meden Sports Centre in 2018 left a clear gap in provision.

Rather than simply replacing a leisure centre, the ambition was to create something more inclusive and community-led. Developed using Sport England's Leisure Local concept, Warsop Health Hub combines physical activity, wellbeing services and social spaces in one location.

The facility includes a 15m,



The fully accessible 15m pool



The £9.1 million Warsop Health Hub is delivering measurable benefits

four-lane swimming pool, gym, sports hall, community kitchen, café, IT suite, and flexible spaces for health and social programmes. Accessibility is central, with step-free access, inclusive changing facilities, and a pool with hoist and pool pod.

The impact has been immediate. Within eight weeks, 627 memberships were sold against a target of 160. Between April 2025 and March 2026, the hub recorded nearly 96,000 gym visits, more than 19,000 class attendances and more than 36,000 swimming-related visits.

Health outcomes are improving. Year 6 swimming attainment has doubled from 40 per cent to 80 per cent, while programmes such as 'Small Steps to Feeling Great' report benefits including weight loss, reduced blood pressure, improved mental wellbeing and stronger social connections.

The hub also plays a vital social role. Partnerships with organisations including Vibrant Warsop and Active Notts support activities ranging from walking football to health sessions and holiday programmes for children with special educational needs, helping embed the hub in daily community life.

Employment and skills development further strengthen its impact. Seventy-five per cent of staff live in Warsop, with the remainder from the wider Mansfield district. Training initiatives have equipped residents with qualifications in areas such as gym instruction, first aid and exercise delivery, building local capacity and opportunity.

Delivered ahead of schedule and within budget, the hub is designed for long-term sustainability. As an all-electric facility with energy-efficient

systems, it reduces carbon emissions and operating costs while remaining accessible.

The project has gained national recognition, winning Build, Design or Refurbishment of the Year at the ukactive Awards 2025. However, its real success lies in its impact on people.

For residents such as Janice and Betty, the hub has become a lifeline. The life-long Warsop neighbours, who both lost their husbands at a young age, now attend four to five times a week.

"It keeps your body going, but it's the social part as well. If you can't go one week, it's surprising how you miss it," says Betty, 87.

"My blood pressure had been really high since my husband died, but I went about a month ago and it had gone right down," adds Janice, 83.

Stories such as these bring the headline statistic to life: £260 of social value per person reflects real improvements in health, confidence and connection.

Warsop Health Hub shows how community-focused facilities can deliver lasting change, turning a single building into a catalyst for healthier, more connected lives. ●



AllianceLeisure

Protecting our public servants

Abuse of council workers and councillors is unacceptable



Councillor Hannah Dalton is the LGA's Civility in Public Life Ambassador

As the LGA Board's recently appointed Civility in Public Life Ambassador, I am honoured to take on a role that places empathy, respect and personal wellbeing at the heart of local councils.

We are seeing the impact that abuse and intimidation can have on those who serve their communities across all UK nations, including most recently in last month's local elections in England and to the Senedd and Scottish Parliament.

This behaviour not only affects candidates and councillors, but also the council officers who lead our organisations and deliver services to our local residents.

The ambassador's role is both a responsibility and an opportunity: to advocate for councillors of every background and political affiliation, and for council employees, ensuring that they are all able to serve safely, confidently and free from intimidation.

A key strength of the LGA's work is



the shared commitment across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In October, we came together through our various national associations to issue a joint statement reaffirming our commitment to protecting democratic participation, and expressing deep concern over the growing levels of abuse, personal attacks and misinformation – particularly online – that are driving some councillors out of public life and deterring others from standing for election.

We called on the UK Government to work in partnership with devolved governments, local government associations and the police to address abuse and intimidation faced by anyone in public life. Since then, we have worked together to develop resources to support healthy debate in local government.

The LGA also receives funding from the

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to provide national training and local workshops for councils, covering themes such as personal safety, handling online abuse, managing aggression and managing conflict in public meetings.

Councils are encouraged to link up with neighbouring authorities to maximise the impact of these learning opportunities. More information is available at [local.gov.uk/civility-public-life](https://www.local.gov.uk/civility-public-life).

In addition to this support, the LGA has joined organisations representing officers from across the local government sector in signing a joint Sector Statement on Civility, hosted by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers ([solace.org.uk/sector-statement-on-civility](https://www.solace.org.uk/sector-statement-on-civility)).

The statement sets out our collective concern that the abuse of council staff is becoming widespread, with employees across all service areas experiencing behaviour that goes far beyond disagreement or challenge, including verbal abuse, threats, harassment and sustained online attacks.

Disturbingly, many employees have come to view such behaviour as simply part of the job.

The statement sends out a clear message: while robust challenge and democratic debate are fundamental to local government, there is never an excuse for abuse.

We would be interested in any case studies that your councils might be able to provide around the issue of abuse towards staff, particularly where action has been taken – for example the successful prosecution of a perpetrator.

If you are able to help provide any such case studies, please email david.green@local.gov.uk.

Alongside this, we have compiled support for councils on staff wellbeing, including specific advice on countering online intimidation and abuse, and support for staff experiencing online harassment (see [local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/wellbeing](https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/wellbeing)).

I look forward to working alongside you to strengthen the support available to any of our members and staff experiencing abuse or unacceptable behaviour. ●

“Our statement sends a clear message: while robust challenge and democratic debate are fundamental to local government, there is never an excuse for abuse”

Policing reforms

Strong local accountability matters



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

Reforming police governance and force structures could bring opportunities: stronger specialist capability, greater operational resilience, improved data sharing, and more effective responses to serious and cross-border crime. But the policy does not come without significant risks.

Improvements cannot simply be about creating larger institutions. Police reform must deliver better outcomes for residents and victims while strengthening, not weakening, local accountability and partnership working.

As Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Committee, I have been leading our engagement with the Government and Lord Bernard Hogan-Howe's Independent Review of Police Force Structures.

Lord Hogan-Howe previously led the Met Police. In May, committee members met him to discuss the review's emerging thinking before agreeing the LGA's formal response. Our message was clear: policing must remain rooted in place.

Visible, responsive neighbourhood policing is fundamental to public

confidence. Any move towards larger force structures must not dilute the connection between communities and the police officers and leaders who serve them.

Emerging plans for larger police forces could see the creation of what are being called 'local police areas' (LPAs) – the smaller building blocks of police forces.

LPAs should align, wherever practical, with upper-tier or unitary council boundaries. Doing so supports stronger partnership working between police, councils, health services, safeguarding partners, fire and rescue services, and local resilience arrangements.

At the same time, police reforms must retain enough flexibility to reflect local geography and operational realities. Strong local accountability matters just as much as operational capability.

Councillors are democratically elected

community leaders, with deep local knowledge and relationships. Engagement with council leaders is important, but it should complement – not replace – wider engagement with councillors and local communities. We should avoid creating parallel structures that confuse accountability or duplicate the representative role councils already perform.

In my own ward, we have a dedicated PC who covers the same four parishes. We work well together to identify problems and how the police and council can work to resolve them. That model should be replicated everywhere.

We also stressed that every principal council within a force area must have a meaningful voice in shaping priorities, scrutinising performance and influencing commissioning decisions.

Councils work with policing every day through community safety partnerships, safeguarding arrangements and wider

public service networks. Reform must strengthen those relationships, not disrupt services supporting victims, tackling antisocial behaviour, protecting vulnerable people or responding to mental health crises.

The review also needs to address the growing complexity of future governance arrangements.

In non-mayoral areas, foundation strategic authorities could become the default body for police governance, yet there remains insufficient clarity around accountability, scrutiny and voting arrangements.

At the same time, mayors (where present) will oversee policing across multiple force areas.

Without careful design, there is a real risk of creating overly complex and fragmented governance structures. The LGA is therefore arguing for police reform that is evidence-based, financially transparent and co-designed with local government from the outset.

Successful police reform must strengthen neighbourhood policing, preserve democratic accountability and support the partnerships that keep communities safe every day. ●



An international voice

Learning from global partners



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

Among the many plaudits for the calm, efficient and professional way in which our councils organised their elections on 7 May were the comments from a delegation of international electoral observers sent by the Congress of the Council of Europe (CoE).

Fielding five teams of local politicians from across Europe, the congress's report observed 'well-organised procedures, handled by highly committed and well-trained polling station staff'.

It continued: 'Election day was overall calm and orderly, and our assessment of voting procedures was overall positive. Voters, candidates and electoral staff alike

expressed a high level of trust in the electoral processes.'

The assessment reflects the hard work of our councils, and the LGA will work with colleagues across the sector to build on this and address any constructive issues raised by the congress for future elections.

Observing local elections is a core activity of the congress. It has covered more than 100 elections in the 46 CoE countries, which helps to ensure the integrity of the electoral process and builds voters' confidence.

In many cases, LGA members have led the way in reporting on election practices in other European countries.

This April, I had the pleasure to visit the headquarters of the congress, which is the local arm of the CoE – a pan-European body created after World War II.

Another of its core tasks is to monitor how well national governments are implementing the European Charter of Local Self-Government. This sets out basic guarantees of autonomy,



Cllr Gittins with Cllr Bryony Rudkin, Chair of UK Delegation to the Congress

powers and resources for local councils, creating a set of binding standards, peer reviewed every five years.

On my visit, I was impressed by the impact that our members have on the work of the congress and, particularly, its work in the field.

My colleague Cllr Bryony Rudkin is the Leader of the cross-party UK Delegation, and President of the Congress Socialist and Greens Group. UK members also chair the Congress Group of Liberal Democrats and Independents, and hold the vice-chair of the Conservative Group.

In the plenary debates, Cllr Rudkin presented her important and timely report on violence towards local politicians, in which the LGA campaign on civility in public life was praised by international speakers (see p19).

Other UK members contributed to reports on LGBTQIA+ rights, coastal erosion, and free and fair elections.

I also had the opportunity to meet local leaders from across Europe, and had a very productive discussion with the president and chief executive officer of the Association of Irish Local Government, opening the door to closer future collaboration.

The LGA's work at the congress is an important part of a wider international effort, with LGA representatives on the Commonwealth and worldwide local government bodies, our European LGA (CEMR), and the UK Contact Group within the EU Committee of the Regions.

Our participation enables local government not only to have a voice on the international stage, helping to shape the world around us, but also to learn from the innovative solutions and best practice our counterparts elsewhere are delivering – whether near neighbours or global partners – in a spirit of mutual respect and collaboration. ●



Cllr Gittins addresses a reception at the UK Ambassador's Residence, with Sandy Moss OBE, UK Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe

Growing our own

Award honours apprentices shaping local government

Councils across the UK have once again been celebrating the apprentices who are helping to shape the future of local government.

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

The LGA continues to support councils to run high-quality apprenticeship programmes, offering funded guidance, peer learning and programme health checks.

This year marked the sixth anniversary of the Local Government Apprentice of the Year, a joint partnership event between the LGA, Local

Government East and South West Councils, which has so far engaged with more than 600 apprentices from England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In May, more than 77 Level 2 and 3 apprentices took part in a virtual event focused on collaboration, innovation and fresh thinking.

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

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

Apprentices worked in teams to tackle a real-world local government challenge, later impressing everyone with their innovative ideas and stellar teamwork during the session.

The title of Local Government Apprentice of the Year 2026 was awarded to Leena Futter, a Corporate Projects Business Admin Apprentice from the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk.

She said: "I'm truly grateful for all the support I have received, and for my nomination and the belief people had in me to take part in the competition.

"I really enjoyed taking part



in the challenges – I thought it would be a great opportunity to try something different, meet other apprentices and build my confidence in a team."

Leena's achievement clearly highlights the strength of talent that is emerging through local government apprenticeships, proving that apprentices play an essential role in building the future of both our councils and our communities.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "Apprentices are the future of the local government workforce, playing a crucial role in delivering the essential services that communities depend on every day.

"This annual award is a fitting celebration of the talent, commitment and achievements of apprentices across the country, whose contributions are invaluable to the work of councils."

Kate Blakemore, Chief Executive at Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, said: "We're absolutely delighted for Leena – she is a talented and capable individual

with a very bright future ahead of her.

"Supporting apprentices and graduates is critical to the future of local government, which is why having an apprenticeship programme is so important.

"It's something we're fully committed to and it's a privilege to have been able to put three people forward for this year's event."

The joint runners-up were Victoria Grant and Kay Howlett, who both work at Plymouth City Council, while Jay Chauhan from Leicester City Council triumphed in the social media competition.

Oliver Bikar (Coventry), William Coopey (Cardiff), Nicole Gardiner (Norwich), Noah Massink (Stevenage), Vanessa Parkhill (South Gloucestershire), Maia Romero-Ward (Braintree), Imogen Taberner (Wigan) and Kira Woodrofe (Bracknell Forest) made up the winning team. ●



Leena Futter, Apprentice of the Year

To find out more about the competition, see [local.gov.uk/AOTY](https://www.local.gov.uk/AOTY)

The Local Government Challenge – the LGA's leadership development programme for council officers in England and Wales – is once again approaching its final stages, with the 2026 programme showcasing the creativity and leadership potential of 10 officers from across the country.

Announced in December, this year's cohort was selected to take part in five real-life, council-hosted challenges designed to tackle pressing issues while developing the vital skills needed for future leadership.

As the programme has progressed, participants have already completed four of the five challenges, each set in a different council and focused on a distinct strategic priority.

The journey began in January at Lambeth, where contestants arrived without prior knowledge of the brief, heightening the sense of anticipation.

Grounded in the Lambeth 2030 Borough Plan, the challenge centred on how digital innovation and artificial intelligence could support inclusive growth, equity and long-term sustainability.

Team Athena proposed 'Future Ready Lambeth', a values-led organisational development approach placing workforce confidence, governance and accountability at the heart of digital transformation.

Team Paradigm, meanwhile, focused on strengthening culture and leadership capability through its 'From basics, to bold, to gold' model. In a closely contested decision, Team Athena's strategic clarity and emphasis on governance secured the first win.

In February, the cohort travelled to Torbay for the 'Coastal Vision Challenge', focusing on uniting the towns of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham under a shared identity while improving connectivity and environmental quality.

Drawing on the Torbay Local Plan and wider destination strategies, both teams presented ambitious solutions.

Team Paradigm's 'Three Towns, One Bay' proposal, with its emphasis on neighbourhood working and consistent infrastructure such as wayfinding and digital platforms, ultimately took the win.

Team Athena's 'Connected Coastal Communities' proposal also impressed, particularly its community-led approach and flagship 'On Your Doorstep' initiative

Challenge and creativity

Friendly competition showcases officers' leadership potential



The 10 officers were split into two teams for a series of challenges around the country

to improve access and engagement.

March saw the competition move to Stockport, where the focus shifted to communication and engagement during the borough's major regeneration programme. Contestants were challenged to develop a unified narrative that could build trust and shared ownership among the borough's residents.

Both teams proposed compelling, people-centred approaches, but once again Team Paradigm secured victory, with the competition's judges favouring its practical, deliverable ideas and clear implementation roadmap.

The fourth challenge, held in April at Warwickshire County Council, turned attention to the council's Creating Opportunities programme and how the council could further tackle inequality and improve social mobility.

Split into two briefs, teams explored ways to strengthen support for care

leavers and expand opportunity across priority communities.

Both teams developed proposals to create more joined-up, accessible systems, with a strong emphasis on partnership working, practical delivery and improving long-term outcomes for residents, with Team Athena coming out on top.

Now anticipation is building for the one final challenge remaining in June at Cheshire West and Chester Council.

Four finalists will be selected to present individual proposals at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth (7-9 July), where the overall winner will be announced – see local.gov.uk/conference to book your place. ●

i See local.gov.uk/lg-challenge to find out more about the event and register your interest for next year's competition



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years of
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84
YMCAs across
England and Wales

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Recognition

Celebrate great work with real rewards

Pay

Choose when you get paid

Rewards

Exclusive discounts from your favourite brands

Find & Combine

Find real pensions and simplify your retirement



Innovation Zone 2026

Navigating change and delivering locally



Councillor Peter Mason is Chair of the LGA's Improvement Committee

Described as 'the beating heart of conference', the Innovation Zone remains a core part of the LGA's annual conference, providing a unique space to share practical learning, showcase innovation and explore how local government is responding to change.

This year's programme, under the conference theme 'From neighbourhoods to nations: building lasting futures locally', reflects the scale of transformation taking place across the sector, recognising both the challenges and opportunities that local authorities face.

Overseen by a cross-party member working group, drawn from the LGA's Improvement Committee, this year's Innovation Zone has been curated to create a more strategic and balanced programme, aligned closely with the wider priorities of the conference and, critically, the sector.

The programme focuses on the issues councils and combined authorities are

facing now, including devolution and local government reorganisation (LGR), public service reform, regeneration and local growth, digital innovation and artificial intelligence (AI), sustainability and organisational transformation.

A strong theme running throughout the entire programme is how councils are navigating change.

Westmorland and Furness Council's 'Lessons on disaggregating services in LGR' and North Yorkshire Council's session on managing LGR and devolution together will provide practical insight into implementing large-scale organisational change and transition.

Surrey County Council and colleagues will share lessons from their LGR journey, offering practical insights from the past 18 months for councils preparing for, or already navigating, reorganisation.

Other sessions will explore how councils are working differently with communities and partners. Oswestry Town Council will share lessons from its partnership-led approach to regeneration and local leadership, while Southwark Council's community-led system change model will showcase community-led approaches to tackling health inequalities.

Prevention will also feature strongly. Essex County Council, Wigan Council and Eastbourne Borough Council will explore earlier intervention and joined-up support, demonstrating the critical role of prevention across a range of service areas.

Innovation and digital capability are also

central to this year's Innovation Zone programme.

Councils including Coventry, North Somerset, and Brighton & Hove will showcase how AI is moving from experimentation into practical service delivery.

Rutland County Council will share how automation and 'low-code' tools (which use minimal computer coding and visual interfaces to build apps) are modernising performance management, while Hampshire County Council will demonstrate digital approaches to procurement and contract management.

The programme also highlights ambitious work under way to support local growth and regeneration.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority will present its work to align investment, skills and infrastructure to drive regional growth, while Barnet Council, Essex County Council and Central Bedfordshire Council will explore how community energy projects are supporting local resilience and sustainability.

Alongside this, Bristol City Council and partners will showcase how culture can support long-term place strategy and regeneration, while sessions on housing innovation and organisational transformation will explore new approaches to delivering better outcomes for communities.

At its core, the Innovation Zone remains about local authorities learning from one another. The programme continues to give a platform for practical innovation, peer learning and sector leadership, helping councils and combined authorities share what works and strengthen improvement across local government. I look forward to seeing you in the zone in Bournemouth. ●



Delegates and speakers at last year's Innovation Zone

The Innovation Zone is a key part of the LGA's annual conference from 7-9 July in Bournemouth. See [local.gov.uk/conference](https://www.local.gov.uk/conference) to find out more and book your place

Turbocharging innovation



Councillor Jacob Allen (Lab) is Cabinet Member for Customer Services and Public Realm at Brighton & Hove Council

In Brighton & Hove, we have a huge financial challenge.

Our temporary accommodation bill is eye-watering, social care demand is increasing and cash reserves depleted.

Investing £6 million over the next four years is one element of our strategy to create a financially sustainable local authority.

We set ourselves a challenge: would it be possible to move from a standing start to embedding innovative technology throughout the council in just six months?

We rolled out 11 pilot projects trialling new technologies, from transcription tools powered by artificial intelligence (AI) to keep social workers helping people rather than filling out repetitive paperwork, to using data modelling to identify signs a resident may be approaching homelessness, to rolling out an AI customer service assistant for council tax enquiries. The latter was designed to allow officers specifically trained in the complex world of local government taxation to focus



on the tricky problems rather than general enquiries.

While this is exciting for our organisation to adopt new ways of working using the tools available to us, the real story is how the process demonstrated that Brighton & Hove is a learning organisation willing to trial new ideas.

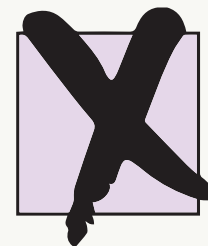
We started from a 'test and learn' philosophy. Of

the 11 pilots, three were decommissioned – and that is okay. They did not suit our needs, but eight did.

Teams worked as one council, obliterating silos and collaborating to plan, execute and evaluate each of the pilot projects. Information governance ensured robust compliance in record time and procurement teams ensured a quick turnaround of licences.

My message to councillors is to embrace technology and digital innovation to its fullest potential.

In these stormy financial times for many of us in local government, digital innovation gives councils the fighting chance they need to deliver services confidently, efficiently, and to a standard residents deserve. ●



Notice of Group Elections 2026

The Local Government Association (LGA) Independent Group will hold elections in June 2026 for the posts of:

Deputy Group Leader

Group Treasurer / AGM Chair

Election guidance and Statement of Persons Nominated are available on the Independent Group's website.

In the event of there being more than one nomination for a position, an electronic ballot will be held.

A unique voter link will be issued to all Independent Group members on Tuesday 2 June and the ballot will close at 5.00pm on Wednesday 25 June.

Results will be announced at the Independent Group Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 1 July 2026.

For further information please contact: **Shelagh O'Brien**, Returning Officer for the Independent Group elections 2026
Telephone: 020 7664320, Email: independent.grouplga@local.gov.uk



Dr Jason Lowther is Director of the Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham

At the LGA's Smith Square debate in March, on 'LG2040: the state of things to come', we had an interesting discussion on how innovation spreads.

I mentioned my frustration that many evaluation reports lack traction and basically say 'we don't know, so probably do more research'.

However, over the past 18 months, government has released a wave of evaluation evidence across multiple themes that are priorities for local government, including homelessness and rough sleeping, local growth and skills programmes, democratic engagement and the Community Ownership Fund (COF).

The collection reveals a landscape where councils are doing a great deal right, but also highlights where structural conditions, funding models and capacity constraints limit what even the best local practice can achieve.

Most recently published evaluations echo the same system level diagnosis: demand is rising faster than capacity.

In homelessness, systems-wide analysis shows local authorities facing increasing crisis presentations driven by housing shortages, welfare constraints and cost of living pressures.

Compressed timeframes and short-term funding cycles created operational strain and restricted innovation in the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), which replaced previous EU structural funds, and the adult numeracy skills programme Multiply.

The COF interim evaluation suggests that without the fund many pubs, community centres, sports facilities and heritage buildings would likely have been lost from community use, but also highlights long lead-in times, complex project management demands, and volunteer burnout as recurring challenges.

Another common thread is that prevention consistently outperforms crisis response, but funding systems still



What works in local government?

favour the latter. For example, across homelessness evaluations, the conclusion is clear: prevention is more humane, more effective and delivers better value for money than crisis response. Yet central local funding arrangements often reward short-term, visible 'rescue' rather than long-term preventative investment.

One of the clearest conclusions across the recent evaluations is that local flexibility works.

For example, UKSPF's devolved decision-making has been praised for enabling councils to design interventions aligned to local priorities, while Multiply's flexible design allowed councils to embed numeracy learning in real-world contexts that resonated with learners.

Other recurring threads across the evaluations include: the impact of workforce shortages and operational capacity, as staff churn, fragile volunteer bases, rising caseloads and short-term contracts constrain delivery and limit innovation; and that partnerships make the biggest difference but need careful stewardship.

Three big implications stand out across the evaluations.

First, councils are increasingly system shapers, not simply programme managers. The evaluations underline that outcomes depend on how councils orchestrate local systems – such as housing, economic

development, voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners and community groups – rather than on the quality of any single programme.

Second, stable, long-term funding is essential for prevention, equity and innovation. Short-term cycles undermine prevention, limit strategic planning and exhaust delivery partners.

Finally, capacity building is central to reducing inequality, even when the policy focus is capital investment.

Councils, community groups and VCS partners need investment in skills, leadership and organisational resilience. It's essential that we develop systematic and accredited processes to deliver the necessary education and training.

The emerging picture is of local government doing extraordinary work under extraordinary pressure.

But the future of place-based policy depends on giving councils and communities the tools, stability and capacity to shape local systems, rather than firefighting the consequences of systemic constraints. ●

i This article is based on a blog originally published by the Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham. See [inlogov.com](https://www.inlogov.com) to find out more

GROUP LEADERS



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

A King's Speech for local government

First, I pay tribute to every Labour councillor who stood in May's local elections – those re-elected and those who lost their seats – for your tireless dedication to the residents and communities you serve, and to our movement.

As council leaders, we see every day the pressures facing our residents: rising costs, public services under pressure and communities that have too often felt ignored.

That is why the measures announced in last month's King's Speech matter so much for local government and the residents we serve.

This Labour Government has

recognised that incremental change is no longer enough.

After years of local services being hollowed out and councils asked to do more with less, the Government is setting out a programme designed to rebuild resilience, restore trust and create opportunity.

The Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill and Social Housing Renewal Bill together represent a significant step forward for local government. The proposed legislation will modernise property law and improve transparency for homeowners.

As part of this Government's Plan for Change, reforms will transform the housing market by replacing the leasehold model and protecting social housing stock, supporting delivery of new affordable homes and strengthening protections for vulnerable tenants.

Together, these measures show a government committed to empowering councils and supporting more resilient communities with a sustainable system of home ownership for future generations.

For councils, the commitment to regional growth and infrastructure

“These measures show a government committed to empowering councils and supporting more resilient communities”

investment is also significant. The Northern Powerhouse Rail Bill and reforms to support clean energy and modernised transport networks offer real opportunities for communities in every region to thrive.

In addition, the Overnight Visitor Levy Bill provides new powers for councils and mayors to introduce visitor levies and will help reinvest tourism income into local services.

Above all, this legislative agenda signals a government ready to work in partnership with councils and local leaders to build a stronger, fairer and more secure Britain for the future.

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



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

Turning electoral success into influence

Following this year's local elections, Reform UK is now the third-largest group at the LGA.

To have achieved that just months after establishing our political group office in September last year is a remarkable achievement.

It reflects the passion and hard work of our candidates, councillors, activists and members across the country.

Following Reform UK's High Court challenge over election cancellations, and the Government's subsequent

U-turn, one thing is clear: where voters were given the chance to have their say, Reform UK was overwhelmingly successful.

Only 136 local authorities in Britain held elections this year and, in many of those, only a third or half of the seats were contested. Even within those limits, the electorate sent a clear message.

This was a landmark moment in British politics and an inflection point for the LGA. The mood of the country has changed, and that mandate must now be properly reflected within the association.

With Reform UK now running many councils, our growing influence brings serious responsibility. Nowhere is that clearer than in the debate on local government reorganisation (LGR).

We have consistently raised concerns about the timing and pace of LGR, particularly where rushed implementation risks instability in vital services.

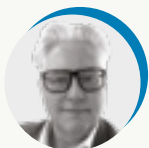
Councils deliver services that

“With Reform UK now running many councils, our growing influence brings serious responsibility”

vulnerable people rely on every day. The test for reorganisation must be whether it strengthens local government, protects frontline delivery, and avoids unnecessary risk to the people councils are there to serve.

At the LGA, the Reform UK political group office is supporting new administrations following changes of control, while also assisting newly elected councillors across local government.

Our task now is to turn electoral success into influence, ensuring Reform UK has a strong, credible and unmistakable voice across local government.



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

Keeping a dominant voice in the LGA

Following last month's local elections, the Conservative Group will remain a dominant voice in the LGA, ensuring that the case for authentic Conservative principles is woven into policy and lobbying output on behalf of our councils.

The Conservatives remain the second largest party and we will continue to chair two LGA policy committees.

I am delighted that Conservatives have gained control of councils following the elections.

The LGA Conservative Group has been in the process of offering 'change of control' support to new Conservative administrations like Westminster and Wandsworth.

"We have been offering 'change of control' support to new Conservative administrations"

Indeed, at the time of writing this piece, there is a possibility Conservatives in councils like Enfield, Basildon, Swindon and Birmingham may be in a position of more influence.

We look forward to welcoming many new colleagues to the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth in July, where our group will be providing a series of programmes for Conservative councillors in attendance.

Following the publication in May of the 'mansion tax' consultation, the Conservative Group will be pushing the LGA hard to adopt a lobbying position of allowing councils more flexibility on the wording of council tax billing statements.

We believe that if ministers are going to force Conservative councils to collect this dreadful tax on behalf of the Government, then our councils should be able to point out it is all being returned to the Treasury.



Councillor Bridget Smith is Leader of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group

Looking forward to leading

It's been another busy few weeks in local government!

Thank you to all who have stepped up to take roles in either governing or holding others to account – and to those who have previously served.

I am delighted to see new Liberal Democrat leaders in places like West Sussex, East Surrey, West Surrey, and Newcastle upon Tyne, as well as those working with other parties to sort out the deep-rooted problems in places such as Birmingham.

"I look forward to fighting for Liberal Democrat values at a time of rapid change"

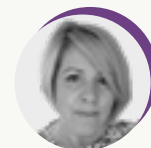
The LGA Liberal Democrat Group Executive has confirmed that I will serve as group leader until our elections next year.

I look forward to fighting for Liberal Democrat values at a time of rapid change both at the LGA and in the wider political environment. Thank you to my predecessor, Joe Harris, for your work as our leader and good luck in your new job.

This year's LGA political balance has been released (see p6). The Liberal Democrat Group has increased its vote share at the LGA to 17.6 per cent – we have seen eight years of growth.

Some of you have contacted our office to ask why it isn't simply based on numbers of councillors. The LGA political balance uses a formula that includes the type of council, population across a council area and the strength of the different political groups on that council. I hope that is clear.

GROUP LEADERS



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

Diversity of thought and leadership

Our local government landscape continues to evolve, and the May local elections have demonstrated just how quickly the political map can change.

We are seeing areas once considered politically settled having new voices, showing that Independent candidates and emerging smaller parties and groupings can gain the confidence of their residents.

Independent councillors as part of the LGA continue to grow in numbers and we now have over 2,500 councillors across England and Wales. That diversity of thought and leadership can only strengthen our ability to respond to the challenges facing our communities.

"We are seeing areas once considered politically settled having new voices"

At the same time, the rise in multi-party and minority-party controlled councils with Independents presents opportunities and responsibilities.

Collaboration, consensus-building and constructive leadership, often led by Independent councillors, will become increasingly important if councils are to deliver effectively for residents.

Even though our overall numbers have grown, we have also lost many long-serving councillors. Some have been heavily involved in the LGA, and I want to thank them for their contribution, knowledge and mentorship over many years.

If you are a newly elected Independent councillor entering local government, I want to welcome you to the group and let you know that we, as a group, will support, guide and encourage you.

Finally, I would like to wish our Green Party colleagues well as they establish their LGA group office. ●

A new electoral politics



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

In little more than a year, the pattern of local government in England has been upended.

Before the 2025 local contests, Conservative and Labour councillors together represented some 70 per cent of local electors. Two electoral cycles later, that figure has plunged to less than 45 per cent.

Reform UK, whose councillors could once be numbered on the fingers of one hand, now represent nearly 20 per cent of the electorate.

There is a similarly stark fragmentation at local authority level.

Before the 2025 elections, the Conservatives had a majority in more than 50 councils and Labour enjoyed the same advantage in exactly 100.

Today, the Conservatives and Reform both control 24 with Labour tenure having shrunk to 56.

The Liberal Democrats lead the way in 41 councils, with half of all authorities – 158 out of 316 in England – under no overall control, or ‘hung’.

Unless politics changes dramatically in the next 12 months, the all-out elections due next year in many unitary and district councils will further exacerbate that trend.

Some of the results this year were spectacular, but there were real variations in different parts of the country.

In the six county council elections held over from 2025, the Conservatives lost more than three-quarters of all the seats they were defending and all five counties where they enjoyed a majority.

Reform gained Essex and Suffolk, and would probably have taken Norfolk too but for the intervention in Great Yarmouth of candidates supporting local MP Rupert Lowe, who was suspended by Reform a year ago.



In West Sussex, the Liberal Democrats matched Reform, and in Hampshire alone do the Conservatives narrowly remain the largest party.

Elsewhere, the spotlight was firmly on Labour, who were attempting to retain half of all seats falling vacant across the country. With 16 of the 32 metropolitan boroughs choosing the entire council (14 following boundary changes), the jeopardy for the party was only heightened.

Like the Conservatives in the counties, Labour lost fully three-quarters of these seats amid some dramatic turnovers.

Eight boroughs went straight from the Labour to Reform column, four of them – Barnsley, Gateshead, Sunderland and Wakefield – having been Labour since the councils were first created in 1974.

In Wakefield, Labour fell from 56 out of 63 seats to return just a single councillor. In Featherstone, one of the wards in Wakefield not subject to a boundary change and a name long-famous in rugby league circles, a third fewer people voted Labour than in 2022, despite nearly 1,000 more ballots being cast.

There is some dispute about how

far previous Labour voters are likely to have moved directly over to Reform. However, with many local authorities seeing turnout levels increasing well above the long-term average, it is clear that electors were keener than for some time to register their dissatisfaction with politics as normal.

It is not without significance that many of the places which posted the biggest swings to Reform also voted heavily to leave the EU at the 2016 referendum.

Sky News analysis showed the average Reform vote share at more than 45 per cent in places that voted decisively for Brexit but pegged back at below 20 per cent in Remain territory.

That comparative shunning of Reform can be seen in the results in some of the unitary and district councils.

The shadow authorities of East Surrey and West Surrey both returned substantial Liberal Democrat majorities, ready to slip into place when they go ‘live’ in 2027, with Reform winning just 14 of the 162 available seats.

The Liberal Democrats came under no pressure in most of its long-term fiefdoms like Cheltenham, Watford, and Winchester, adding Portsmouth and Wokingham to its tally as compensation for falling short in Hull.

In Hastings and in Norwich, majority Green councils were returned for the first time, with Exeter, Cambridge and Oxford also registering Green gains.

But it was in London, once again cementing its reputation as a place apart politically, that the Greens really came into their own.

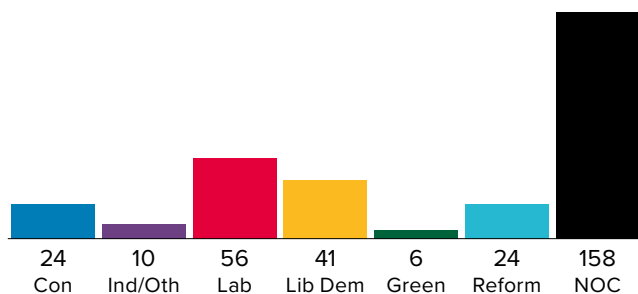
Reform’s one victory in the capital came in Havering, where the defection to the party of Romford Conservative MP Andrew Rosindell served to undermine many of the Residents’ Association councillors who had long-formed a substantial bloc in the council.

However, predicted Reform success in two boroughs on the Kent border – Bexley and Bromley – came to naught. Havering apart, Reform had just 40 councillors elected in London as a whole out of more than 1,750 vacancies.

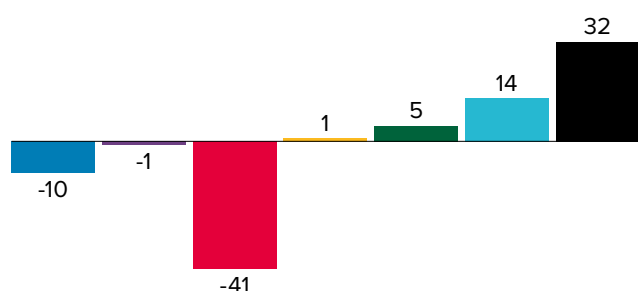
Results summary 2026 England*

*compared with seats/councils before the election, taking boundary changes into account

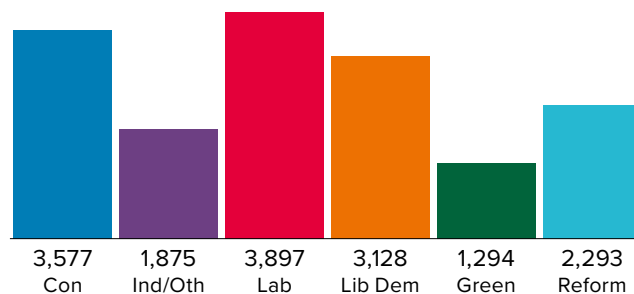
Councils controlled (England) 2026



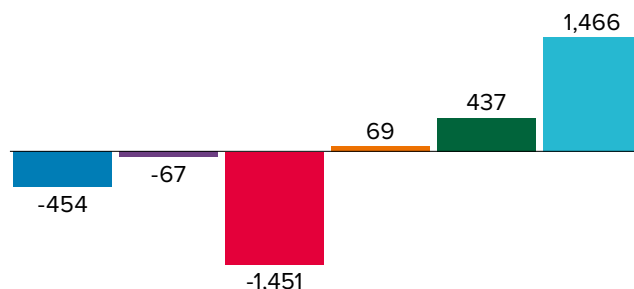
Change



Councillors (England) 2026



Change



The Conservatives actually made a modest net gain of seats in London.

However, even their much self-publicised achievement in winning back Westminster and depriving Labour of control in Barnet and Wandsworth was more a function of them losing a smaller share of the vote than their rivals rather than an explicit increase in their own support.

Labour's real nemesis in London was the Greens.

Attacking Labour from the left and particularly prospering in areas with younger and often more ethnically diverse populations, they took the mayoralties and comfortable majority control in Hackney and Lewisham.

In Lewisham, Labour was reduced from all 54 seats to 14 as the Greens snapped up three-quarters of the vacancies. In Hackney, the Green mayoral vote jumped from 17 per cent in 2022 to 47 per cent now, on a turnout up more than 7 percentage points.

The Greens also took a narrow overall

majority in Waltham Forest and came agonisingly close in Haringey.

In London and some other parts of the country, Labour also suffered inroads from candidates opposing the Government's policies in the Middle East.

It lost further ground to Aspire in Tower Hamlets, and the Newham Independents – endorsed by Jeremy Corbyn's Your Party – took 24 out of 66 seats and came second in the mayoral contest.

In Blackburn and Bradford, similarly orientated candidates helped deprive Labour of its decade-long majorities.

Labour's problem and a general feature of the new multi-party politics can be encapsulated in the very final result to be declared. This was in the Glebe Farm and Tile Cross ward of Birmingham City, where council leader John Cotton and a Labour colleague lost their seats.

That the two victors came from Reform and the Workers Party of Britain demonstrates how Labour was often caught in a pincer between left and right.

The outcome also highlights the small

percentage of the vote often now needed to win.

Taking the top votes of each party, the Reform winner received less than 30 per cent of the total vote and the Workers Party prevailed with just a quarter of the total. Once the level of turnout is considered, neither has a mandate supported by more than one in 10 of the ward electorate.

Many similar examples can be found across the country and should temper any hyperbole about one or another party carrying all before it.

In truth, the electoral system is delivering an exaggerated reward to whoever comes top in a particular area, with the electorate as a whole split – as evidenced by the polls and the detailed results of these elections – in fairly even measure across five parties each clamouring for attention.

Nothing can be certain, but there is currently little sign that local government will continue to provide other than a case study of this new electoral politics. ●



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

Rt Hon Ian Murray MP

Minister for Digital Government and Data

Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith

Minister for Skills

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

Lord Victor Adebowale CBE

Chair, NHS Confederation

Jonathan Smith

London Fire Commissioner



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