

first

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Association

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A photograph of Cllr Eamonn O'Brien, a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a blue suit and a red tie, speaking at a podium. The podium has the Local Government Association logo on it. The background is a green and purple geometric pattern.

“The test of
national policy
is whether it
changes lives
locally”

Cllr Eamonn O'Brien,
new LGA Chair

Adult social care

Casey: reform needs
public consent **p15**

Innovation Zone

Leading-edge thinking,
practical solutions **p18**

Total Place

Building trust around
common goals **p23**

Are officers in your council up for the LG Challenge?

Now recruiting its 15th cohort, the LGA is looking for **10 contestants** to participate in the Local Government Challenge 2027, in which a diverse cohort of local government officers tackle real-life challenges, hosted by five councils around the country.

Nominate an officer in your council to apply.

The application deadline is 12pm on Monday 7 September.

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

Find out more and watch last year's challenge films:

local.gov.uk/lg-challenge
lgchallenge@local.gov.uk





LGA manifesto for the new PM

Ahead of new Prime Minister Andy Burnham's arrival in Downing Street, the LGA published a manifesto on behalf of local government, setting out how we want to work with his team to ensure public service reform sustains vital local services (p13).

'Building lasting futures locally' was launched at our annual conference in Bournemouth in July, which was attended by more than 1,800 delegates, and where I was delighted to give my first speech as LGA Chair (p12).

Baroness Louise Casey announced she would launch a 'big conversation' on adult social care reform to engage the public on the tough choices needed (p15), and we launched our own recommendations on local government's central role in this (p14).

Conference also saw the launch of our Total Place Toolkit, which provides practical guidance on putting place at the heart of public service reform (p23).

And we published the first-phase report from our flagship LG2040 research programme, which is examining the trends and forces likely to shape local government and communities over the next 15 years (p20).

As ever, there was also a plethora of good practice and practical new ideas showcased in conference's vibrant Innovation Zone (p18). ●

Councillor Eamonn O'Brien
is Chair of the LGA

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A manifesto and an invitation



Councillor Eamonn O'Brien
is Chair of the LGA

With Westminster entering a new political chapter under Prime Minister Andy Burnham, the LGA has moved quickly to set out our offer to the new administration.

'Building lasting futures locally' is both a manifesto and an invitation, a call for a new partnership between central and local government that looks beyond short-term political cycles and focuses on delivering lasting change for communities (see **p13**).

As the new Government begins to establish its priorities, the LGA is making a clear case that national ambitions can only be achieved if councils and local leaders are empowered to play a full role in delivering them.

Across housing, children's services, skills, community safety and adult social care, councils are uniquely placed to bring partners together and design services around people, rather than institutions.

Whether reforming special educational needs provision, supporting young people into education and employment, tackling homelessness, strengthening community cohesion or rebuilding health and care services around prevention, local government can lead the way in tackling the biggest issues facing our people and places, and in shaping our nation's future.

In the coming months, the LGA will be engaging closely with ministers across Whitehall to ensure the priorities of councils and communities are reflected in national policymaking. From sustainable funding and meaningful devolution to housing delivery and public service reform, we will continue to make the case that local government must be recognised as an equal partner in leading and delivering change.

On that note, it was wonderful to see so many councillors, officers, partners and national politicians coming together to share ideas, learn from one another and tackle some of the biggest issues facing local government at the LGA's annual conference (see **p12**).

I left Bournemouth feeling optimistic about what lies ahead and even more determined to ensure the voice of local government is heard loud and clear, with the arrival of a new Prime Minister. ●



NEWS



Councils face £7bn funding gap

Councils in England are facing a £7 billion funding black hole within three years, according to new LGA analysis.

The gap equates to more than the current council spend on roads, transport, homelessness and housing services combined, and it risks leaving residents facing longer waits for services, and cuts to road maintenance, libraries, parks and waste collections.

By 2028/29, councils will face extra cost pressures equivalent to 22 per cent of their current spending just to stand still, according to the analysis.

Costs are being driven by rising demand for homelessness support, children's services, adult social care and home-to-school transport, and new national requirements such as Simpler Recycling and the UK Emissions Trading Scheme.

The LGA is calling on new Prime Minister Andy Burnham and his government to lay out a new path for local services that is not reliant on council tax rises, short-term fixes and unsustainable emergency bailout arrangements. Government also needs to commit to deeper, long-term reform of local government finance, including a cross-party review of council tax, business rates retention and other funding sources.

An LGA spokesperson said: "Councils want to get on with supporting people, boosting local economies and delivering local priorities. But they can only do that with the long-term funding they need and public service reform." ●

New ministers for local government

Angela Rayner has returned as Secretary of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), in new Prime Minister Andy Burnham's first Cabinet.

As **first** was going to press, other changes included: Local Government Minister Alison McGovern moving to health and social care; the return of her predecessor Jim McMahon in a more junior role; and the arrival of Florence Eshalomi as an MHCLG minister. Devolution strategy has moved to Number 10 North, under Louise Haigh, First Secretary of State.

Cllr Eamonn O'Brien, LGA Chair,

said: "Councils will work with the Prime Minister's government to tackle the biggest issues facing our communities, including long-overdue reform of adult social care and ending rough sleeping.

"It is important they are recognised as equal partners to shape national policy.

"A rebalancing of power must include completing the devolution map so that every community can benefit from meaningful devolution, avoiding a long tail of areas left without devolved powers, resources or influence.

"This is essential to unlocking growth in every postcode, tackling skills gaps, building more affordable homes, strengthening and modernising public services, and ensuring every resident can share in opportunity." ●

£2m homes tax 'damages local accountability'

Councils should not be used to run a national tax for high-value properties that could be expensive for them to administer, confusing for residents and damaging to local accountability, the LGA has warned.

The High Value Council Tax Surcharge – set by central government – would be charged on homes in England valued above £2 million.

Councils would be responsible for billing, collecting and enforcing the surcharge, but would have no control over the tax rate, eligibility rules or exemptions.

They would also need to identify liable owners, administer deferrals, manage appeals and pursue debt recovery – including from overseas owners.

Councils will not retain the income they collect,

which will be returned to the Treasury. And while the Government has said the revenue raised will support council services, it has provided little detail about how this will work

Cllr Kam Rai, Chair of the LGA's Resources Committee, said: "The surcharge is a national tax, yet councils would be left to administer it, carry the risk and deal with the confusion it will create for residents.

"Without full funding for implementation costs and clear accountability, this proposal risks adding cost and complexity at a time when councils are already under enormous pressure.

"We need a cast-iron guarantee from government that any money raised must be genuinely additional and must not be used to offset reductions elsewhere.

"Councils should not be expected to run a new national tax system that could leave them out of pocket and undermine local democratic accountability." ●



Local authorities 'sidelined' on fair pay for care staff

Councils are set to be sidelined in negotiations over fair pay for adult social care staff, with no guarantee that all their costs will be covered by government, the LGA has warned.

In July, the Government announced that an independent Adult Social Care Negotiating Body will deliver the first ever Fair Pay Agreement (FPA) for care workers in England.

Directly employed council staff working in adult social care will continue to benefit from being part of the National Joint Council 'Green Book' collective bargaining process, alongside other local government workers.

However, the LGA remains concerned that the funding proposed is not likely to be sufficient to cover the full cost of an FPA.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "Councils need assurances that all costs they incur arising from the introduction of FPAs will be covered by government.

"Councils have a critical role in commissioning adult social care for local people and statutory responsibilities, but local government is set to be sidelined in the FPA process.

"We strongly urge government to reconsider this – local government must be part of decision-making to avoid a scenario where an FPA jeopardises the supply of care and sustainability of council finances." ●





Most care councils rated 'good'

Local authorities responsible for adult social care in England are "broadly performing well in the face of significant challenges", according to a new report from the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

The report brings together findings from the health and care regulator's first national programme of local authority assessments, including that 60 per cent of care councils are rated 'good', 35 per cent as 'requires improvement', 3 per cent as 'outstanding' and 2 per cent as 'inadequate'.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "The conclusion of the two-year baselining period of inspection marks an important moment for councils' adult social care teams. Councils have invested a significant amount of time, resource and energy into the assessment process.

"While many councils found the assessment process a positive experience, concerns were raised about elements of the approach.

"Early indications are that the CQC has listened carefully to feedback and is making subsequent changes to its methodology. It must continue to work closely with local government to ensure regulation is consistent, fair and proportionate."

She added: "Councils continue to work hard to ensure people receive safe and high-quality care. But, as set out in our 'Care where we live' report, sustained and predictable funding and infrastructure will be essential for the future of adult social care." ●

● See p14

Alarm raised over LGR delivery challenges

The LGA has warned that tight timescales and an "unprecedented scale of disaggregation" arising from local government reorganisation (LGR) "pose significant risks to statutory services".

While it has not previously taken a position on decisions on LGR, the LGA is now raising delivery concerns on behalf of some of its member councils – including around short delivery timelines, limited resourcing, workforce capacity, service continuity, concurrent reforms in other public services and uncertainty about the future of devolution.

Cllr Eamonn O'Brien, LGA Chair, said: "A government led by a new Prime Minister presents an opportunity to revisit some of the practicalities of the current local LGR programme.

"For the potential that this government is seeking to achieve through LGR to be

realised, the expert view of councils needs to be embedded in the decision-making to help solve real challenges, such as timing, resources and workforce capacity.

"It needs a commitment from government to adjust the approach – including, where necessary, the timetable – where there is local agreement that it is needed to align with the scale of change."

He added: "The LGR programme is extremely complex, affecting more than 200 councils and the services they deliver to millions of residents. The LGA is supporting councils as they navigate this unprecedented change, to use it as a platform for future transformation.

"For any future local authorities to be in a position to meet the aspirations and challenges of their local communities, the delivery concerns of existing councils need to be heard and acted on." ●

New unitary decisions announced

Unitary plans for a further 14 council areas in England were announced by the former Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary Steve Reed OBE MP in July.

The reforms will see 134 councils – in Gloucestershire, Derby and Derbyshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, East Sussex and Brighton & Hove, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool, Kent and Medway, Devon and Plymouth and Torbay, and Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire – reorganised into 38 unitary authorities.

Decisions on two areas – West Sussex, and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough – were delayed to allow ministers more time to consider the options.

The LGA has secured additional funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to provide dedicated support for reorganisation to councils. This includes



knowledge-sharing opportunities, peer support and support around workforce, governance and leadership.

It complements a broader range of support already available, including: data, digital and technology; adult and children's services; finance; housing; and communications. ●

● See bit.ly/4wSb0Cn to find out more about LGA support

'Millions' overspent on social care

Overspends by councils on adult social care remain high, at £715 million, with a growing number of people waiting for care and support, according to the latest annual survey from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "After successful efforts in recent years to reduce the number of people waiting for a care assessment or support service, it's concerning to see this number rise.

"This is another reminder of the difficult decisions councils are having to make and the real impact this has on their ability to meet their statutory responsibilities.

"We are alarmed that 58 per cent of integrated care boards are reducing their spending on continuing health care, potentially excluding people from the support they should receive and shifting costs onto social care budgets, exacerbating the risk of council overspend.

"We continue to call for sustained and predictable funding and infrastructure...



This will be essential if councils are to successfully meet growing demand, deliver on their duties under the Care Act and support people to live the independent lives they want to lead." ●

Temporary accommodation costs 'up tenfold'

Council spending on temporary accommodation has increased by 1,077 per cent in real terms over the past 13 years, new analysis from the LGA reveals.

The analysis shows councils in England spent £6 billion on temporary accommodation between 2011/12 and 2024/25, with more than a third of that total – £2.2 billion – spent in the past two years alone.

The LGA has set out its recommendations for reforming the system in its recently published

'Homelessness and rough sleeping strategy position statement 2026'. These include uprating subsidy rates to 90 per cent of prevailing local housing allowance levels, increasing the supply of genuinely affordable and social housing, and strengthening homelessness prevention.

Cllr Eamonn O'Brien, Chair of the LGA, said: "Temporary accommodation is a huge leak in council budgets that needs to be patched quickly and, at its heart, transform

the lives of families and children across the country.

"The way that councils are reimbursed by central government is not working, and it's impacting the entire country due to the knock-on effect on budgets and all other services.

"The increasing use of temporary accommodation is not only financially unsustainable for councils, but is hugely disruptive for individuals and families placed in them.

"Ensuring there are sufficient homes for people is the foundation for strong communities. As our plan to tackle homelessness shows, councils are a key player in this effort and we look forward to working with the Government towards this goal." ●

● See p11, p19

Declining childhood outcomes

Findings from new reports indicate that child health and the education disadvantage gap are worsening.

According to the Royal College of Paediatricians and Child Health's State of Child Health 2026 report, the UK has some of the worst outcomes for children in Europe because of declining vaccination rates and rising mental health disorders.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "Councils have embraced their public health responsibilities and continue to work hard to develop more integrated, place-based approaches to improving outcomes in early childhood and supporting families. But they do so under considerable financial pressure and challenging workforce shortages, with teams, such as health visitors, stretched ever thinner."

Meanwhile, the Education Policy Institute's annual report has warned that the Government faces an "uphill battle" to halve the academic disadvantage gap.

Its latest analysis of England's education system revealed the post-pandemic gains in narrowing the disadvantage gap have stalled or are in reverse across all phases of education.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE, Chair of the LGA's Children, Young People and Families Committee, said: "These findings show that ambition and commitment to reducing inequality must be accompanied by proper and consistent investment if we are to close the disadvantage gap." ●



'Stop asking care leavers to share their story'

How councils engage with care-experienced children and young people needs to change if services for them are to improve.

Luke Rodgers BEM, Chief Executive Officer of The Care Leaders, told the LGA's annual conference that children and young people who have been in care are the "biggest untapped talent pool in our country", skilled at negotiating adult care systems and frequent placement changes.

He described his own experience of being taken into care at age 10, having 13 placements by the age of 15, and, at 18, living in a caravan with a broken window, with only a sofa to sleep on.

"My corporate parent came in and said 'can you share your story'... up until that point, my story had zero value," he said.

As corporate parents, councils should ensure children in care leave care "in a better place than they entered", he said.

Drawing on his own experiences, including working on projects funded by the Children's Social Care Innovation programme, he called for a focus on three key areas: providing loving homes for children; supporting young people leaving care, "because it is such a cliff edge"; and giving young people the skills needed to find work.

"Let's stop asking if they can share their stories and let's ask them if they can share their ideas," he told delegates. ●



Luke Rodgers BEM

Creating 'opportunities for growth'

Devolution "should encourage places with the freedom to shape their own future", the LGA's annual conference heard.

Sir James Cleverly, Shadow Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary, told delegates in Bournemouth that devolution should be about creating opportunities for growth, not just redistributing funding or devolving responsibilities.

"I recognise there will always be places that need support, and they should get that support," he said.

"But that cannot become our model for growth, because no place has ever become more prosperous simply because someone transferred money to it from somewhere else.

"Places become prosperous because they create opportunity, because they attract investment, because businesses choose

to locate there, because people choose to build their lives there.

"That should be the purpose of devolution – not simply devolving responsibility, not simply redistributing resources, but giving every part of the country the chance to become stronger in its own right, economically successful, economically sustainable."

To do that, the incentives need to be right, he argued – so if a council unlocks inward investment, it should "see the reward for that work", and not locally collected taxes "handed straight to Westminster".

Sir James added: "If we get that right, we will not simply have devolved power, we will have created a stronger country, a country where more communities stand on their own two feet, where more places thrive through their own effort, and where local success becomes national success." ●

'Private profit put before public good'

"Shocking" amounts of public money are being taken out of local communities in the form of private profit, Green Party Leader Zack Polanski has warned.

Speaking at the LGA annual conference's first Green Party plenary, he gave examples of road repair contracts that incentivise failure, planning deals where "affordable housing is treated as negotiable, but developer profits are not", and private care providers extracting more than £250 million pounds in profit.

He warned that "councils in England will still be poorer by the end of this Parliament than they were back in 2010", and called for five-year funding settlements and grant funding that increases in line with inflation, to keep up with rising costs.

Mr Polanski said the Government has "misguidedly treated local government reorganisation as a cost-efficiency exercise", when the question should be not



Green Party Leader Zack Polanski

its cost, but what kind of local government is needed for the future.

A bold vision and proper funding are crucial if councils are to meet the many challenges their communities face, he added. This includes action on climate change, which should be a statutory duty for local authorities. ●

'Devo needs funding to work'

Councils need trust, genuine devolution and financial stability, according to the Liberal Democrat Local Government Spokesperson.

Speaking at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth, Zöe Franklin MP said government needs to trust councils because "you understand your communities and how to deliver like no-one else".

While there is now "more agreement than disagreement" on devolution, the key question is not whether, but how, power should leave Whitehall, she told delegates.

"What works in a major metropolitan region won't necessarily be the right answer for rural communities, coastal

communities, or mixed urban and rural communities," she said.

"That's why I've always argued that devolution has to be built on the central premise of local choice and local decision."

Ms Franklin warned new Prime Minister Andy Burnham against using devolution plans as an excuse to delay local elections again, and that government needs to "provide councils with the resources to succeed" if they are going to devolve responsibilities.

"Devolution only works if local government has financial stability and, at the moment, there are too many councils simply trying to keep their heads above the water." ●

Reed calls for double devolution

Power can be overcentralised locally as well as nationally, the former Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary told the LGA's annual conference.

Setting out his vision for "double devolution", Steve Reed OBE MP said that "residents can feel just as shut out by the town hall as by Whitehall if it refuses to listen to them". He added: "When communities have more control, they use their energy and creativity to find answers. They push services towards preventing the problems in their lives rather than simply trying to manage them."

These principles are at the centre of the Government's Pride in Place programme, providing 300 of the poorest communities with up to £20 million each to transform life chances in their areas, he added.

Mr Reed spoke of the need to ensure local government stands on firm financial foundations,



Steve Reed OBE MP

referencing Fair Funding reforms, the first multi-year funding settlement in a decade, and the "decision to end two-tier local government, with its costly duplication, so we could plough the savings back into frontline services".

He also warned that "we won't have strong communities if we don't tackle the housing crisis".

Government, he added, has opened the first phase of the £39 billion Social and Affordable Homes Programme to fund social and council housebuilding, given councils certainty on rent convergence, and made changes to Right to Buy "so new council homes are protected from being sold off so you have the confidence to go ahead and build". ●

© LGA/Joe Outterside



Suella Braverman MP

Reform UK would 'unleash a skills revolution'

With a million young people not in education, employment or training, one of the greatest risks facing the country is "allowing young people to become disconnected from learning or working".

That's according to Suella Braverman MP, Reform UK's Spokesperson for Education, Skills and Equality, who said policymakers have "paid lip service to achieving parity of esteem" between academic, vocational and technical education.

However, local authorities are "uniquely placed" to bring together schools, colleges, employers, universities and community organisations to address these issues, she told the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth.

"Increasingly, successful places are those where partnerships are strong, where employers help to shape training, where colleges respond quickly to changing labour market needs, where career education reflects genuine local opportunities, and where young people can see pathways between education and employment," she said.

"That's why a Reform UK government will unleash a skills revolution with education pathways and regional dedicated qualifications at their hearts."

Ms Braverman cited the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate, as an example of how the Labour-led combined authority, councils, employers, training providers and colleges, working in partnership, had crafted a "regionalised qualification", tailored to the area's specific industries.

Young people were being trained by local employers in the specific skills needed for jobs in their home towns, rather than finding themselves ill-equipped for the local economy, she added. ●



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The 5 new giants of opportunity:

A new social contract for housing



To mark our 125th anniversary, Clarion commissioned a landmark report exploring the future role of social housing in the UK amid intensifying social, economic and environmental pressures.

The work is explicitly inspired by the 1942 Beveridge Report, which identifies five "giants" obstructing social progress to be defeated. Developed by a multidisciplinary Foresight Group of residents, academics, health experts and sector leaders, this report identifies five new giants – not obstacles to be defeated, but opportunities to be seized.

Connection

Strengthening social ties and community capability in the places we build and manage.

Resilience

Creating regenerative places that can withstand social, economic and environmental shocks.

Sufficiency

Ensuring everyone has enough to live well, across all tenures and life stages.

Trust

Rebuilding confidence between residents, providers and the state.

Health

Placing physical and mental wellbeing at the heart of every housing decision.

“These are not problems to be feared – they are opportunities to be seized, with housing once again at the heart of national life.”

The Five New Giants provide a shared framework for how housing, health, local government and communities can work together to improve outcomes. As an anchor organisation in local places, we want to play our role and work in partnership with you.

Use this QR code to read the Five New Giants report in full.



A renewed partnership

Ending rough sleeping

With a new Prime Minister taking office, this year's LGA annual conference theme, 'From neighbourhoods to nations', could not have proved timelier.

It served as a reminder that national ambitions are delivered locally. Whether tackling homelessness or supporting people with the cost of living, lasting change depends on a strong partnership between central and local government, and devolving power to communities.

That message was at the heart of our 'Building lasting futures locally' manifesto, launched at conference (see p13). The publication sets out a vision for a modern, mature partnership between national and local government, recognising local and strategic authorities as essential partners in delivering long-term change and improving outcomes for residents.

Conference also marked the beginning of a new chapter for the LGA, as we welcomed Cllr Eamonn O'Brien – Leader of Bury Council and portfolio holder for technical education and skills, and clean air on the Greater Manchester Combined Authority – as our new Chair (see p24).

In his first weeks in the role, Cllr O'Brien has already been engaging with ministers, ensuring that the priorities of councils are reflected in the Government's early policymaking.

That engagement reflects the LGA's offer to the new Prime Minister: a genuine partnership, backed by practical proposals, that can deliver meaningful improvements.

One of PM Andy Burnham's early announcements has been to commit to ending rough sleeping in England.

This is an issue that resonates strongly across local government, with unprecedented levels of demand and financial costs spiralling, particularly on the cost of temporary accommodation.

Councils' net spend on homelessness services has risen by £950 million (125 per



cent) in real terms from 2019/20 to 2024/25, and there has been a 51.9 per cent increase in people requiring temporary accommodation in the same period.

While this highlights that the scale of the challenge should not be underestimated, it also presents an opportunity to build on the progress already being made in communities across the country.

The LGA's recently published 'Homelessness and rough sleeping strategy position statement 2026' sets out how councils can support delivery of this ambition.

The statement recognises the Government's focus on tackling homelessness while highlighting the need for long-term investment in prevention, increased delivery of social and affordable housing, and support to address growing pressures on temporary accommodation.

It also sets out practical recommendations to ensure councils have the funding, powers and certainty needed

to prevent and reduce homelessness in their communities.

As the new Government develops its programme, the LGA will continue to champion the priorities set out in 'Building lasting futures locally' and looks forward to working closely with new and returning ministers to ensure local government remains at the heart of national reform.

That engagement will continue throughout the year, including at the Reform UK, Liberal Democrat, Labour, Green and Conservative Party conferences this autumn, where we will continue making the case for our members and ensuring the voice of local government is heard at the heart of national debate. ●

i To find out more about the LGA's parliamentary and public affairs work, please visit local.gov.uk/parliament. Our 'Homelessness and rough sleeping strategy position statement 2026' is available at local.gov.uk/publications

Strength and ambition

Working together to serve better



**Councillor Eamonn O'Brien is
Chair of the LGA**

As your new Chair, I feel privileged, proud and honoured to lead the LGA.

At our annual conference in July, we celebrated what we, together, have achieved through the LGA on behalf of local government and the communities we serve.

Together, we: shaped and influenced legislation; stood up for the sector at the UK Covid-19 Inquiry; told the story of local government through the media

nearly 15,000 times; and, through our sector-led improvement work, delivered more than 3,400 instances of support to councils in England.

This is a statement of what we have achieved and what the LGA is proud to have delivered for its members.

That is why 316 out of 317 councils have either reconfirmed or rejoined LGA membership this year – and that confidence has been earned.

I know the value of the LGA's support because I have seen it from the inside.

As a member peer, I know what it means to welcome a peer challenge team into your authority, and to receive the honest, constructive and supportive feedback that helps you to lead better, serve better and think bigger.

I also know what it means to look at the membership subscription and say, with confidence, this is value for money.

For every £1 member authorities invest in the LGA, we attract a further £7 through external funding, grants, sponsorship and sector-wide investment.

Our improvement support, workforce development, legal services, policy expertise and leadership training save the sector tens of millions of pounds every year; this would cost many times more if we all procured it individually.

My ambition is that the LGA is your first port of call for anything that you need, because who is best placed to support and train our colleagues in local and strategic authorities? It is elected members and officers such as you and me: people who have faced the challenges,

made the decisions and delivered for our communities, time and again.

This year's conference theme – 'From neighbourhoods to nations: building lasting futures locally' – wasn't just a slogan. It asked us to consider how we build



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a future we can be proud to pass on to the next generations.

With Prime Minister Andy Burnham taking office, we have published our 'Building lasting futures locally' manifesto (see right). This seeks a new, modern, mature partnership between the PM and local and strategic authorities, so that we, together, can help shape long-term change through the next general election and beyond.

Because the test of national policy is not whether it sounds right in Whitehall and Westminster, but whether it changes lives in the places people call home.

We are at a moment of huge change in our sector. Devolution and local government reorganisation (LGR) are reshaping the landscape with new strategic authorities emerging.

Wherever you sit on the devolution/LGR journey, what really matters is that every tier of the system is supported in this new landscape.

That is why the LGA is providing tailored support for strategic authorities and, over the next few months, will be deepening our engagement and inviting them to formally join the LGA.

Completing the devolution map means securing agreements that put place first, setting a clear route to further powers, and ensuring every community has the investment, autonomy and collaborative leadership needed to shape its own future.

Fundamentally, the wider public service reform agenda should not be done to communities; it should be done with, and shaped by, communities – not around institutions, boundaries or internal processes.

Local government already knows how

Communities across the country need to see government working in partnership to deliver in the places they live: on the streets they walk, through the services they rely on, and in the opportunities available to them.

Confidence in delivery – and in our democracy – depends on every resident feeling the benefit of decisions made closer to home.

That requires a strong, financially resilient local government with the autonomy to make decisions locally and be accountable for them.

Devolution must reach every part of the country and it must be real devolution – power at the level as near as possible to the communities it affects.

This means working with locally, democratically elected representatives to put local places at the

Building lasting futures locally

The LGA's manifesto for the new PM

heart of any agreement, and setting a clear route to that devolution of powers, ensuring every community has the investment, autonomy and collaborative leadership needed to shape its own future.

Local and strategic authorities want to work with the new Prime Minister to build a modern, mature partnership – one capable of shaping long-term change through the next general election and beyond.

That means responding together to population change, new technology, climate pressures, further devolution and shifting public expectations.

Through this partnership, we can deliver the improvements all communities need. We want to work in partnership

with the new Government to ensure that, by the time of the next general election:

- parents have confidence that schools will meet the needs of their child
- young people have hope for the future and a stronger role in our economy
- families have access to safe, secure and affordable homes
- communities feel safe and more united
- everyone can count on the right care and support being there when they need it.

Communities need local government services backed by central government.

The LGA brings the collective leadership, insight and convening power of a sector that touches on every aspect of life.

Together, we can put local experience at the heart of policy, shape solutions, provide trusted challenge and support, and strengthen local leadership.

All of this relies on a local government sector that has the powers and resources to deliver. We want to work with PM Andy Burnham and his team to ensure public sector reform, including local government reorganisation, protects and sustains vital public services.

Our offer is to work with government to deliver visible change – because lasting futures are built with communities, through councils, and in every place.

i You can read 'Building lasting futures locally' in full at local.gov.uk/publications/building-lasting-futures-locally

to do this. Across counties, districts, mets, towns and parishes, we are joining up services on the ground, delivering impact through prevention, devolution and technology-enabled reform, and convening partners around all of that.

But that local impact can only deliver lasting futures if Whitehall backs it.

For example, adult social care has, for too long, been treated as a secondary issue; a cost pressure; an afterthought behind the NHS. However, through our latest 'Care where we live' report, we are making the case that investing in adult social care, prevention and joined-up, community-based support can improve wellbeing, reduce inequalities, support independence, ease hospital pressures and, importantly, build a society that genuinely cares for its people (see p14).

With rising demand, constrained finances, and increasing complexity, we've all had little space to look beyond the immediate pressures we face.



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But imagine what could happen if councils had the funding and the space to step back and ask bigger questions about how we prepare for the world our residents will be living in by 2040 and beyond. Through our LG2040 programme, we are analysing the role and mandate of local government in a changing world (see p20). We consider developing more preventative, user-centred ways of working, and, in doing so, supporting leaders across the sector to understand what's coming next and the choices that will define our future.

As your new LGA Chair, I will waste no time in getting around the country to visit your town halls and hear about what is, and is not, working.

My commitment to you is that I will bring these insights back to the LGA, to ensure that our voice is genuinely a national one, because the strength of what we do comes from the diversity and the depth of what you do in your local places.

I will work to ensure that your membership has impact, your voice is heard and your successes are celebrated.

Our sector delivers, and this is a moment for local government to speak with confidence about its strength and power. ●

i This is an edited summary of LGA Chair Cllr Eamonn O'Brien's speech to annual conference, which can be read in full at bit.ly/3T39Qp9. See also p24

Care where we live

Local government's role in adult social care reform



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

For too many years, adult social care has been discussed primarily through the language of crisis, pressure and failure.

The pressures facing councils, providers, unpaid carers and the workforce are very real, and should not be understated, as are the consequences of those pressures on people drawing on care and support.

But framing the issues in only those terms is a disservice to the millions of people who draw on care and support, their unpaid carers and the dedicated workforce.

Countless commissions, reviews and inquiries into the future of adult social care in England have stalled, and their associated policy papers litter the long grass. For everyone connected to

adult social care, the frustration is deep.

At its best, adult social care is one of the foundations of a good society. As our population changes and expectations evolve, its necessity for all of us will only continue to grow.

This time, though, it feels different. The work being led by Baroness Louise Casey, through the Independent Commission on Adult Social Care, has grasped a cross-party consensus that could just mean the conditions finally exist to build a broader and more lasting change.

The work of the commission carries weight and credibility across local and national government, and the adult social care sector. Baroness Casey's reputation for confronting difficult issues honestly, building alliances across institutional boundaries and driving reform through complex environments matters enormously.

She has placed important emphasis on the first-hand expertise of people drawing on care and support, and is bringing in public thought through the launch of a national consultation – the 'big conversation' (see panel, right).

This moment is bigger than any one review or commission on adult social care, however.

The shifts set out in the 10 Year Health Plan for England – from hospital to community, from sickness to prevention,

from fragmentation to place-based partnership, and from dependency to independence and wellbeing – are now shaping a debate beyond adult social care.

It is a debate in which local government is well versed. Councils understand the interconnections across multiple other services and systems – about benefits, homes, the built environment, employment and skills – and local government's convening powers are essential to making adult social care reform work and stick.

Through the LGA's Care Where We Live engagement, we set out to explore a question that sits at the heart of the debate: what should the role of local government be in a future, reformed system of adult social care?

Bringing together professionals, people who draw on care, unpaid carers, partners and wider stakeholders, the programme was designed not simply to gather views, but to help inform and enrich the national picture.

Our engagement process provided an opportunity to test ideas, surface difficult questions and ensure the perspectives of local government, communities and people with lived experience are reflected in the debate about what comes next.

Just as importantly, it helped identify strong cross-party and sector consensus for a future system of adult social care that is place-based, preventative, grounded in lived experience, and has a sustainable national funding settlement; one where national and local government work together but have clear and distinct responsibilities, helping to speed up the system and reduce inefficiency and inconsistency.

Our new report, 'Care where we live: local government's role in adult social care reform', presents the key findings from



Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, in orange, with (l to r): Phil Holmes, President of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services; James Bullion, Assistant Director of Policy, LGA; and Steve Duckett, former unpaid carer

"We call on the Government to lead a campaign to change how the public thinks about social care"

Casey's big conversation

Social care reform 'will fail without public consent'

A "challenging conversation" with the public about the hard choices involved is needed before attempting major reform of adult social care, Baroness Louise Casey has warned.

Speaking at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth, the Chair of the Independent Commission on Adult Social Care said England does not have a functioning system of adult social care.

And she described the social care precept on council tax as a "stealth tax".

Baroness Casey told delegates the commission would launch a national public conversation this summer, warning that previous attempts at reform have failed because they have tried to push through

big changes without securing public consent for the tough choices involved.

"Everyone remembers the death tax and the dementia tax," she said, calling instead for "a designed system that puts the adult who needs social care at its centre".

The current system is a "patched together set of arrangements" involving councils, the NHS, the benefits system, the private sector, charities, and an estimated five million members of the public who are unpaid carers – with the onus falling on them to navigate their way through it, she added.

The NHS is the "dominant partner by a country mile", and "politically protected and financially dominant", but we "cannot build a National



© LGA/Joe Outterside

Baroness Louise Casey announces her 'big conversation' on adult social care at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth

Care Service that sits apart from the National Health Service", Baroness Casey told delegates.

While many councils welcomed the Care Act 2014, many can't meet their full responsibilities because the money, infrastructure, systems and reform needed to make it work "weren't put in place", she added.

Consequently, the social care precept was introduced in 2016, with social care relying on local authorities to raise council tax for a service that is "poorly understood and hidden from most taxpayers' view".

"Councils are left trying to manage national problems with local tools and dwindling resources," she added.

our engagement process, and a series of recommendations for government and the Casey commission.

We call on the Government to make the case for a national funding solution for adult social care, and to lead a national public campaign to change how the public thinks about social care. Reform will fail unless the public narrative changes.

We recommend making prevention a core national infrastructure, funded like the NHS, with a dedicated national prevention and transformation fund focused on early intervention, housing, community support and independence.

Other recommendations include ensuring a National Care Service strengthens consistency and entitlement, exploring how greater consistency can be delivered within assessment processes and frameworks, returning oversight of integration and place-based delivery to local government, and establishing a

national programme to improve transition from children's to adult services.

We want to explore the role of council tax in funding adult social care, with all options on the table, including how reforms might lessen the reliance on it and whether it remains a suitable mechanism for funding adult social care in the future.

We need to: recognise housing as a core component of care, prevention and independence, and develop a National Care, Wellbeing and Housing Plan for England; develop a new national approach to recognise, identify and support unpaid carers, and develop a package of practical support measures; and review whether the Care Quality Commission's market oversight powers should extend to a wider range of medium and large providers to improve transparency around provider ownership, financing and the role of

private equity within adult social care.

This is a starting point for further exploration of the key issues by the LGA and we will be diving deeper into the key emerging themes in the coming months.

We are ready to work with government and the Casey commission to explore all options for reform and help co-design and lead this change for a system that is built around people, not services.

Successful reform will require a new partnership between national government, local government and citizens. It will be measured by whether people who draw on care and support can live the independent and dignified lives they want to lead, with the people and in the places they know. ●

i 'Care where we live: local government's role in adult social care reform' can be read in full at local.gov.uk/publications

LGA Annual Conference and Exhibition 2026

Pictures by LGA/Joe Outterside

More than 2,700 people – councillors, officers, partners, national politicians, speakers, sponsors and exhibitors – came together at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth, to share ideas, learn from one another and tackle some of the biggest issues facing local government.

There were discussions on public service reform, housing, social care, finance and devolution; conversations and ideas shared in a refreshed Innovation Zone; and networking and social events, including early morning swims, walks and runs.

New additions to conference this year included the LGA Voices podcast, a photo exhibition, a sketchologist and the LGA Lounge.

Thank you to everyone who attended and contributed to the event, and we look forward to seeing you in Harrogate for next year's conference, from 29 June to 1 July. Please visit local.gov.uk/conference to book your place at our early-bird rate. ●



Cllr Millie Earl, Leader of BCP Council, who welcomed delegates to Bournemouth



Paul Bristow, Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority



Delegate registration



Cllr Bridget Smith, LGA Liberal Democrat Group Leader, with Lib Dem Local Government Spokesperson Zoë Franklin MP



Live illustrator Becky James in the LGA Lounge



Cllr Bella Sankey, LGA Labour Group Deputy Leader, with Steve Reed OBE MP, the then Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary



LGA Green Group Leader Cllr Emily O'Brien



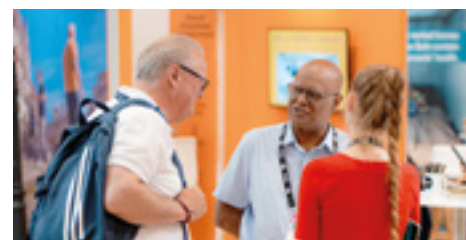
Delegates off for a morning run



Cllr Stephen Atkinson, Leader of the LGA Reform UK Group



Lords Local Government Minister Baroness Sharon Taylor



In the exhibition



LGA Independent Group Leader Cllr Hannah Dalton



Delegates in the Innovation Zone



LGA Conservative Group Leader Cllr Kevin Bentley and Shadow Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary Sir James Cleverly MP

Bringing life to ideas

Sharing learning in the Innovation Zone



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

The best ideas in local government rarely stay in one place for long. This year's Innovation Zone was designed to help councils and combined authorities share them.

Across three busy days at the LGA's annual conference, and in well-attended sessions, councillors and officers shared authorities' experience of what had worked and the challenges they faced.

That openness is one of local government's greatest strengths and sits at the heart of sector-led improvement.

The clearest message from this year's Innovation Zone programme was that councils are not waiting for change to happen to them – they are shaping it.

Whether embracing new technologies, redesigning services around prevention or responding to local government reorganisation (LGR), speakers demonstrated how local government is adapting, innovating and learning together.

Some of the most popular sessions focused on LGR and devolution. For example, Surrey County Council shared practical lessons from its reorganisation programme, while Westmorland and Furness reflected candidly on life beyond vesting day.

Common themes emerged: successful reorganisation takes time and is about more than structural change. Building strong relationships, organisational culture, open communication and bringing people together early were identified as critical aspects of any process.

Speakers observed that keeping services



Cllr Peter Mason at the opening session of the Innovation Zone at the LGA's annual conference

running while change is happening is challenging, but key.

Prevention was another defining theme. Hertfordshire County Council showcased how data and artificial intelligence (AI) are helping identify unpaid carers before they reach crisis point, while Wigan, Essex, and Eastbourne and Lewes councils demonstrated how prevention can become the organising principle for whole systems.

The emphasis was on building on people's strengths, working in partnership with communities and adapting systems to unlock better outcomes.

Technology featured prominently and the discussions were practical. Presenters explored how digital tools, automation and better use of data are reducing administrative burdens, improving performance management and strengthening decision-making, including through use of AI.

The message was clear: technology is most powerful when it supports professional judgement, improves data quality and gives leaders a single, trusted version of the truth.

Digital, data and technology also emerged as critical aspects of effective reorganisation.

The Innovation Zone highlighted

the important role councils play in shaping places. Sessions on local growth, community energy, housing, regeneration and culture showed how collaboration between councils, partners and communities helps create more resilient places and deliver lasting benefits.

Speakers also highlighted the important roles of town and parish councils and new ways of working together on community-based solutions.

Across the lessons shared, the Innovation Zone showcased that councils and combined authorities are delivering remarkable solutions in the face of significant challenge and change.

Each year, this event plays a vital role in capturing these insights – both successes and setbacks – so that learning informs and strengthens improvement across the sector.

My thanks go to every local and combined authority, partner, sponsor, and member of the Improvement Committee Member Working Group and LGA team who contributed to this year's programme.

Presentation slides will be available on the LGA website, alongside a publication capturing learning from the Innovation Zone, ensuring councils and combined authorities across the country continue to benefit from knowledge shared. ●

Supporting children with SEND

Reforms ‘need stronger accountability’, says minister

Education Minister Georgia Gould OBE has said the Government’s SEND reforms will need “stronger accountability” in every part of the system, including on councils, health and schools.

The Government recently consulted on major reforms to the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system, which it announced in February.

Speaking at an LGA annual conference session on ‘Inclusive neighbourhoods: supporting children and young people with SEND locally’, Ms Gould said the Government continued to explore what system-level accountability looks like.

She said: “There’ll be accountability on local authorities, there’ll be accountability on schools, and there has to be accountability on health, and that’s something that’s come up really strongly in the consultation.

“We have committed to new accountability measures on health. We’re working through with health exactly what that looks like.

“We’ll set out our minimum expectations of all schools and then Ofsted will hold schools

to account on those standards.”

Ms Gould, a former Leader of Camden Council, said the reforms would mean support is provided earlier and closer to families, without having to face long waits or “bureaucratic processes” to get support.

She said the Government was setting national inclusion standards – where teachers can identify needs early, rather than having to wait for a health diagnosis – and has developed new inclusive-by-design guidance to help create schools in which all children can be comfortable.

Ms Gould added that the reforms would create “much greater consistency for specialist provision”.

She said there was currently “very little clarity” on which children should be in specialist provision, what high-quality provision looked like or the range of provision that should be available in every area, leading to “a massive postcode lottery”.

She also spoke of the vital role councils play as leaders of place and convenors of services – “having that view of all children in an area” – but warned they would “need the levers to hold other partners to account”. ●

Prevention ‘at the heart of ending homelessness’

How councils and their partners can shift from reactive crisis management to long-term homelessness prevention is a key question for local government.

The issue was discussed at a session on ‘From crisis to prevention: delivering the Government’s ambition to end homelessness’, at the LGA’s annual conference in Bournemouth.

Chaired by Cllr Carl Cashman, Vice-Chair of the LGA’s Inclusive Growth Committee, a panel of speakers – including Tom Copley, Deputy Mayor of London for Housing and Residential Development, Cllr Anthony Okereke, Leader of the Royal Borough of Greenwich, and Ben Tomlin, Head of Strategic Housing and Partnerships, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council – stressed that while local approaches are making a difference, councils need sustained national support, long-term funding and stronger partnerships to move from responding to homelessness to preventing it.

The audience heard that councils face unprecedented financial pressures, with spending on temporary accommodation rising while record numbers of households live in temporary accommodation. The increasing cost of emergency housing is also limiting councils’ ability to invest in preventative services and wider homelessness support.

The LGA’s recently released homelessness position paper,



(from l to r) Greenwich Leader Cllr Anthony Okereke, London Deputy Mayor Tom Copley and the LGA’s Cllr Carl Cashman

calling on the Government to close the temporary accommodation subsidy gap as part of a programme to end homelessness, was highlighted as a gold standard approach to responding to homelessness challenges.

Panellists shared examples of successful local approaches, including bringing empty homes back into use, making greater use of direct offers, strengthening relationships with private landlords, purchasing homes for long-term accommodation, and using data to identify households at risk of homelessness earlier.

The importance of designing services around people’s lived experience was also highlighted. Practical support – such as access to Wi-Fi, employment advice, food provision and household essentials – can play an important role in helping people move out of temporary accommodation and rebuild their lives.

i For the LGA’s ‘Homelessness and rough sleeping strategy position statement 2026’, please visit [local.gov.uk/publications](https://www.local.gov.uk/publications)

Delivering devolution

Powers shared, futures secured

Councils should “seize the moment” for devolution with the

arrival of former Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham as Prime Minister.

Joanne Roney CBE, Managing Director of Birmingham City Council, and formerly Chief Executive of Manchester City Council, told the LGA’s annual conference she was “hugely excited” and wanted to see a “rapid advancement” of devolved powers to places.

“I genuinely think this is a golden opportunity for local government to lead in and fix the things that have always been a challenge for us, working with our private and public sector partners to co-design systems that work for people in our places.

“The test of it will be whether our people feel anything is different. The challenge for us will be to keep them on the journey, because it won’t happen overnight.”

Will Garton, Director General for Local Government, Growth and Communities at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), said it was “an exciting time to be a localist”, with a new administration “that really gets places”.

He acknowledged that, with devolution and local government organisation, plus SEND reform, neighbourhood

health and much more going on, the pace and scale of change feels “overwhelming”.

But he predicted that by the end of this Parliament there will be fewer councils in exceptional support, a single layer of local government, and “massive progress” in mayoral and combined authorities, with power “out of central government and into local government”.

Rob Bridge, Chief Executive

of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, said there were a “lot of really exciting opportunities”, but cautioned it “will take time and patience to make sure you build the right organisations”.

He said it was “vital” combined authorities were seen as part of the local government family, and that the LGA’s work

supporting new ones is “really important, because there’s a lot of learning”.

It must be made easy to get devolution right, he added, to avoid others going through what Cambridgeshire and Peterborough experienced, where the combined authority was subject to Best Value notices from MHCLG. ●



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Rob Bridge, Chief Executive, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (r), with Cllr Julia Hilton, Deputy Chair of the LGA’s Public Service Reform and Innovation Committee (Will Garton, MHCLG, and Joanne Roney, MD Birmingham City Council, in the background)

Rebuilding the social fabric of communities

LG2040 is the LGA’s flagship futures research programme.

‘Forces shaping local government’, its first-phase report published in July, examines the trends likely to shape councils and communities over the next 15 years.

One of its clearest warnings is the continued loss of social infrastructure: libraries, parks, youth centres, leisure facilities, community hubs, sports clubs and shared public spaces.

These places are not optional extras. They help reduce loneliness, support families, keep young people engaged and enable older people to stay connected.

They are often where problems are identified early, long before someone needs

urgent or costly support.

When social infrastructure disappears, the need does not disappear with it. Instead, it can emerge through greater pressure on the NHS, policing, mental health services, housing, social care and community safety.

That challenge is becoming more urgent as pressures on communities grow more complex. People are living longer, young people face increasingly insecure prospects, health inequalities remain deeply rooted in many areas, and climate shocks and economic uncertainty continue to affect local places.

The strength of a community’s social fabric can determine whether these pressures are managed early or allowed to become crises.

Councils are already finding new ways to support residents sooner, use data more effectively and build stronger local partnerships. But local innovation alone cannot compensate for rising demand, tight budgets and short-term funding.

A stronger future for local government will require sustainable long-term funding, greater freedom to join up services and more scope to invest in prevention. It will also require national recognition that social infrastructure is central to community resilience and better public services.

i To find out more about LG2040, please visit bit.ly/4wip5sV



(l to r) The then Health Secretary James Murray MP, NHS Alliance's Lord Victor Adebawale CBE, Worcestershire's Prof Lisa McNally and former LGA Chair Cllr Louise Gittins

Neighbourhood health

NHS is 'not a great partner'

The biggest barrier to developing a neighbourhood health service in England is not money, estates or data – it's the NHS.

That's according to Lord Victor Adebawale CBE, Chair of the NHS Alliance, who told the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth that the NHS is "not a great partner".

"We tend to arrive in communities wanting control, defined boundaries, detailed governance, and we call that leadership. It isn't," he said.

"Local government... is better at the things that make neighbourhood health actually work – genuine partnership, being led by the community and being brave enough not to impose one model on very different places, because different communities have different needs, assets and histories."

He added: "The inverse care law still holds – that those who need care most are least likely to get it. A neighbourhood health service that forgets that isn't reform; it's the old system with a new name."

In the same conference session, Professor Lisa McNally, Director of Public Health at Worcestershire County

Council, urged delegates "not to let neighbourhood health become another service transformation of the NHS".

Eighty per cent of health outcomes are determined by social factors, which are most influenced by local authorities – "things like financial security, housing, education, employment, skills and, importantly, access to a community full of socially supportive connections", she said.

Prof McNally highlighted how residents of the Westlands estate in Droitwich Spa, given £100,000 to spend on improving local health, had invested in a local wellbeing hub and support for children with special educational needs, plus a nature trail and bike repair shop.

After one year, urgent hospital admissions dropped 7 per cent (up 5 per cent for the rest of Worcestershire) and demand for children's social care was down 20 per cent.

"That's what happens when you trust in communities... and make neighbourhood health about neighbourhoods," she said.

The session also heard from the then Health and Social Care Secretary James Murray MP, who emphasised the importance of having the right structures in place – such as strengthened health and wellbeing boards – to "make sure cooperation happens routinely" between the NHS and local authorities. ●

AI 'may not save money'

Artificial intelligence (AI) can provide better ways to serve local residents, but it may not deliver the savings many councils are looking for, delegates were warned at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth.

Theo Blackwell MBE, Chief Digital Officer for London at the Greater London Authority, said people approach technology in "quite a solutionist way", looking for efficiencies, but the real benefit of AI is value added – the "ability to do a particular task much more effectively".

"I'm seeing the potential for much better public services," he added. "Savings may well accrue, but will be incidental to that rather than the main purpose."

A more fundamental question is the use of data, analytics and AI to understand and improve prevention – for example, identifying and supporting vulnerable people before they reach crisis points, which would prevent "misery in human lives", but also high costs for councils, he added.

Jason Kitcat, Director of Digital, Data and Technology, at the then Department for Business and Trade, said AI can, for example, enable social workers to do higher-quality visits and see more people, but that "there's been too many unverified claims that this will drop money out of people's budgets".

"AI is just another technology. It's not magic. So, we all need to calm down and think really carefully about what we think is an appropriate use for it, and what's a cost-benefit analysis that makes sense," he told delegates.

Mr Kitcat advised councils to be "fast followers" rather than leaders of AI developments, to be clear what they want from it and evaluate rigorously, and to not get locked into contracts – "Microsoft are not your friends".

He added: "Service redesign has to be half of this. If we are just going to add AI to our existing ways of working, we're not going to see much benefit."

Addressing complex strategic issues

LG Challenge 2026 winner announced

Created in 2009, the LGA's Local Government Challenge brings together talented council officers to compete in a series of real-life challenges around the country.

The fifth and final round of the 2026 competition took participants to Cheshire West and Chester Council, where they were asked to address one of local government's most complex strategic issues: balancing climate resilience with economic growth.

The challenge focused on the Origin industrial zone, a nationally significant area that includes major energy, logistics and manufacturing assets such as the Stanlow Refinery.

The area is also central to the UK's net zero ambitions through emerging hydrogen production and carbon-capture technologies.

The LG Challenge teams were tasked with developing a long-term approach to managing flood risk and water demand while supporting sustainable economic development.

The highly technical challenge required participants to consider local and national priorities. Discussions centred on the area's experience of



LG Challenge 2026 winner Victoria Lewis (centre, left) with fellow finalists (l to r) Shannon Kennedy, Nadia Hussain and Harrison Giles

summer droughts and winter flooding, changing regulations around water abstraction and drainage, and the need to balance environmental protection with industrial growth.

Teams worked quickly to understand the complexities of the brief before developing innovative, long-term solutions.

Team Athena, captained by Claire Goldsworthy (Cornwall Council), proposed 'Capture the Future 2050'.

Their vision focused on long-term collaboration through a multi-agency partnership board, alongside plans for a circular water economy, community-led flood preparedness and a thriving innovation ecosystem.

The strategy aimed to establish Origin as a global leader in green technology and climate resilience.

However, it was Team Paradigm, led by Nadia Hussain (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council), that took the win, with their pitch 'Resilience is Growth', a proposal that integrated flood resilience, water security and economic development into a single programme.

The plan centred on a partnership-led approach, bringing together regulators, industry, landowners and communities under a shared vision for the area.

Key proposals included a Resilience and Growth Partnership Board, an integrated investment pipeline and early delivery of nature-based solutions to build momentum and attract investment.

At the end of the challenge, it was revealed that the four overall finalists for 2026 were: Harrison Giles (Norfolk

County Council); Nadia Hussain (City of Bradford); Shannon Kennedy (Wirral Council); and Victoria Lewis (Bolton Council).

The finalists, supported by the rest of the cohort, were invited to compete for the prestigious Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth, in early July.

There, each finalist had the opportunity to create an exhibition stand to pitch their scholarship proposals to conference delegates, before taking part in a presentation and Q&A session with local government leaders.

During an awards ceremony in the conference's Innovation Zone, Victoria Lewis was crowned as the winner by LGA Chair Councillor Eamonn O'Brien, for her project 'NextGen: Local Government'.

Her proposal is about building a sustainable talent pipeline for the sector by attracting, empowering and developing the next generation of public service leaders through modern recruitment, paid internships and mentoring.

Victoria will now have the opportunity to turn this project into a reality over the next year.

Meanwhile, officer nominations and applications are open for the 2027 programme via the LG Challenge website. The deadline to apply is Monday 7 September – see local.gov.uk/lg-challenge ●

Total Place

Putting place at the heart of public service reform



Councillor Richard Clewer is Chair of the LGA's Public Service Reform and Innovation Board

Every public pound spent locally should work towards the same goal: better outcomes for residents, greater collaboration and multiplied impact.

Yet, too often, public services plan, commission and spend in isolation, with organisations focusing on their own responsibilities rather than the needs of the communities they collectively serve.

Total Place starts with a simple but important question: what if public resources were viewed through the lens of place rather than institutions?

For more than a decade, the idea of Total Place has shaped conversations about public service reform. Today, with rising demand, constrained finances and increasing expectations from residents, its relevance has never been greater.

The LGA's new Total Place Handbook provides a practical framework for local leaders looking to improve outcomes through collaboration, prevention and place-based leadership.

By understanding how resources are used across a local area – by the NHS, police, voluntary organisations, councils and other partners – organisations can make better decisions, improve outcomes and reduce long-term costs.

Total Place is not just about integration, but about strengthening locally

accountable leadership over public spending and outcomes.

The timing is significant. Public services are under sustained pressure, while demand for support continues to rise. Incremental improvement alone is unlikely to meet these challenges. Instead, we need a stronger focus on prevention, tackling the root causes of demand, rather than repeatedly responding to crises.

Launched in July at the LGA's annual conference, the handbook draws on the experience of more than 120 leaders from across the public sector and beyond.

It arrives as national policy increasingly embraces place-based approaches, particularly through discussions around budget pooling, devolution and public service integration.

The emergence of strategic authorities, local government reorganisation and place-based budget pilots creates an opportunity for Total Place to move from aspiration to mainstream practice.

The handbook provides a practical framework for action, helping local areas build a shared understanding of challenges, map spending and outcomes, engage communities, co-design solutions and test new ways of working.

Importantly, it recognises that there is no single model for success; every place must adapt these principles to its own circumstances.

A recurring theme is the importance of viewing public spending as a shared resource. Too often, organisations optimise

their own budgets while costs and demand simply shift elsewhere in the system.

The Total Place approach is particularly valuable for people with complex needs who interact with multiple services. Someone experiencing poor mental health, housing instability and unemployment may be supported by several agencies at once. By coordinating support around the individual, organisations can reduce duplication, intervene earlier, lower costs and improve residents' quality of life.

Importantly, Total Place is not primarily about structures; it is about relationships, leadership and culture. Success depends on organisations working across boundaries, sharing ownership of outcomes and building trust around common goals.

As devolution and local government reform continue to reshape public services, councils have a vital role as convenors of place, bringing together partners and communities to address complex challenges.

The challenge now is not whether we understand the principles of Total Place, but whether we are prepared to put them into practice. At a time of significant reform and financial pressure, there has never been a greater opportunity – or need – to think and act collectively. ●

i The Total Place Handbook can be downloaded for free at local.gov.uk/publications/total-place-handbook



Breadth and depth

Councils drive change and improve lives, says new LGA Chair

Cllr Eamonn O'Brien's political career started with a food bank.

While at university, he set up the first Trussell Trust food bank in central Manchester, in an area that still has some of the highest poverty levels in the country.

"It showed me how people could be let down by the systems and structures that are meant to look after them; how so many people fall through the cracks and come up against unbending bureaucracy; and how, sometimes, the different systems forget that there are people at the heart of them," says the LGA's new chair.

"Rather than try to just treat the problem, I thought I'd look for some way to fix these systems and processes that often let people down. So, when the opportunity came, I stood for election."

First elected to Bury Council in 2014, aged 22, Cllr O'Brien served as cabinet member for finance and housing for several years. It was, he says, good preparation for leadership, with finance giving him insight into the breadth of the organisation – "a really good understanding of all those pressures and challenges" – and housing providing the depth and understanding of the "real complexities".

He became leader of Bury Council in 2020 – just as the COVID-19 pandemic struck. "It was a very challenging time. But it reaffirmed my view about the importance and value of local government, because without councils on the ground – doing things, coordinating things, every single day – there was no way central government could have managed," he says.



"Local government at its best is a massive agent of positive change in people's lives. Bins, roads and parks – important as those things are – are only a fraction of the impact councils have locally, often with the most vulnerable people.

"Local government is not just a delivery arm of national government. We obviously do want to work in partnership, but we are also very capable of driving change, innovating and improving people's lives in our own way."

While Cllr O'Brien is newly elected LGA Chair, he is not new to the organisation, having worked as a regional lead peer, supporting councils in the North East and Yorkshire & Humber. He feels the LGA's

sector-led improvement support is "one of the most valuable parts of what the LGA offers" and a "trusted and reliable way of resolving issues".

"Local government has shown repeatedly that it has an ability to challenge itself and to improve," he adds. "It embraces the 'critical friend' and it does so because we all want to be the best that we can be. Nobody gets into local politics to do a bad job."

Cllr O'Brien says his focus as chair will be on the sustainability of local government finance – and solving the finances requires a fix for social care.

"I think at the heart of fixing adult social care is a new relationship with the NHS

and an embracing of public service reform at a neighbourhood level,” he says. “More money is clearly going to be necessary, but local government is at its best when it is driving innovation and change in service delivery to make things more impactful, more efficient.

“That means doing as much as we can to empower our own communities and pull public services together around people, not processes.”

Other challenges include housing and temporary accommodation – “having a secure, safe and warm home is a fundamental part of having a decent life, so we need to be quite radical about this” – and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Cllr O’Brien feels there has been some “really positive movement” on SEND, with the Government’s reforms “an excellent foundation to build even more on”.

Finally, as someone who grew up in the area they represent, he wants everyone to feel pride in where they live. “Once areas

“We all want to be the best that we can be. Nobody gets into local politics to do a bad job”

start to decline, the problems compound – criminality, antisocial behaviour, social cohesion challenges,” he says.

“Growth for me is not just about statistics and comparisons with other countries, but about bringing excitement, innovation and opportunities back into communities, whether that’s on high streets, town centres or more broadly across city regions.”

Cllr O’Brien is looking forward to working cross-party at the LGA, after experience of doing so in his own council and within the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, where he holds the portfolio for technical education and skills, and clean air.

“It’s another strength of the LGA that

it works on a cross-party basis, and we reinforce that every time we speak with a collective voice. We put our places first and not our parties,” he says.

“Of course, there are differences, and we can’t be naive about some of those, because politics has become more divided and challenging. But I remain a real optimist about being able to work together because, ultimately, that’s what our residents want.”

Cllr O’Brien believes new Prime Minister Andy Burnham’s agenda is a “massive endorsement” of what the sector has been saying for a long time – that we need to “bring power closer to communities through devolution, and ensure public services wrap around people and that the benefits of growth are shared as equally as possible”.

“I would like to see the LGA and local government very much at the heart of some of that agenda,” he says, “because I don’t think we want to be a passenger in that journey – we want to be driving it.” ●



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Hosting Armed Forces Day



Councillor Sophie Porter (Lab) is Deputy Leader of Rushmoor Borough Council

As Aldershot is the historic home of the British Army, and Farnborough the birthplace of British aviation, hosting the prestigious Armed Forces Day National Event was a perfect union.

The identity of our towns and the Armed Forces community have been entwined since the British Army chose Aldershot as its base in 1854, and they remain home to thousands of serving personnel and veterans, as well as innovative defence businesses.

Working with local MP Alex Baker (Lab, Aldershot), we could not have

been prouder to win the bid to celebrate our heritage, but also to highlight the important role of the Armed Forces and our continuing role in the nation's defence.

From the outset, our objectives were to celebrate and thank our serving personnel and veterans, to promote the role of the cadet forces, which are so important to our future, and to inspire young people to consider a career in the Armed Forces.

Hosting the national event was also a fantastic opportunity to showcase Aldershot and Farnborough, and to shine a spotlight on our important defence businesses. Many became valued sponsors, and showcased exciting innovations to inspire and attract young people to consider a career in defence technology.

Throughout our planning, we worked closely with our Armed Forces partners,



A British Army Apache helicopter at the Armed Forces Day National Event

the Ministry of Defence, businesses, sponsors and community groups to deliver a successful, free, two-day, family-friendly occasion for everyone.

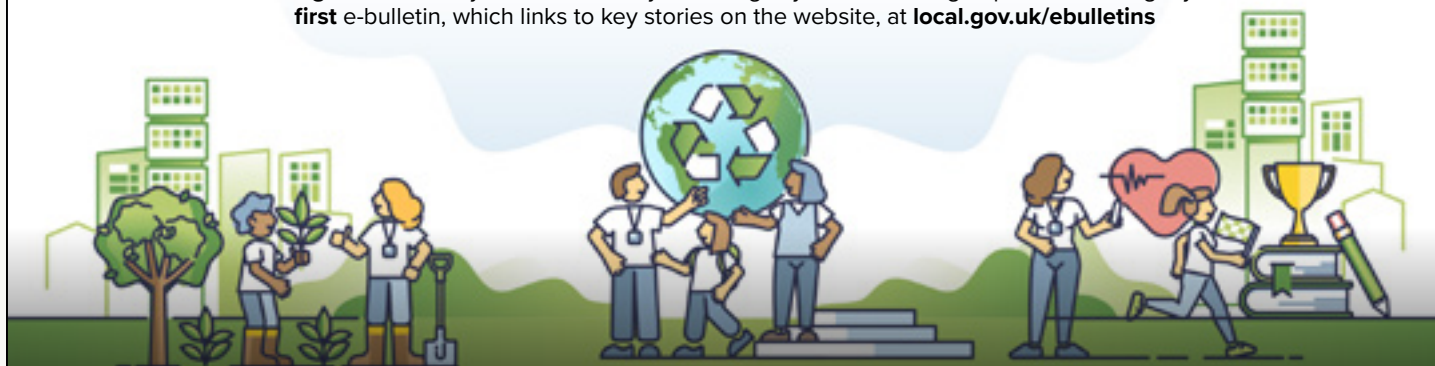
Saturday's event was a spectacular celebration, including a tri-service parade and aerial displays that thrilled the crowds. Sunday's Community Day included heritage activities, sports sessions and a poignant Drumhead Service.

Following the weekend, we were inundated with hundreds of messages from local people, and others around the country, saying how much they had enjoyed this latest chapter of Aldershot and Farnborough's military story. ●

first

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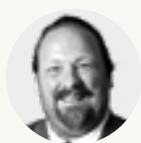
But did you know that we publish all the stories from the magazine online each month, at local.gov.uk/first? If you're not already receiving it, you can also sign up for our fortnightly **first** e-bulletin, which links to key stories on the website, at local.gov.uk/ebulletins



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.



Why I'm optimistic about the future of our cities



Councillor Vince Maple
is Chair of Key Cities

For those in local government, it can often feel as if all we ever talk about are challenges, whether those be funding pressures, housing waiting lists or strains on social care.

Add in the ongoing debate around devolution models and service redesign, and it feels even more dire.

But as I take on the role of Chair of Key Cities, I find myself feeling genuinely optimistic. Why? Because I am representing a cross-party network acting for proud communities of millions of people, where businesses contribute billions to the national economy.

Our network goes beyond numbers or economics to connect leaders from different political backgrounds through a shared belief in the power of place.

Our nation's future depends on the fortunes of our local places, which act as hubs for innovation, learning and culture, driving growth and progress. This shared belief has got us some real results over recent years.

Under the leadership of former Chair Cllr John Merry, Key Cities has established itself as a respected and unifying voice in national conversation, championing the value of urban areas.

We have amplified the interests of local authorities with our report 'Turbocharging housebuilding in cities and urban areas', highlighting barriers and opportunities to delivering homes that our residents truly need.

We have promoted the priorities of local leaders through our annual Leaders' Survey, including the most acute financial pressures and the approaches that will be taken to alleviate them.

Key Cities has continued to challenge the idea that individuals' opportunities should be determined by where they happen to live. Our 'Rights to Place' research identified how geography can impact outcomes, from health to income, and set out targeted and practical solutions for overcoming these barriers through a rights-based approach to policymaking.

With new devolution frameworks being drawn up and new bodies taking shape, local government is evolving rapidly. But beyond structural change, we should keep asking: how can we create places where people can be confident about their future?

Councils are facing real challenges, but those pressures should not overshadow the positive impact they make every day.

Local councils support people who need services, bring new life to high streets, back local businesses and help communities thrive. This is work worth celebrating.

Our cities may differ in size and character, but we share a belief that local leadership matters and that many of the country's biggest challenges can be addressed in the cities and towns we serve.

I want Key Cities to maintain its position as a trusted voice for government and a strong advocate for local government at the decision-making table, championing what we stand for and what we can achieve.

While leadership may change and policies evolve, Key Cities' mission remains firmly grounded in creating places where people can build a good life, fulfil their potential and feel proud to call home. I look forward to playing my role in helping to deliver it for many years to come. ●

i Key Cities is an LGA special interest group and a national network of 22 cities representing urban living in the UK, see keycities.uk

GROUP LEADERS



Councillors Peter Mason and Bella Sankey are the Deputy Leaders of the LGA's Labour Group

Positive buzz and constructive debate

It was brilliant to see so many of you in sunny Bournemouth for the LGA's annual conference 2026.

Between the sea breeze and the packed session halls, there was a positive buzz at this year's conference.

Joined by ministers and secretaries of state from across government, colleagues came together to share ideas, showcase innovation and explore this year's theme, 'From neighbourhoods to

nations – building lasting futures locally'.

One of the most insightful sessions came from Baroness Louise Casey, who joined us to discuss the vital work of the Independent Commission on Adult Social Care.

Her sobering yet constructive assessment of the challenges facing the sector sparked conversations among delegates about how we can transform delivery of care, improve outcomes for residents and build sustainable services for the future.

Labour also nominated a new LGA Chair, which was formalised at the General Assembly. We are looking forward to working with our friend Cllr Eamonn O'Brien in this role.

We have no doubt he will do us all proud as he steps up to the responsibility of representing the whole of local government on the national stage.

At our Labour Group meetings at

conference, we welcomed Lucy Powell MP and Baroness Taylor, Minister for Housing and Local Government in the Lords, as well as senior colleagues from the Labour Party.

We discussed the political and policy priorities for the year ahead, including housing, local government reorganisation and driving forward local growth.

We left Bournemouth feeling refreshed after three days of sun, strategy and solidarity.

Our congratulations also go to Andy Burnham MP on his election as Leader of the Labour Party, and warmly welcome Angela Rayner MP back to her role as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

We look forward to working with the Prime Minister and his new Cabinet to strengthen local government and deliver lasting change for communities in every part of the country.

"We discussed the political and policy priorities for the year ahead, including housing, LGR and local growth"

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



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

Listening should never be a token exercise

Local government is at its best when decisions are shaped by the people they affect.

Evidence, research and professional expertise are all essential, but they are strongest when combined with the insight of those who have experienced services first hand.

At the LGA's recent annual conference, our plenary speaker Luke Rodgers BEM – who shared his experience of growing up in care and the work he now leads to improve outcomes for care-experienced young people – reinforced

the importance of ensuring lived experience has a meaningful place in policy development.

His reflections were a timely reminder that those people who use our services often have the clearest understanding of where they succeed, where they fall short and how they can be improved.

For Independent councillors, this approach is nothing new. Our strength has always been our close connection to the communities we serve.

We are often the first to hear residents' concerns, understand local circumstances and see the impact that national decisions have on everyday lives. Those conversations provide invaluable insight that should help shape local priorities and influence national policy.

This is particularly important for children and young people with care

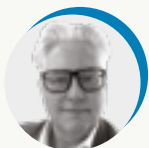
experience. As corporate parents, we have a responsibility not only to support them, but also to ensure their voices help inform the services designed for them and for future generations.

The same principle applies across local government. Whether we are considering housing, public health, adult social care or community safety, policies are more effective when they are informed by those with direct experience.

Listening should never be a token exercise. It should be embedded throughout policy development, with people able to see how their experiences have influenced decisions.

By combining evidence with lived experience, councillors can continue to champion practical, community-led solutions that reflect local realities and deliver better outcomes for the people we represent.

"Those who use our services often have the clearest understanding of how they can be improved"



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

Coming together to provide real solutions

What a brilliant LGA conference in Bournemouth this year, with nearly 200 Conservative councillors in attendance.

This showed the LGA at its best, coming together with our differing political perspectives to provide real, credible solutions to the issues we face in the sector today.

I was pleased to welcome Sir James Cleverly MP (Shadow Secretary of State), Kevin Hollinrake MP (Party Chairman) and David Simmonds CBE MP (Shadow Local Government Minister) to the LGA conference this year to meet our Conservative councillors.

We had worthy debate on what local government will look like under the next Conservative government.

“We have been highlighting the disastrous plans to abolish Healthwatch”

What did raise my concern at conference were the comments made by Devolution, Local Growth and Communities Minister Nesil Caliskan MP, which triggered a headline in the Local Government Chronicle – “Minister will ‘kill’ pride in place if councils interfere”.

I won't hold back in saying that local councillors know the communities they serve best and this level of interference from government should be treated with caution moving forwards.

Our Conservatives on the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee have been using the committee to highlight the disastrous plans put forward by the Government in the Health Bill to abolish Healthwatch.

This independent organisation has done wonders to stand up for patients in our communities and abolishing it shows this Government for what it is!



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

LGR ‘chaotic and disrespectful’

One of the last acts of the Starmer Government was to announce one of the biggest shake-ups in local government for a generation.

The local government reorganisation (LGR) announcement covers around 20 million people living in two-tier areas.

The Government's handling of LGR has been chaotic and disrespectful to the communities it affects.

“Communities will lose the local representation on which they depend”

MPs and councillors have been given no meaningful detail on what these deals look like, and no time for proper scrutiny.

At the time of writing, we are still waiting for decisions for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and West Sussex. We may not hear about these areas until the autumn.

Many authorities, especially the rural ones, are being left to flounder in dire financial straits, or forced into artificial regional structures that make little geographic or democratic sense, while money continues to flow to metro mayors.

This is not devolution. It is a two-tier settlement that we believe rewards urban Labour heartlands and punishes the rest.

These new mega-authorities will not bring government closer to people; they will push it further away.

Communities will lose the local representation on which they depend, and accountability will be buried under another layer of remote bureaucracy.

Many of these councils are already at breaking point and forcing rushed reorganisation onto authorities already struggling to balance their books is recklessness.

GROUP LEADERS



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

The postcode test for Andy Burnham

Prime Minister Andy Burnham says he wants to take power out of Westminster and put it into every postcode. The test is whether he will match that promise with authority, resources and discretion.

Councils have been treated as delivery agents for decisions made elsewhere.

They carry the risk, manage the consequences and answer to residents, while Whitehall keeps the money and the final say. That is not devolution. It is centralisation with better branding.

Councils are not branch offices of the state. They are democratic institutions rooted in place, charged with defending local interests, expressing the will of residents and shaping the future of their communities.

“Councils have been treated as delivery agents for decisions made elsewhere”

That principle matters most when decisions are contentious.

If the Home Office or its contractors seek to place asylum accommodation in a community, local representatives should not be spectators. They should have the power to challenge, reshape or reject proposals in light of local circumstances and democratic consent.

Local leaders understand where growth is blocked, where services are failing and where national policy collides with local reality. Different places require different answers.

Real devolution means multi-year funding, fewer ringfenced grants, greater fiscal freedom and meaningful control over decisions with local consequences.

The choice is simple: put real power into every postcode, or leave Westminster in command. Devolution begins where central control ends, in practice, not rhetoric. ●

Changing hands



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

There were 53 by-elections in this latest crop of results, with 24 (45 per cent) seeing a seat change hands.

Nine vacancies arose because of the requirement that councillors elected to the expanded Welsh Senedd should vacate their seat. A further five contests were in seats won by the Green Party last May, after winning candidates fell foul of the rules governing eligibility.

Reform UK continues to have appeal among local voters, with six gains,

three each from Labour and Independents.

Harborough's Lutterworth East produced a split ward in 2023, with one seat each for Labour and Liberal Democrats, and Reform in last place. Those parties were overtaken by both Conservative and Reform this time, with Leicestershire County's Cllr Bill Piper (Ref) edging the contest by 17 votes.

Nuneaton and Bedworth voted heavily for Reform last May, including in Camp Hill ward, where Labour's vote collapsed. The Greens chose to sit out this by-election, resulting in a boost to Labour's share, but Reform made the expected gain.

A third gain from Labour, in Denbighshire, reflects Reform's appeal in Wales. The party finished second in the Welsh Senedd election, winning more than a third of the seats.

Two of the three Reform council gains

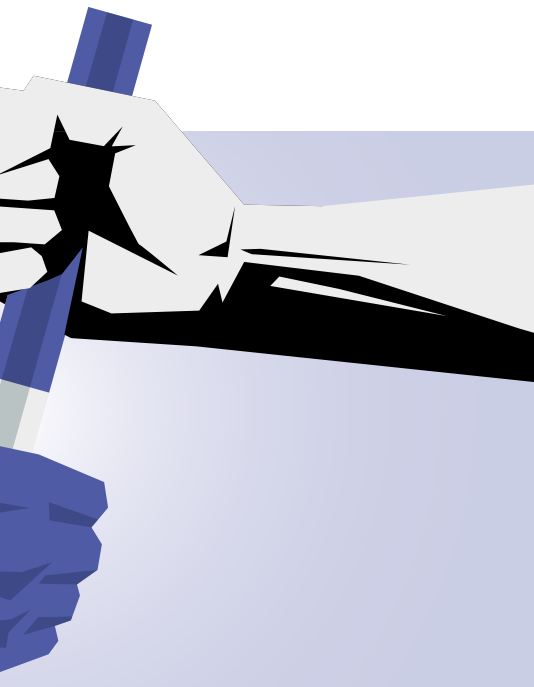
from Independents in Wales were in seats where the incumbent had previously switched to Reform and was then subsequently selected for a Senedd seat.



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By-election results

Breckland, Dereham Toftwood
CON GAIN FROM LAB
8.9% over Ref | Turnout 21.8%

Brighton & Hove, Goldsmid
GREEN GAIN FROM LAB
16.4% over Lab | Turnout 35.8%

Camden, Regent's Park
LAB GAIN FROM GREEN
5.3% over Green | Turnout 21.9%

Carmarthenshire, Llangennech
PLAID GAIN FROM REF
12.4% over Lab | Turnout 28.2%

Cheshire West and Chester, Weaver and Cuddington
IND GAIN FROM CON
10.2% over Con | Turnout 34.2%

Denbighshire, Llanrhaeadr-yng-Nghinmeirch
IND GAIN FROM PLAID
6.7% over Plaid | Turnout 39.1%

Denbighshire, Rhyl South
REF GAIN FROM LAB
16.9% over Con | Turnout 25.9%

Flintshire, Connah's Quay Central
REF GAIN FROM IND
29.1% over Lab | Turnout 14.9%

Gwynedd, Llanrug
IND GAIN FROM PLAID
19.2% over Plaid | Turnout 50.9%

Harborough, Lutterworth East
REF GAIN FROM LAB
1.2% over Con | Turnout 36.0%

Haringey, Northumberland Park
LAB GAIN FROM GREEN
1.9% over Green | Turnout 22.4%

Haringey, Woodside
GREEN GAIN FROM LAB
2.3% over Lab | Turnout 24.4%

Hertsmere, Bushey Park
CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM
10.0% over Lib Dem | Turnout 37.1%

Lambeth, Streatham St Leonard's
LIB DEM GAIN FROM GREEN
6.8% over Green | Turnout 25.8%

Merthyr Tydfil, Dowlais and Pant
LAB GAIN FROM IND
15.9% over Ind | Turnout 18.0%

Norfolk, Old Catton
CON GAIN FROM REF
1.8% over Green | Turnout 39.9%

Nuneaton and Bedworth, Camp Hill
REF GAIN FROM LAB
6.4% over Lab | Turnout 16.8%

Pembrokeshire, Pembroke Dock Market
CON GAIN FROM IND
13.5% over Ind | Turnout 27.6%

Peterborough, Fletton and Woodston
GREEN GAIN FROM LAB
11.5% over Ref | Turnout 20.9%

Powys, Llanfyllbach with Nantmel
REF GAIN FROM IND
15.4% over Lib Dem | Turnout 49.6%

Powys, Yscir with Honddu Isaf and Llanddew
LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
5.1% over Ref | Turnout 51.1%

Stratford-on-Avon, Kinwarton
CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM
0.5% over Lib Dem | Turnout 45.1%

Torfaen, Llantarnam
REF GAIN FROM IND
12.1% over Lab | Turnout 22.3%

Uttlesford, Stort Valley
CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM
14.6% over Lib Dem | Turnout 33.8%

i Only results where there was a change of political control are shown here. For the full results, and additional data on other recent local by-elections results, please visit lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections

The Conservatives enjoyed a strong performance, making six gains and two defeats (a loss to Liberal Democrats in Powys, and to an Independent in Cheshire West and Chester), including three gains from the Liberal Democrats.

Hertsmere's Bushey Park elected a full slate of Liberal Democrats in 2023, from a ballot containing only the three main parties. Reform's presence on the by-election ballot had no impact on the Conservatives, who selected a former ward councillor.

Stort Valley comfortably elected a Liberal Democrat to Uttlesford District Council at the previous May election, but this time round the Conservatives won easily.

Stratford-on-Avon's Kinwarton ward heavily backed the Liberal Democrats three years ago, but a closely contested by-election saw a high turnout, with the Conservatives winning by five votes.

The Conservatives gained a seat from Independent in Pembrokeshire before adding two more gains from Labour and Reform respectively.

Breckland's Dereham Toftwood ward featured the two main parties at the May election, but it was a three-way battle

Two by-elections... were pivotal to council control. The outcome saw the main protagonists swap seats

this time as Reform entered the fray. The Conservatives emerged with the gain, with Labour in third.

Reform won Norfolk's Old Catton division last May after polling 30 per cent of the vote. This by-election saw Restore contest their first council by-election – but it was voters switching to the Conservatives (whose losing candidate last May was duly elected) and Greens that accounts for Reform's defeat.

Despite causing by-elections, the Greens held steady, gaining three seats from Labour while losing two in exchange and another to the Liberal Democrats.

Control of Haringey last May hung by a thread, with the Greens falling one short. Two by-elections – in Northumberland Park, whose Green winner was subsequently disqualified, and Woodside, whose Labour winner resigned – were pivotal to council control. The outcome

saw the main protagonists simply swap seats, leaving the council unchanged.

Labour had success in Camden's Regent's Park ward – another Green disqualification prompting this extra contest – but their winning candidate polled less than a third of the vote.

It was a Green resignation that led to a third defeat in London, this time in Lambeth's Streatham St Leonard's ward. The Liberal Democrats successfully squeezed the vote of all its competitors when making the gain.

Elsewhere, the Greens met with another success in Brighton, capturing Labour's Goldsmid ward by a comfortable margin.

And in Peterborough's Fletton and Woodston ward, having lost a by-election seat to Reform in February, Labour lost another, but this time to the Greens, who had taken the ward seat on offer at last May's election. ●

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