

first

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“Local
government is
the bedrock of
this country”

Cllr Louise Gittins,
outgoing LGA Chair

The Health Bill

Lobbying for council
representation on ICBs **p08**

Annual conference

Building lasting futures
locally **p10**

A line in the sand

Reclaiming civility in
local politics **p27**



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The place to be

Steve Reed MP, Housing, Communities, and Local Government Secretary, his Opposition Shadow Sir James Cleverly MP, and Baroness Louise Casey, Chair of the Independent Commission on Adult Social Care, will be among the keynote speakers at the LGA's annual conference next week (7-9 July).

Taking place in Bournemouth, our flagship national event attracts around 1,600 delegates plus speakers, discussing the key issues for local government over an action-packed three days (p10).

It's been a little more than 10 years since the horrific murder of Jo Cox MP. Her life and public service continue to be remembered, and this anniversary provides a moment to reflect on the importance of respect, civility and safety in public life (p27).

Elsewhere in this edition, we take a look at the Health Bill (p8), the LGA's new toolkit for disabled councillors (p15) and our call for a clearer statutory framework for public sector use of CCTV (p19).

Our lead comment is from Cllr Anthony Hunt, new Leader of the Welsh LGA (p23), and we hear from Zöe Franklin MP, the Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Local Government (p26), the Youth Endowment Fund on keeping children safe from violence outside the home (p28), and the Confederation of Passenger Transport on speeding up buses (p30). ●

Councillor Louise Gittins
is LGA Chair

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Children's social care



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

The Government is reforming children's social care through new legislation to help improve the sustainability of young people's social care placements and funding via the Families First Partnership programme.

Last month, I attended a roundtable discussion on the children's social care residential market in England, facilitated by Alison McGovern, Minister for Local Government and Homelessness, and Josh MacAlister, Minister for Children and Families.

During the discussion, I made the case that any reform must deliver better outcomes for children while at the same time addressing the growing financial pressures councils face as demand for places continues to rise.

Reforms must also address the sufficiency and availability of placements, as well as the barriers we face in increasing local provision, which can sometimes, unfortunately, lead to

children being placed a very long way from home.

I was pleased that ministers recognised the value of collaboration, and welcomed the LGA's offer to convene councils, government and providers to shape a more sustainable and effective children's care system.

Children's social care will be one of the many issues covered at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth next week (7-9 July).

I'm looking forward to seeing friends and colleagues at the event, but many of you will be aware that I will not be doing so as Chair of the LGA (p16), having taken the difficult decision to stand down.

Chairing the LGA and working alongside such dedicated colleagues from across local government has been one of the greatest privileges of my career. Thank you to everyone who has hosted me on council visits or shared their thoughts, experience and good practice with me over the past two years.

Finally, I would like to welcome and congratulate Cllr Emily O'Brien, as the recently elected Leader of the new LGA Green Group; and send my best wishes to Cllr Eamonn O'Brien, Leader of Bury Council, who has been nominated to succeed me as LGA Chair. ●



Football 'can teach about healthy relationships'

The FIFA World Cup 2026 offers a vital opportunity to teach younger people about healthy relationships and how to treat one another with respect, the LGA has said.

Studies have shown spikes in reported domestic abuse incidents on days when England has played in major football tournaments, including the World Cup and European Championship.

With this summer's tournament in full swing, the LGA has highlighted the vital role councils play in supporting victims of domestic abuse, and has called for further funding for prevention and early intervention measures that aim to prevent domestic abuse happening in the first place.

Cllr Sara Conway, Vice-Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Committee, said: "Domestic abuse is a horrendous crime, which can have a long-term and devastating impact on the people and families affected, especially children.

"While the vast majority of those watching football games are not in any way involved in domestic abuse, data does show a spike in incidents during this time.

"Our ambition as a society must be to do all we can to tackle domestic abuse head on and eradicate it."

"Local government is a vital partner, working with resident and partner organisations every day to keep communities safe, prevent abuse, and support victims and survivors," she added.

"Councils stand ready to play their full part, but national ambition must be matched by a clear recognition of local leadership and responsibilities, and backed up with the resources to deliver these services fully." ●

Local government honoured

The work of councillors and officers in local government has been recognised in the King's Birthday Honours List 2026.

Recipients of OBEs include Cllr Peter Wheeler (Lab, Cheshire West and Chester) for political service, and Terry Stacy JP, Head of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Office, for services to the LGBTQ+ community.

There were also OBEs for services to local government for Dr Martin Reeves, Chief Executive of Oxfordshire County Council, and former Chief Executives Robert Walsh (North East Lincolnshire Council) and Carolyn Williamson (Hampshire County Council).

Cllr Clare Apel (Lib Dem), Chair of Chichester District Council, was made an MBE for services to the voluntary sector,

local government and Holocaust education.

Additional MBEs included: Susan Parsonage, Chief Executive of Wokingham Borough Council; Cllr Cherry Povall JP (Con, Wirral); Cllr Dean Cohen (Con, Barnet); Cllr Tim Hall (Con, Surrey); and Cllr Jack Emsley (Con, Hounslow).

Poignantly, Cllr Robert Francis-Davies (Lab, Swansea) received an MBE for public service dated back to 6 May – days before he died, meaning it stands as an award he received in his lifetime.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "Every one of you goes above the call of duty serving your communities, day in and day out, and these awards are a fitting tribute to the dedication, professionalism and public service shown." ●

SEND reforms 'can improve outcomes'

New independent analysis commissioned by the LGA and the County Councils Network has found that eight in 10 councils believe the Government's SEND reforms will lead to better outcomes for children and young people in England. However, less than half (43 per cent) feel they will lead to a more financially sustainable system.

The report warns that the existing SEND system remains "peculiarly vulnerable" because of a "surging demand" for assessments during the long gap between publication of the reforms and enactment of the legislation in 2029.

The Government's reforms propose replacing education, health and care plans (EHCPs) with a new tiered system. The report suggests a substantial minority of councils have already reported a "very significant surge" in demand for EHCP



assessments, as parents seek to secure an EHCP before they are replaced.

An LGA spokesperson said: "We are pleased government acted on the calls of councils and set out comprehensive and ambitious reforms to improve the educational outcomes of children and young people with SEND. However, as this report highlights, while the reforms have been largely well-received, there remain significant and very live challenges within the existing SEND system.

"Building the foundations for a new model that meets children's needs, while working within a broken system that continues to fail them, risks undermining the delivery of the reforms. It is vital government works closely with councils, not just to deliver the reforms, but also to tackle the present challenges in the system." ●



Children's social care costs at 'record high'

A coalition of children's charities is calling on the Government to use recent investment to rebalance children's services towards early support.

It follows new analysis showing the scale of financial pressures facing councils in England responding to families in crisis.

The report, by economic thinktank PBE, commissioned by The Children's Services Funding Alliance, shows councils spent a record £14.7 billion on children's services in 2024/25.

It found spending on early help services has fallen by 40 per cent since 2011, while the average annual cost of supporting a child in care now exceeds £100,000 – a rise of 30 per cent in five years.

An LGA spokesperson said: "Supporting children and young people, and helping them to lead happy and fulfilling lives, is one of the most important jobs councils do.

"However, as this report shows, councils face significant rising and ongoing cost pressures to provide this lifeline of support, driven by increases in demand and increasing complexity of need.

"As well as calling on government to ensure councils have long-term, sustainable funding, we continue to push for a cross-government strategy for children so every child has the opportunity to thrive." ●



EHCPs rise as new inclusion guide published

The number of children with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) has increased by 12.5 per cent since last year, according to official figures.

As of January 2026, there are now 718,838 EHCPs in England, of which 110,708 started in 2025 – 13.3 per cent higher than the previous year.

The figures were released as the Government published ‘first of its kind’ guidance on creating inclusion bases – dedicated teaching and support spaces for children with SEND – in mainstream schools.

An LGA spokesperson said: “The Government’s reforms can improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND, but there is a real risk these could be undermined by the existing broken system.

“The EHCP figures are a reminder of the continued rise in need, which the current system is struggling to meet.”

For inclusion bases to be successful, councils should have a central role in admissions and be able to work with schools to ensure they are delivering the right support quickly and effectively, they added.

“Inclusion bases must also be focused on ensuring pupils can learn in a mainstream classroom as much as possible. They should not be seen as an alternative option to a mainstream education.” ●

LGA General Assembly to elect new chair

The LGA’s General Assembly will elect a new LGA chair next week, after current incumbent, Cllr Louise Gittins, announced last month that she would be standing down.

The LGA’s Labour Group, as the association’s largest political group, has nominated Cllr Eamonn O’Brien to succeed Cllr Gittins.

Cllr O’Brien was first elected to Bury Council in 2014 and has been its Leader since 2020. He also holds the portfolio for technical education and skills, and clean air at the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. He has worked with the LGA as a Regional Lead Peer, supporting councils in the North East and Yorkshire & Humber.

Cllr Emily O’Brien (no relation), Cabinet Member for Climate, Nature and Food

Systems at Lewes District Council, will also be voted in at General Assembly as the first Leader of the new LGA Green Group.

General Assembly takes place in Bournemouth, on the first day of the LGA’s annual conference and exhibition from 7-9 July.

Around 1,600 delegates are expected to attend, with confirmed keynote speakers including: Steve Reed OBE MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government; his Opposition Shadow, Sir James Cleverly MP; Baroness Louise Casey, Chair of the Independent Commission on Adult Social Care; and Lord Victor Adebawale CBE, Chair of the NHS Alliance. ●

● See p10 and local.gov.uk/conference to book your place at annual conference

Shadow Secretary of State at LGA forum

Sir James Cleverly MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, joined the LGA’s most recent Councillors’ Forum to share his perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing local government.

The panel covered some of the most pressing issues facing councils today, including adult social

care, pressures on special educational needs and disabilities, high-street regeneration and the long-term sustainability of local government finance.

A key theme throughout was the vital role councils play in delivering public services and supporting communities.

The conversation also reinforced the importance of focusing on outcomes,

prevention, and effective partnership working between central and local government to meet growing demand and deliver for residents.

“All politics is local and, ultimately, almost all public service delivery is local... everybody experiences stuff locally,” Sir James told the forum.

“You see what is working and what is not working... you see the gap between what is said in Westminster and what is delivered on the ground.”

Councillors’ Forum also heard from Olivia Field, Chief Executive Officer of The Jo Cox Foundation, as part of a discussion on civility in public life, marking the tenth anniversary of the murder of Jo Cox MP. ●

● See p27



LGA Chair Cllr Louise Gittins and Sir James Cleverly

More people accessing STI services

There has been a decrease in diagnoses of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in England, according to annual data from the UK Health Security Agency.

At the same time, the number of people accessing locally commissioned sexual health services has increased to more than 4.6 million, highlighting the role of these services in supporting public health.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "Councils work hard to deliver these services and are ready to play their part in the delivery of the Women's Health Strategy,

the HIV Action Plan and the Men's Health Strategy. However, current spending on sexual health remains lower than in 2017.

"To ensure equitable access to testing and treatment, improve prevention and tackle health inequalities, sexual health services must be adequately resourced with sustained investment, particularly where demand is concentrated among young people and higher-risk groups.

"The Sexual and Reproductive Health Framework is an important plan, and must be backed by the funding to deliver it effectively." ●



'Close single-use vapes loophole' – LGA

The LGA is urging the Government to tighten the definition of single-use vapes to close a loophole, reduce waste and prevent further dangerous bin lorry, recycling and waste centre fires.

Since the disposable vape ban was introduced on 1 June 2025, the number of vapes and pods thrown away each week has fallen from 8.2 million, but more than six million are still being discarded.

The market has quickly adapted, with many products now designed and used like the disposables they replaced.

Vapes continue to be placed in household waste, with 47 per cent of users unaware that vapes can be recycled. Of those attempting to do so, only 43 per cent report being consistently able to recycle at supermarkets, despite a legal requirement for retailers to offer take-back schemes.

The LGA is calling on the Government to tighten the legal definition of single-use vapes to capture disposable-style products, strengthen enforcement of retail take-back schemes, with penalties for non-compliance, and increase producer fees to reflect the full cost of safe disposal.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "A year on, the volume of vapes in our bins has dropped, but industry has moved faster than regulation; the products causing fires in our bin lorries today are effectively the same disposables in a different shell.

"Councils are bearing the cost of contaminated recycling and dangerous fires, with residents ultimately paying through council tax, instead of producers and retailers." ●



Students to get MenB vaccine

The Government has announced the rollout of a one-off meningitis B vaccine programme for young people in England and Wales.

It follows concerns over meningitis outbreaks and clusters earlier this year, and aims to protect those at highest risk – Year 13 pupils and those aged 18 to 25 going to university for the first time this year.

Cllr Dr Wendy Taylor MBE, Chair of the LGA's Health and Wellbeing Committee, said: "We are pleased the Government listened to our call to introduce this programme to help protect more young people from meningococcal B disease, which can be very serious and fast-moving.

"Councils are ready to work closely with local partners across the NHS, education settings and communities to support awareness and uptake of the MenB vaccination offer, particularly among students and those preparing to enter higher education.

"It is vital that those eligible take up this opportunity for protection. Councils will continue to play a central role in providing trusted information and helping young people understand the benefits of vaccination and how to access it." ●

The Health Bill

Keeping local government at the heart of reform

The Health Bill represents a significant moment for the future of health and care reform.

For councils, the central question is whether these changes will strengthen local integration or make it harder to connect national health policy with the realities of local places.

The LGA has been engaging closely with Parliament as the bill progresses. This has included a second reading briefing for MPs, and oral evidence to the Health and Social Care Select Committee's inquiry on the bill and the Health Bill's Public Bill Committee.

A key concern throughout our engagement has been the legislation's proposal to remove the requirement for local authority representation on integrated care boards (ICBs).

The LGA has been clear that this is

a backward step from a joined-up and localised approach.

Councils are democratically accountable to residents and responsible for services that shape people's health every day, including adult social care, public health, housing and wider community support.

Their involvement helps ensure that NHS decisions are always grounded in local priorities and connected to the wider determinants of health, not just healthcare activity.

This matters even more as ICBs cover larger geographies. Local authorities bring neighbourhood and place-based insight, helping system decisions reflect differences between communities rather than applying a single approach across diverse populations.

Replacing that role with strategic mayoral authority representation may bring a broader regional perspective, but it cannot substitute for the detailed delivery insight councils provide.

The LGA supports the principle of neighbourhood health plans; bringing services closer to people, supporting earlier intervention and improving

coordination across services strongly aligned with local government priorities.

However, we have stressed that neighbourhood health must be genuinely shaped around local communities.

Plans should be co-produced with councils, NHS partners, the voluntary and community sector, residents and people with lived experience.

Furthermore, we have emphasised the importance of health and wellbeing boards as democratically accountable forums for bringing partners together and understanding local need.

If neighbourhood health is to succeed, councils must be at the centre of shaping what it looks like in practice.

We also support the ambition behind the Single Patient Record. Better data sharing could help information follow the patient, support safer care and improve coordination between services. However, to deliver full value, the record must be interoperable across the whole health and care system, including social care.

Over time, there is an opportunity to think beyond a Single Patient Record towards a 'Single Person Record', reflecting wider determinants of health, such as housing, employment, education and social support.

The proposed abolition of local Healthwatch has also been a major concern. This provides an independent, statutory patient and public voice across health and social care. Removing it without a clear independent replacement risks fragmentation, duplication and gaps in accountability.

We have urged government to work with councils and partners to develop a clear and workable model for local patient and public voices that maintains independence and joins up insight across health and social care.

As the bill progresses, the LGA's message remains clear – councils are ready to support changes, but integration, prevention and neighbourhood health will only succeed if local government is treated as an equal partner in shaping and delivering change. ●



i To find out more about the LGA's parliamentary work, please visit local.gov.uk/parliament



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CCLA
GOOD INVESTMENT

From neighbourhoods to nations

Building lasting futures locally



Councillor Louise Gittins
is Chair of the LGA

Exploring the biggest challenges and opportunities facing local government, the LGA's annual conference and exhibition brings together around 1,600 delegates from across the sector for three days of policy debate, innovation and networking.

We are back in Bournemouth this year, from 7-9 July, and I'm looking forward to catching up with friends and colleagues, and sharing our experiences, good practice and lessons learned from another busy year for councils.

Since last year's event in Liverpool, we have seen the launch of the 10 Year Health Plan for England and the Council Housebuilding Support Service, the first multi-year local government funding settlement in a decade, and the



English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act.

The LGA has successfully lobbied for significant additional funding for prevention and reform across children's services, special educational needs provision (SEND), homelessness and rough sleeping, and for the write-off of 90 per cent of historic high-needs SEND deficits.

We have led the way on influencing major pieces of legislation and policy, from SEND and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act, to devolution and vapes.

But the LGA's annual conference is about looking ahead, not just reflecting on the past; it provides some vital head space away from the day job to think constructively about the future.

The conference theme, 'From neighbourhoods to nations – building lasting futures locally', runs through the entire conference and Innovation Zone programme, showcasing how local action drives national impact, from neighbourhood services and community leadership to devolution, growth and public service reform.

Councils at the forefront of innovative thought and practice will be showcasing their projects in the conference's ever-vibrant, creative and interactive Innovation Zone – fuelled by free, professionally brewed coffee, courtesy of Newton, the zone's sponsor (see **p13**).

And in a series of conference plenaries, workshops and fringe meetings, delegates will be asked to consider some of the big questions facing us all – how do we reform adult social care, tackle the housing crisis, keep more families together, empower local economies, build cohesive communities, deliver devolution, unlock rural potential, and lead in an age of artificial intelligence?



For example, with Baroness Louise Casey, Chair of the Independent Commission on Adult Social Care, due to address conference, we will be showcasing the findings of our 'Care where we live' engagement programme, which has captured hundreds of views from across local government on the role the sector should play in a reformed adult social care system.

As we build towards Baroness Casey's first report, the LGA's engagement has a strong role to play in shaping the commission's thinking.

With local government navigating a period of profound change, the LGA has also been doing some forward-thinking on behalf of the sector via its LG Horizons programme

Demographic shifts, technological disruption, devolution, fiscal pressures and rising expectations from communities are reshaping what councils do, how they operate and who they serve.

Through 'LG 2040: The State of Things to Come', the LGA has worked with the non-profit consultancy School of International Futures and design agency Futurall to map the key forces shaping local government over the next 15 years, drawing on insight from across and beyond the sector.

We will be sharing the findings of that work at conference, introducing the emerging themes that describe the landscape councils may be operating in by 2040 and exploring how different drivers of change interact to create new pressures and possibilities.

The findings draw on 'hopeful' futures developed with practitioners and partners to explore what thriving councils, stronger partnerships and better outcomes for communities could look like – and the



choices the sector needs to make now to shape its own future.

Conference is also a time for renewing political and personal friendships and networks, and for farewells and welcomes.

Following the arrival last year of Reform UK as our fifth political group at the LGA, this year we will be welcoming a sixth – the LGA's Green Group, and its first Leader, Cllr Emily O'Brien.

I am standing down as LGA Chair, and General Assembly will be voting on Cllr Eamonn O'Brien, who has been nominated by the LGA Labour Group to succeed me.

We will, of course, be meeting in Bournemouth as nominations open for a new leader of the Labour Party – and consequently a new Prime Minister.

On behalf of our members, the LGA has engaged effectively with ministers and across departments in the current administration, and this gives us a strong foundation upon which to continue to make the case for local government.

Throughout my time as Chair, the LGA and the wider local government sector have worked constructively together through significant challenges and reforms, including local government reorganisation and the Fair Funding Review, as well as ensuring councils' voices were heard at the UK Covid-19 Inquiry.

These and many other moments over the past year have together exemplified the LGA's unique strength and core tradition – that we speak more powerfully as one collective voice for all councils, regardless of their party, region or tier.

I know that this unity of purpose, backed by the expertise of colleagues, stands the LGA in good stead in supporting members to navigate the opportunities and challenges of the future. ●

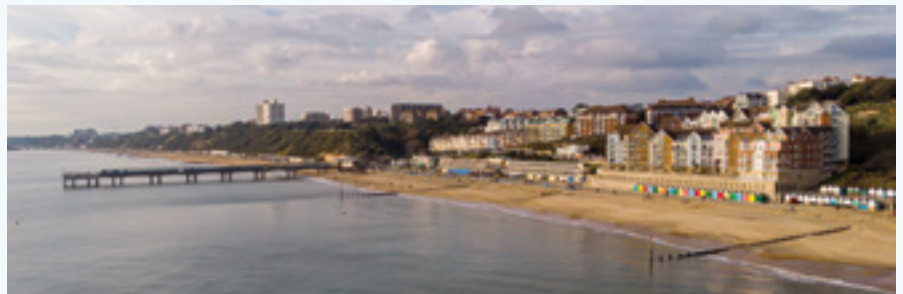
See you in Bournemouth...

The LGA's annual conference kicks off in Bournemouth from 7-9 July, with a host of speakers from across local and national government, other public services, business and the third sector, addressing around 1,600 delegates.

It's not too late to book your place, at local.gov.uk/conference. You can also download the conference app via the App Store or Google Play (search for 'LGA events') and follow events on social media using [#LGAconf26](https://twitter.com/LGAconf26), or online by visiting local.gov.uk.

As **first** was going to press, this year's conference speakers included:

- **Steve Reed OBE MP**, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
- **Sir James Cleverly TD VR MP**, Shadow Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
- **Baroness Louise Casey DBE CB**, Chair, Independent Commission on Adult Social Care
- **Suella Braverman KC MP**, Reform UK Spokesperson for Education, Skills and Equality
- **Zöe Franklin MP**, Liberal Democrat Local Government Spokesperson
- **Luke Rodgers BEM**, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, The Care Leaders
- **Zack Polanski**, Leader, The Green Party
- **James Murray MP**, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
- **Lord Victor Adebawale CBE**, Chair of the NHS Alliance
- **Jonathan Smith**, London Fire Commissioner
- **Alison McGovern MP**, Minister for Local Government and Homelessness
- **Josh MacAlister MP**, Minister for Children and Families
- **Katie White OBE MP**, Minister for Climate, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, and Co-chair, Local Net Zero Delivery Group
- **Baroness Jacqui Smith**, Minister for Skills
- **Paul Bristow**, Mayor, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority
- **Dame Sarah Healey DCB CVO**, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
- **Sam Jones**, Permanent Secretary, Department of Health and Social Care
- **Nigel Keohane**, Head of Strategy, Test, Learn and Grow Programme, Cabinet Office
- **David Phillips**, Associate Director, Institute for Fiscal Studies
- **Emma Squire CBE**, Co-Chief Executive, Historic England
- **Alison Crofton**, Chief Regional Delivery Officer, Homes England
- **Baroness Sharon Taylor**, Lords Minister for Housing and Local Government
- **Nesil Caliskan MP**, Minister for Devolution, Faith and Communities
- **Tom Copley**, Deputy Mayor of London for Housing and Residential Development, Greater London Authority
- **Kelly Fowler**, Chief Executive, Belong



PROUD TO BE A PARTNER OF THE INNOVATION ZONE

We're celebrating a decade of partnering with the LGA to deliver the Innovation Zone. Described as 'the beating heart of the LGA conference', we're proud to support a space which is committed to showcasing innovative practice and approaches from across the sector.

As the quantum, scale, and complexity of change and reform in public services continues to grow, we look forward to hearing from local authorities, including many of our clients, as they share new and innovative ideas.

We hope you are able to join us in the Zone; find out more about our clients' sessions by visiting our website:



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Proactive prevention

Making it work for older adults

In 2024, 20 councils joined a 'community of practice' to work through a deceptively simple question: how do you make proactive prevention for older adults work at scale?

Not in theory, not in a single pilot, but consistently – across different places, different systems and different starting points.

What emerged from the community of practice – convened by the LGA and consultants Newton, and Atlantic Customer Services – was the foundation for something more concrete than shared learning and a potential delivery model.

Several of those councils have since joined the Future of Prevention Academy, a national programme developed with Newton, with continued support from the LGA. This is now live and working towards the first large-scale national evidence base for proactive prevention in adult social care.

The Department of Health and Social

In the zone

The Innovation Zone is a key part of the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth from 7-9 July.

It provides a platform for practical innovation, peer learning and sector leadership, helping councils and combined authorities share what works and strengthen improvement across local government.

Sessions cover everything from improving landlord services with tenants, rethinking neighbourhood health, and community energy, to local growth, keeping families together, making culture count, and building a unitary council from the ground up.

See local.gov.uk/conference to find out more about the zone and to book your conference place.



Care is contributing by sponsoring development of evaluation methodology. Through this programme, participating councils are putting into practice a co-designed delivery model – grounded in connected data and analytics enabled by artificial intelligence – to design, implement and evaluate specific preventative interventions.

They are doing this as part of a collective improvement cycle with a peer network that compounds learning across the cohort, rather than repeating the familiar pattern of isolated pilots that never quite scale up.

The theoretical benefit from prevention is well established. What has been much harder is collating evidence for investment, building the infrastructure to enable it to work consistently and achieving scale.

For residents, earlier identification of risk means earlier support: intervention before a situation reaches crisis, rather than after.

For councils, the implications extend

further than adult social care alone. The same data infrastructure and prevention capability is directly applicable to homelessness prevention, children's services, and other areas where demand is rising and late intervention is costly.

The first wave of the academy focuses on adult social care, but the approach is designed to extend council-wide.

Within the Innovation Zone at the LGA's annual conference next week (7-9 July), three councils in wave one of the Future of Prevention Academy programme will share their honest, early experience of what this looks like in practice: what is working; what is harder than expected; and what the wider sector can learn.

The programme is designed to grow and the session is the place to hear directly from those already in it. ●

i For more information, contact Simon Williams, the LGA's Director of Social Care Improvement, at simon.williams@local.gov.uk



Soaring rents, a lack of affordable homes, and the constant risk of homelessness are leaving many young people locked out of the futures they deserve.

As the largest charitable provider of supported housing in England and Wales, YMCA is uniquely placed to meet this challenge. Cemented in local communities, with over **10,000 homes** already under our belt, we see the impact the housing crisis has on young lives – and we have the experience and ambition to change it.

In fact, we have already started. From modular housing to full site renovations, YMCAs across the country have been working with local authorities and developers to create more on solutions for years. But sadly, demand far outstrips supply.

That's why YMCA is launching **#BuildingFutures** – our plan to help end the youth housing crisis by creating **10,000 new genuinely affordable and supported homes** for young people.

JOIN US AND HELP BUILD THE BETTER FUTURES YOUNG PEOPLE DESERVE.



ATTENDING THE LGA CONFERENCE?

Visit us at **Stand P18a** or join us for our session in the **Bayview Suite** on **Wednesday 8 July at 4:35pm.**



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Opening the door

A new toolkit for disabled councillors

June marked an exciting step forward for inclusion in local government, as the LGA unveiled its new Toolkit for Disabled Councillors.

Co-produced with members of the Local Government Disability Champions Network (LGDCN), this practical guide is more than just a resource – it is a statement of intent, rooted in lived experience and shaped by the people it's designed to support.

The LGDCN operates with a powerful guiding principle: 'Nothing about us without us.'

The network brings together disabled councillors and allies to share good practice, raise awareness of barriers to inclusion and promote the voice of disabled people in local government.

This toolkit, funded by the UK Government as part of the LGA's Sector Support Offer, speaks directly to real-world challenges, offering clarity and tangible solutions.

Whether you're newly elected or already navigating the complexities of council life, this guide is designed to meet you where you are. Importantly, it recognises that disability isn't always



Baroness Sal Brinton and Cllr Hilaria Asumu, of Salford City Council, at a recent meeting of the Local Government Disability Champions Network

defined by a formal diagnosis. If aspects of your role feel more difficult because of neurodivergence, a health condition or impairment, this toolkit is for you. No labels are required.

Built on the social model of disability, the toolkit shifts the focus away from individuals and towards the environments around them.

It explores how design, processes and attitudes can create barriers – and, crucially, how they can be reimaged to foster inclusion.

Inside, you'll find three sections:

- your rights as a newly elected councillor – a clear and accessible guide to the support available
- a guide to reasonable adjustments – including a model policy and reasonable adjustments passport
- a guide to the UK government's Access to Work grant scheme – helping councillors understand what support they can access and how.

Each section has been shaped by steering groups of councillors and officers from the LGDCN, drawing on their lived experience. The content

reflects what matters most to members, answering key questions such as:

- Are councillors eligible for Access to Work support?
- Do I need a formal diagnosis to ask for help?
- What adjustments could make my role more manageable?
- What does good practice actually look like in action?

The toolkit is designed to become part of everyday council life – from induction programmes to ongoing support conversations. Accessible online at local.gov.uk/publications/toolkit-disabled-councillors, it is also available in print by emailing leadership@local.gov.uk.

Looking ahead, the LGDCN is set to share this resource widely, encouraging councils across the country to continue the journey towards greater accessibility. ●

Develop your leadership skills

Applications are now open for cohort five of the LGA's Disabled Councillors Leadership Programme.

This programme is a unique opportunity to grow your skills, confidence and experience, working with other disabled councillors and developing as a cohort of peers.

Councillors can find out more, and apply by completing a short online form, at local.gov.uk/disabled-councillors-leadership-programme

i If you're inspired to get involved, the network is open to new members ready to champion inclusion and help shape what comes next – email leadership@local.gov.uk to join.

Staying local

LGA chair standing down after two “amazing” years

Cllr Louise Gittins is speaking to **first** the night after the Local Government Chronicle’s annual awards, where Burnley Borough Council was named council of the year.

The awards were “local government at its proudest, its strongest, its very best”, says the LGA’s outgoing chair.

“Across the country, local government is there as a constant, whether it’s delivering services for vulnerable people, collecting the bins, keeping our streets clean, or providing enforcement – for example, around illegal vapes.

“Local government is the bedrock of this country. And when there are elections, officers within local government

are there to support new members and administrations, and carry on delivering, day in and day out. They are the best example of public service you can find.”

It’s the pull of the local place she calls home that has shaped her “really hard” decision to stand down after two “absolutely amazing” years as LGA chair.

It was at the UK’s Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum in Leeds, in May – where Cllr Gittins was leading an LGA delegation but also representing Cheshire West and Chester Council as Leader, and Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority as its chair (since April) – that Cllr Gittins thought carefully about her decision.

“I was so pleased by the number of people coming to our stall to talk about a new combined authority and wanting to work with us. And I was thinking, ‘what a busy year ahead’,” she says.

“And then I did an LGA panel with Cllr Richard Wright, Chair of the Local Councils Network, about the future of local government, and somebody asked me at the end what made me become a councillor.

“Those two things took me right down to the grassroots of why I am a councillor – the residents of the ward who have elected me. This is where my focus needs to be.”

Cllr Gittins became LGA Chair in 2024, and her first priority was building a new relationship between central and local government following the general election.

“I think we are a more equal partner now,” she says. “The Leaders’ Council has been set up, which is our chance to formally interact with all departments within government, led jointly by ourselves and the Secretary of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

“It brings in ministers and other departments to talk about all the things that impact on local government, because one of the biggest points we’ve been getting across is that local government isn’t just the MHCLG.

“It covers schools, culture, climate change, health, economic growth – everything that government does is touched by local government.

“We’ve interacted with government at a level that’s never happened before and got some really big wins. Having that regular and strong connection with government, and a united, collective, and constructive voice from the LGA directly to them, has put us in really good stead for the new chair to take the LGA forward.”

Those wins include: a multi-year financial settlement; the writing off of 90 per cent of council deficits related to provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); additional funding for SEND, homelessness and rough sleeping, and for adults’ and children’s social care; and an earlier and bigger multi-year public health grant.

Ongoing challenges remain for the sector and the LGA, says Cllr Gittins. These include: securing more funding, particularly for investment in prevention, such as in SEND; influencing Baroness Casey’s Independent Commission on Adult Social Care; navigating local government reorganisation and a new landscape of mayoral combined authorities; and looking ahead to the future.

The LGA is developing a membership offer to combined authorities and looking ahead, on behalf of the sector, to 2040, as part of its Local Government Horizons programme (see bit.ly/4oGiNQW).

“The LGA needs to be leading by example in terms of looking to the future, and what that looks like for us as an organisation – how we need to adapt and change, and really reach out to our members and give the support that they need,” says Cllr Gittins.

“We are a more equal partner now. The Leaders’ Council has been set up, which is our chance to formally interact with government”





Cllr Gittins at the Great North Investment Summit 2026

"Nothing ever stands still and every challenge is an opportunity."

Cllr Gittins also reflects on last summer's social unrest around the anniversary of the horrific murder of three young girls in Southport, saying: "In such awful circumstances, the council was there to convene partners and support their community. And the LGA was quick to support councils and to work with government on social cohesion. That was a really big thing where it showed how we can convene and respond in an agile way."

"If you look back over many years, local government has always been great at doing that – the pandemic, Homes for Ukraine, flooding, ongoing challenges with the asylum system."

"An important role for the LGA is to be a convenor of local government, in the same way that local councils are convenors of place."

"We've got that ability to bring people together, whether it's political leaders or chief executives, to look at the challenge of the moment, and what we need to do to work together to overcome that."

"It's done informally and is very much

based on relationships. But if we and our member councils had all the powers to bring the public sector together locally to deliver, it would make a huge difference – for example, in terms of early intervention and prevention work."

Local government is "brave and ambitious" and will invest in early intervention, but other parts of the public sector "can't always see the benefits", she notes – highlighting, for example, the difference it would make to acute hospital admissions down the line if health services could contribute to local government's pot for tackling damp and mould in housing now.

Cllr Gittins says the role of LGA Chair couldn't work without all the support from the sector and the organisation itself. "I have really enjoyed visiting other councils and meeting other leaders, looking at the fantastic work they have done and sharing that good practice – and taking things back to my own council!" she says.

"At the LGA, whether it's been staff, group leaders, board members, chairs of committees, it's a whole-team effort."



Cllr Gittins (r) with Harriet Vitty, winner of the Local Government Challenge 2025, and Cllr Kevin Bentley, LGA Senior Vice-Chairman

I couldn't do what I'm doing without knowing there's that fantastic cross-party support driving forward the voice of local government.

"That has been such a strength of the LGA, that we really do speak with one voice. As Kevin (Cllr Kevin Bentley, LGA Senior Vice-Chairman) always says, when you come into Smith Square you leave your political hat outside. And that needs to continue."

For now, Cllr Gittins is looking forward to the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth next week (7-9 July, see www.local.gov.uk/conference), and to continuing some work on health and health inequalities, one of her policy passions.

"I am going to be doing some things to support a smooth handover," she says.

"For example, I've been working with Lord Victor Adebawale, Chair of the NHS Alliance, on the important role of local government in health reforms. We've been working together to make sure that the voice of local government is at the heart of the 10 Year Health Plan for England."

Cllr Eamonn O'Brien, Leader of Bury Council, has been nominated by the LGA's Labour Group to succeed Cllr Gittins, and an election will take place at the LGA General Assembly's meeting on 7 July.

Cllr Gittins' advice to her successor is to "not worry about repeating yourself when lobbying government".

"Things will happen, but the LGA and local government will respond as we always have: with agility, adaptability and resilience, so keep on pushing for the things that our members need." ●



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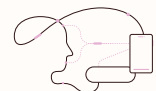
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Public sector camera use

Call for clearer statutory framework for CCTV



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

When residents talk to councillors about crime and antisocial behaviour, they want to know that action is being taken to keep their communities safe.

Public space closed-circuit television (CCTV) remains one of the most important tools councils have to help achieve that.

It can deter offending, support police investigations, provide valuable evidence, enable faster responses to incidents and

reassure local communities. Research from the College of Policing found that areas with CCTV experienced around a 13 per cent reduction in crime compared with similar locations without it.

In Newark and Sherwood, the installation of high-definition cameras in antisocial behaviour (ASB) hotspots contributed to a 23 per cent year-on-year reduction in ASB incidents.

However, CCTV is not a silver bullet. The strongest results are achieved when it forms part of a wider community safety strategy that includes environmental design, neighbourhood patrols, active community engagement, and close partnership working with the police and other agencies.

Cameras alone cannot solve the complex causes of crime and antisocial behaviour. Councils also face increasing challenges in operating CCTV systems.

Cameras must be properly maintained and monitored, and regularly reviewed to remain effective. Footage must be stored and managed in line with legal and data

protection requirements. Meanwhile, rapidly developing technologies, including artificial intelligence and facial recognition, present opportunities to improve public safety while also raising legitimate questions around privacy, transparency and public confidence.

All of this comes at a cost. Although CCTV is widely relied upon by police and other emergency services, it remains a non-statutory service funded by councils. Many authorities spend hundreds of thousands of pounds each year maintaining networks that play a vital role in protecting residents and supporting law enforcement.

At the same time, councils are being asked to navigate an increasingly complex regulatory landscape. Public space CCTV currently sits within broader data protection legislation that was not designed specifically for modern surveillance technologies.

As systems become more sophisticated, councils need greater clarity around their responsibilities, the rights of the public and the appropriate boundaries for law enforcement use.

That is why the LGA is calling for a clearer statutory framework for public space CCTV and sustainable funding arrangements that recognise the important role council-operated systems play in community safety. Councils need the resources, legal certainty and flexibility to continue delivering this service effectively and responsibly.

The debate about CCTV is ultimately about balance. Residents expect action to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour, but they also expect surveillance to be lawful, proportionate and transparent. With the right safeguards, oversight and public accountability, we can achieve both.

CCTV is not the whole answer, but it remains one of local government's most effective tools for helping keep communities safe. Government should recognise that reality and provide councils with the support they need to use it well. ●



i To find out more about the LGA's work on safer communities, please visit local.gov.uk/community-safety

Shaping the conditions that influence health

New public health guidance for councillors

Public health has a long and well-established history in local government.

Councils have, for many decades, played a central role in shaping the social, economic and environmental conditions that influence health, from housing and sanitation to education, planning and community services.

While the organisation of public health functions has changed over time, local government has consistently been a key part of the public health system.

Since 1 April 2013, councils have held statutory responsibility for improving the health of their local populations. That responsibility remains a core function of local government, and continues to be central to efforts to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities.

The Government's 10 Year Health Plan for England, published in July 2025, sets out an agenda structured around three shifts: from hospital to community, from treatment to prevention, and from analogue to digital.

Local government has a role across all three areas, particularly through its responsibilities for prevention, early intervention and place-based services delivered in homes, schools, workplaces and communities.

This role is further reflected in the Neighbourhood Health Framework, published in March 2026, which sets out expectations for neighbourhood-level working across the health and care system in England.

From 2027/28, health and wellbeing boards are identified as having a central role in local neighbourhood health plans, building on their statutory function to bring together partners around shared priorities for population health and wellbeing.

At the same time, the national health system is undergoing significant structural change. NHS England is being abolished, integrated care boards are being reduced in number and scale, and integrated care partnerships are being wound down.

In this context, it is important that local government is clear about its statutory responsibilities and how these relate to the evolving NHS landscape. Consequently, the LGA has recently published a new 'Councillors' guide to local authority public health responsibilities'.

Councillors have a leadership role in shaping local approaches to health and wellbeing, and the guide is intended to support them by setting out what councils are legally required to do, the funding arrangements that apply, and how national policy frameworks interact with local decision-making.

It has been updated to reflect the 2026/27 public health grant settlement, the consolidation of drug, alcohol and smoking cessation funding



streams, and – as referenced above – the Government's 10 Year Health Plan, Neighbourhood Health Framework and NHS restructuring programme.

But while statutory public health functions are important, they represent only a fraction of the impact local government has on health.

The great majority of what determines health – housing quality, employment, education, the built environment, community life, air quality, safety – is directly shaped by decisions councils make every day across all their services.

Under a section on councils as leaders for population health, the guide looks at the 'Health in All Policies' approach, which embeds consideration of health and wellbeing impacts into decision-making across all council functions.

The LGA offers Health in All Policies workshops and support for councils wishing to strengthen this approach, as well as a wider public health and prevention improvement offer – funded by the Department of Health and Social Care – which is based on sector-led principles. ●

i To discuss improvement support and any aspect of the LGA's public health offer, please email publichealth@local.gov.uk. The guide for councillors can be read in full at [local.gov.uk/publications](https://www.local.gov.uk/publications)

Community voice

How culture can improve participation



Dr Joseph Owen is a Research Fellow at the University of Southampton

As it states above, I'm a research fellow from the University of Southampton. Specifically I'm currently the AHRC LUCIA fellow, seconded to the LGA.

Yep. Let's unpack that a bit.

The LUCIA programme stands for Locally Unlocking Culture through Inclusive Access, and it lasts from April 2026 to March 2027. It's a nationally funded scheme, run by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

It supports six projects across the UK, looking at how culture can improve access and participation, particularly for communities that are seldom heard, or are under-represented or excluded.

I'm working as a fellow embedded in the LGA to connect the findings from these projects to local government needs, and I'm undertaking my own project on participation through socially engaged visual arts practice.

This focuses on how a new model should be grounded in how the sector operates: through studios, galleries and community settings.

The LGA is a partner in the LUCIA programme and was approached to host my fellowship, reflecting its role as the national voice

of local government and its work supporting sector-led improvement.

The key reason for that is straightforward: academic research produces a lot of good material, but it is often not accessible or useful for councils in practice.

My role is to translate research findings into formats that are usable, to make sure outputs are clear and relevant, and to work with colleagues and teams across the LGA.

The work is aimed to be genuinely useful for practitioners on the ground.

Across the LUCIA programme, there are projects working throughout the UK. They are using methods such as arts-based workshops, participatory theatre, co-created music programmes and visual arts engagement in different communities and public settings.

What links them all together is a focus on participation,

inclusion and building an evidence base around what works in communities.

When we talk about participation, we don't just mean attending an exhibition or taking part in an arts activity.

What we're really interested in is participation through culture: being an integral part of civic life, having a community voice and getting truly involved in local decision-making.

We'll ask questions such as: Who feels able to take part? Who feels represented? Who feels they have a voice? And how can cultural activity in its various guises contribute to tackling all of these questions?

The evidence, after all, indicates that meaningful

cultural participation is associated with improved health and wellbeing, greater social cohesion and increased democratic participation.

Yet I'm keen to stress the 'knottiness' of this work.

The boundaries between cultural institutions and civic life are now becoming increasingly blurred.

Participation is often embedded in organisations but is not always recognised as such.

Cultural activity is not straightforwardly positive: it can bring people together, but it can also unfortunately reinforce differences and surface tensions within communities.

This research seeks to understand these complexities by working with them. ●

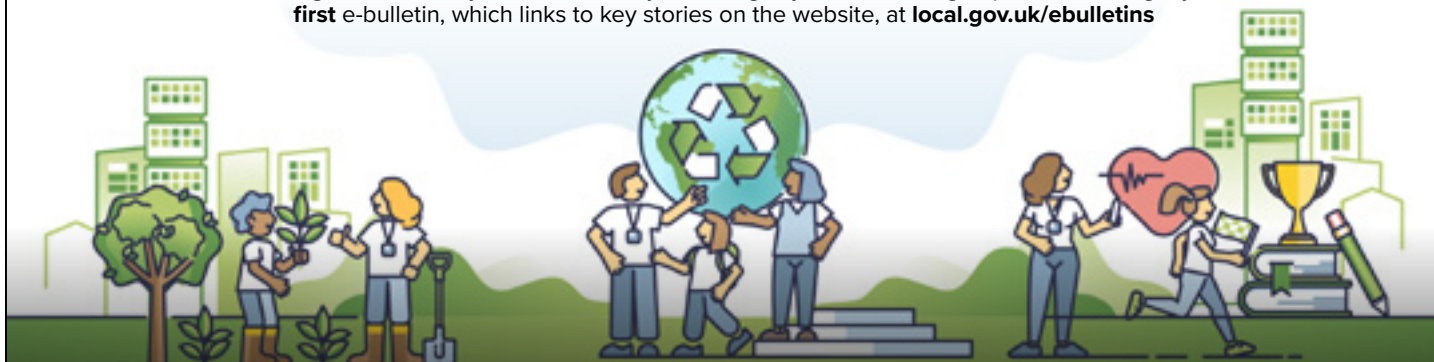


i If you want to know more or would like to participate, please email J.G.Owen@soton.ac.uk. See bit.ly/4ehQ1Ti to find out about all the LUCIA projects

first

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

But did you know that we publish all the stories from the magazine online each month, at 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.

KFC X KFC YOUTH FOUNDATION: CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

KFC is committed to being a Good Neighbour in the heart of the communities where we have restaurants. We support the KFC Youth Foundation which is committed to empowering young people to build brighter futures. Through funding grassroots organisations and delivering innovative programmes, we create safe spaces, provide mentoring, and develop life skills that help young people overcome barriers such as economic disadvantage, care experience, and limited access to education or employment. We also support wider neighbourhood communities by:

- Creating local jobs, each restaurant opening provides on average 32.5 jobs in our local community.
- Running 'Hatch', our dedicated pre-employment training programme for 18-24 year old NEET young people.
- Supporting local economic investment - each restaurant contributes an average of £620,000 to the local economy.
- Tackling litter with our partnership with Keep Britain Tidy.
- Partnering with The Felix Project to distribute our surplus food, providing over 5 million meals so far.

We know that strong communities are built on partnership, and we are always keen to listen, learn, and work closely with local councils to maximise local opportunity. We are supporting the LGA Conference - please reach out to hannah.birt@yum.com if you would like to meet to discuss these initiatives further.





Councillor Anthony Hunt is Leader of the Welsh Local Government Association

Every day, Welsh councils deliver the services that people depend upon.

They educate children, care for vulnerable people, maintain roads, provide homes and support communities through both everyday life and times of crisis.

Across Wales, there is real strength in our local services and the knowledge they have of the communities they support, even as they operate under ever-increasing pressure.

Against this backdrop, it is a tremendous honour to have been appointed as Leader of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).

Having served as a councillor for 14 years and as Leader of Torfaen County Borough Council since 2016, I have seen first-hand the difference local government makes to people's lives.

I have also seen that the very best outcomes are achieved when councils and national governments work together in trusted partnership.

As Wales enters a new political chapter, councils continue to face significant and growing pressures.

Demand for social care is rising, schools are supporting children with increasingly complex needs, and local authorities are being asked to deliver more at a time of sustained financial constraint and rising costs.

These challenges are real, and they require honest recognition. But in responding to them, we also need to be careful about the way we talk about our communities and our public services.

Too often, the narrative can drift towards describing decline, fragility or failure. That does not reflect the full picture in Wales.

Across the country, there are volunteers helping other residents, along with dedicated public servants and councils that continue to innovate, adapt and deliver under pressure.

Local government is not simply managing problems; it is actively



Local leadership for a resilient Wales

shaping solutions every day, supporting families, investing in places and helping communities to thrive.

Councils are responsible for far more than is often recognised, delivering more than 700 different services that underpin everyday life in Wales.

We should not talk our communities down. Instead, we should recognise their strengths, build on what works and focus on how public services can enable further progress and enrich people's lives.

That means a partnership between national and local government that is grounded not only in responding to pressure, but in a shared ambition

to improve outcomes and strengthen confidence in the places people call home.

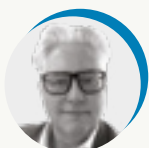
Ultimately, all tiers of government serve the same people and are accountable to the same communities.

I begin this role with optimism. Not because the challenges ahead are small, but because I have seen exactly what local government can truly achieve when we work together.

By strengthening the partnership between local and national government and focusing on the positive change we can make together, we can build stronger, fairer and more resilient communities for generations to come. ●

i Registration has opened for the WLGA's annual conference, 'Local leadership for a resilient Wales: local government in the new Senedd term'. The event takes place from 16-17 September in Swansea. See wlga.wales to find out more and book your place

GROUP LEADERS



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

Reflecting councillor views on social housing

I am looking forward to welcoming 200 Conservative councillors to Bournemouth next week, at the LGA's annual conference (7-9 July).

I'd encourage all Conservative councillors to get involved with the events being held by our group and, if you see me in passing, please do say hello.

The Social Housing Bill completed its committee stage in the House of Lords last month, and the LGA Conservative Group has ensured the views of our councillors are reflected by our shadow Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government frontbench team.

We have emphasised how important it is for housing revenue accounts to retain



100 per cent of right-to-buy receipts, as opposed to national pooling schemes.

We're also in support of Baroness O'Neill of Bexley's amendment to the bill to ensure that those who are not British citizens cannot access social housing.

Arising from feedback given to us by the Conservative Group on Rushmoor Borough Council around 'escheat land' (ownerless land in Crown Estate control) and some of the issues around lack of grounds maintenance on that land, I am pleased to confirm that the Law Commission will soon be starting a consultation on transferring this land to other public bodies,

"It is important for housing revenue accounts to retain 100 per cent of right-to-buy receipts"

and the LGA will provide a response to that. If any groups have evidence they would like including, please pass it on to the LGA Conservative Group Office (lgaconservatives@local.gov.uk).

Other than the brilliant by-election successes for the Conservative local government team last month, there was one more election of consequence, and that was in Makerfield, with the election of Andy Burnham.

Clearly, we know there is a chance Mr Burnham may be Prime Minister by October conference season. The new Government will need to come clean very quickly to the sector on its intentions for local government reorganisation (LGR).

Simply, our councils can't keep throwing public money down the drain preparing for LGR just for another government U-turn!

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



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

Respectful debates

Politicians from all parties recently paid tribute to Jo Cox MP, who was murdered just over 10 years ago in the run-up to the Brexit referendum.

Her tragic death was followed in 2021 by the murder of Sir David Amess MP, and, in my own party, preceded by the killing of Cllr Andrew Pennington and attempted murder of Nigel Jones MP in 2000.

Councillors and MPs continue to face a growing level of abuse and threats

of violence – as do candidates. This has to stop.

Women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, disabled people and LGBTQ+ people are subject to disproportionately high levels of abuse, intimidation and threats.

A survey in 2026 by the Local Government Chronicle reported that 52 per cent of respondents said concern about online abuse affected decisions on whether to stand or re-stand.

Operation Bridger and Operation Ford were set up to deal with violence and threats against, respectively, MPs and parliamentary candidates, and councillors and local candidates. But the effectiveness and responsiveness of police forces to threats and abuse under Operation Ford is highly variable from force to force.

You can see the excellent work the LGA has done with its Debate not Hate

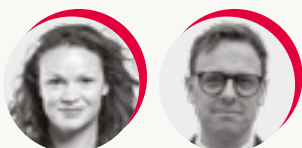
"Abuse, threats and violence have a chilling impact on democracy"

and Civility in Public Life campaign pages. There are plenty of helpful materials there and I urge you to take a look – both are accessible via the main LGA website (local.gov.uk).

However, other agencies also need to step up.

Abuse, threats and violence have a chilling impact on democracy. They stifle debate, discourage involvement in civic life and discourage people – especially those most likely to face abuse – from standing.

Let's keep working together at the LGA on this issue; we will continue to speak out about it and I look forward to supporting work on this going forward.



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

Shaping places in partnership

As we head towards the LGA's annual conference, we have been reflecting on this year's theme: 'From neighbourhoods to nations – building lasting futures locally'.

It captures the vital role councils play in shaping places, supporting residents and building stronger communities.

Residents are already seeing the benefits of a Labour Government working in partnership with councils to deliver for local communities. Labour's ambitious housebuilding programme, backed by planning reform and investment in affordable and social housing, is helping councils tackle the housing crisis, giving more families access to secure, high-quality homes while supporting local growth.

This government is focused on neighbourhood-level regeneration,

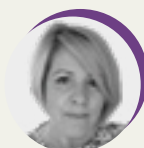
"Additional support for neighbourhood policing is making streets safer"

with investment in infrastructure, town centres and public spaces helping communities thrive.

Funding for roads, transport links and local renewal is creating places where people want to live, work and invest.

Additional support for neighbourhood policing is making streets safer, tackling antisocial behaviour and strengthening community cohesion. And Labour's commitment to skills, apprenticeships and quality jobs is ensuring more people benefit from economic growth and build successful futures closer to home.

Labour recognises that councils and communities are central to delivering lasting change. By working together, we are supporting neighbourhood renewal and delivering improvements residents can see and feel in their daily lives.



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

Looking ahead to the future

You'll be reading this just before or during the LGA's annual conference.

I'm so pleased that Luke Rodgers BEM, of The Care Leaders, invited by the LGA Independent Group, will be speaking at conference to all councillors about his work with local authorities in their role as corporate parents to the children in their care.

His plenary will blend powerful stories with practical frameworks, helping

"Independent councillors will be exploring youth democracy"

councillors and leaders truly understand these young people's lives, and involve them properly in the services built around them.

Independent councillors will also be exploring youth democracy, and how we can enable our young people to be engaged in local government and local politics, navigating the toxic and polarising social media barrage that many experience now.

We'll also be taking some time to discuss the role of Independent and local party councillors, and leadership in an increasingly nationalised and polarised political environment – making sure we promote those councillors' unique contribution to local democracy.

Following our recent elections, I would like to congratulate our newly elected Deputy Leader, Cllr Paul Harvey, and Treasurer, Cllr Marianne Overton MBE. Their appointments come at an important time for the group, and I look forward to working with them as we support you to deliver for your communities and to strengthen the Independent voice within the LGA.



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

From campaigning to governing

This month marks a year since the Reform UK Group was established at the LGA.

Since then, Reform's footprint has grown significantly. We now lead three times as many administrations, giving us a stronger voice and greater responsibility to residents.

Our 2025 administrations have set a strong example, showing that Reform UK councils can govern responsibly, focus on residents' priorities and make tangible improvements.

Our new administrations are engaging with the LGA, drawing on support and getting on with the job. I have no doubt they will build on that record.

The successful campaigns that brought

"Reform UK councils can govern responsibly and make tangible improvements"

Reform UK councillors into office showed that the public wants change, including on difficult issues that others too often avoid.

The task now is to turn that mandate into action, with the same energy, clarity and relentless focus on the change residents trusted us to deliver.

That responsibility comes at a critical time. Local government reorganisation is moving at pace and scale, alongside reforms, financial pressure and rising demand.

Recent disclosures about Devolution Priority Programme decisions raise serious questions about whether government followed its own criteria and official advice.

Across the sector, councils, regulators and partners are raising concerns about timing, evidence, continuity and deliverability.

Through the LGA, and directly with government, we will press for evidence, safeguards and flexibility so reorganisation does not put vulnerable residents at risk. ●

LGR: the choice should be yours



Zöe Franklin MP is the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Local Government

There is so much in local government Liberal Democrats want to see changed.

We need the government to put aside its internal turmoil and support our councils and councillors in getting things done for our communities.

Nowhere is this support

needed more than with local government reorganisation.

Despite numerous assurances from ministers that they are on track for all tranches to be completed by 2028, I am increasingly concerned that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government lacks the capacity and resources needed to deliver this programme effectively – especially if it continues to foist solutions of its own upon authorities that conflict with the local proposals submitted.

The Liberal Democrat approach would have seen the

Government saying to local authorities: 'The choice should be yours. If local authorities want to move to unitary structures, we will support them to do so. If they choose to retain two tiers, that choice should be respected.'

We would also recognise that the people who are best placed to make decisions on new boundaries are local leaders in consultation with their community.

It was great to meet Liberal Democrat council leaders and the LGA Liberal Democrat Group Executive recently.

I look forward to working

with them and, of course, the wider LGA over the coming months to hold the Labour Government to account, and to press for meaningful change.

Bills coming up in Parliament include ones on social housing, the overnight visitor levy, leasehold reform, taxi licensing, highways financing and an education bill.

I will no doubt be hearing from Lib Dem councillor colleagues and the LGA in responding to these – and many other policy areas too!

I look forward to speaking at the LGA's annual conference next week and continuing to work with you to ensure local government is given the voice – and support – it deserves. ●



Emma Willson is Director, Education Value For Money, at the National Audit Office

Better outcomes for children depend not only on national policy, but also on how this is implemented locally.

Government relies on local authorities, alongside schools and others locally, to support hundreds of thousands of children.

Our work at the National Audit Office often comments on the need for strong government and local authority relationships, which are critical to understanding progress, managing costs and securing value for money.

Our latest report, 'Strengthening relations with local delivery bodies in education', uses our insights to give government eight actions to consider to get this right.

These insights also provide

councillors with important considerations around what they should expect and how they can contribute.

The foundation is a whole-system approach with strong collaboration. Central government should set out roles, align responsibilities and provide clear objectives. But local authorities can also shape partnerships through leadership, transparency and constructive challenge.

A core theme is the need for better evidence on costs, outcomes and what works,

to help local and national decision-making.

While the Department for Education (DfE) should not overburden local systems, it needs frontline insight.

Local authorities can strengthen their influence by improving how they evaluate services, understand costs and generate evidence.

Our report, 'Responding to demand for school places', provides a practical take on primary rolls, which have dropped 3 per cent in recent years, with a further 7 per cent

fall projected by 2030, placing pressure on school finances.

We found the DfE could do more to help the system respond. Collaboration remains difficult, and there is no clear framework to help decide when, and how, to act.

Local authorities are key, by strengthening place planning strategies, shared with trusts and neighbouring areas, and improving data and forecasting by building in uncertainty and planning for flexibility.

Strong central-local relationships are fundamental to high-quality children's services and value for money. We help government and local authorities understand what they each need to make these work. ●

Central-local relations in education



See nao.org.uk to find out more about the work of the National Audit Office and to access its reports



**Olivia Field is Chief Executive of
The Jo Cox Foundation**

We marked a deeply significant milestone on 16 June: the 10th anniversary of the tragic murder of Jo Cox MP. Five years later, we lost Sir David Amess MP.

When Jo was taken from us, the collective cry was 'never again'. Yet here we are, in 2026, facing a reality where abuse, intimidation and hostility towards elected officials have not shrunk, but grown.

Abuse of candidates and elected representatives is no longer an anomaly. Tragically, many in local and national government have begun to accept it as an occupational hazard.

But let us be absolutely clear: as normalised as abuse has become, it is entirely unacceptable and it poses a serious threat to our democracy.

The data paints a worrying picture. The LGA's 2025 Debate Not Hate councillor survey revealed that nearly three-quarters of councillors (73 per cent) reported feeling personally at risk while fulfilling their duties.

This issue has been supercharged by a perfect storm of collapsing trust and a rise in misinformation, disinformation and deepfakes driven by artificial intelligence.

At the same time, hostility is becoming generationally normalised. According to the UK Electoral Commission, only 25 per cent of young people aged 18 to 24 view verbally threatening a politician in public as unacceptable.

The consequences for our democracy are devastating: talented people are walking away (56 per cent of councillors surveyed by the LGA in 2025 were not standing again or were unsure about doing so); and the impact is disproportionately felt by women, disabled representatives and people from ethnic minority communities, which ultimately risks reversing decades of progress in local diversity.

But we cannot lose hope. Through the Jo Cox Civility Commission, we have a clear roadmap.

Working alongside local and national



Reclaiming civility in local politics

partners, including the LGA, we have already driven forward vital protections, from dedicated police support for local politicians via Operation Ford to removing security costs from election spending limits and finally ending the requirement for councillors to publish their home addresses.

Crucially, the Representation of the People Bill, currently making its way through Parliament, contains measures for which we have long fought, including tougher sentences for those who harass candidates.

But the job is far from done. To safeguard local democracy, we must focus our collective action across four key areas.

First, we must properly resource Operation Ford across police forces, and ensure local authorities have the funding required for risk planning, wellbeing resources and dedicated security contacts.

Second, we must robustly implement new mandatory political and media literacy in schools, raise awareness of the role of elected representatives

among adults, and encourage elected representatives to actively visit education institutions to humanise their roles and bridge the trust gap.

Third, we must hold tech platforms accountable to a true duty of care and safety-by-design principles, forcing them to prevent abuse at the source.

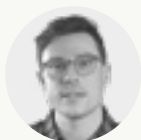
And fourth, political parties and individuals must also model and embed respectful disagreement.

As we mark this poignant anniversary, let us remember Jo Cox's defining words: "We are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us."

Let this be the moment we draw a line in the sand to build a safe, diverse democracy rooted in mutual respect. ●

i Visit jocoxfoundation.org to find out more, including about the recommendations of the Jo Cox Civility Commission. See bit.ly/4uHrfRm for the LGA's 2025 Debate Not Hate councillor survey

Keeping children safe from violence outside the home



Tom Carter Ottens is Head of Change – Children's Services at the Youth Endowment Fund

Children's social care in England is undergoing once-in-a-generation reform.

Councils are preparing for major changes as the Families First Partnership programme and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 come into effect, reshaping how support is provided to children and families.

The ambition is clear: to provide effective help earlier and strengthen the way agencies work together to keep children safe.

For local leaders, this presents both a challenge and an opportunity.

As they plan for change, there's a rare chance to step back, take stock and ask what can be done differently to improve outcomes for children and families.

That could mean freeing up practitioners' time to focus on direct work with children and families, strengthening partnerships or investing in approaches that have been shown to make a difference.

That's why, at the Youth Endowment Fund, we've published new national guidance for children's services' senior leaders and local safeguarding partnerships.

Drawing on the best



available evidence, it sets out seven recommendations to help protect children from becoming involved in violence.

Importantly, the recommendations complement the direction of current reforms in England and offer practical ways to strengthen support for children at a time of significant change.

So, what do our recommendations include?

First, councils should make safeguarding children from extra-familial harm (EFH), including serious violence, a core strategic priority.

Too often, children facing significant harm outside the home are less likely to receive a child protection response than those experiencing

harm within their family. Many receive no further action following assessment, despite facing serious risks.

As local areas implement reform, there's an opportunity to ensure child protection thresholds are applied consistently, regardless of where harm is taking place.

Harm outside the home can often meet statutory child protection thresholds in its own right, and should trigger an appropriate safeguarding response.

We're also calling for one pathway, one plan and one

owner for children affected by EFH. In many areas, responses to harm outside the home have developed alongside statutory safeguarding arrangements rather than within them.

The result can be multiple meetings, assessments and protection plans running in parallel, creating complexity for practitioners and children alike.

Bringing these processes together into a single safeguarding pathway can reduce duplication, make better use of practitioners' time and, most importantly, improve outcomes for children.

We're also calling on councils to strengthen support for children in care, who face a heightened risk of violence, exploitation and involvement in the youth justice system.

Research shows that children in care are significantly more likely than their peers to receive a caution or conviction, making it particularly important that services focus on keeping them safe.

This starts with providing stable, supportive placements, ensuring care plans proactively identify and reduce the risks of extra-familial harm, and developing local protocols that reduce the risk of unnecessary criminalisation.

Taken together, these steps can help councils make the most of this moment of reform, and we hope our guidance provides a clear evidence base to support them. ●

i To read all seven of the Youth Endowment Fund's recommendations and the evidence behind them, download the guidance from tinyurl.com/3m89paaw

Leading with pride



Councillor Christine Whelan (Lib Dem) is Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat and Independent Group at East Cambridgeshire District Council

As we continue to celebrate Pride, I would encourage my fellow LGBTQ+ councillors to attend the LGA's annual LGBTQ+ Focus on Leadership event.

I attended this year's event, where the theme of the weekend was leading with pride – and how that sits alongside your role as a councillor and your identity as a member of the LGBTQ+ community.

For many of us, this is not an abstract question. It goes to the heart of how we show up in public life, how visible we choose or can be, and how our lived experience shapes the way we represent our communities.

The weekend gave participants a valuable opportunity to speak openly about what it is like to be LGBTQ+ in local government, and how that experience intersects with the expectations, pressures and responsibilities of elected office.

These conversations were honest, supportive and, at times, challenging – but always constructive.

Friday evening set the tone, with informal discussions and the chance to reconnect or meet for the first time. Some attendees had been to previous LGBTQ+ weekends, but it was particularly positive to see new councillors joining the group and bringing fresh perspectives and experiences into the conversation.

Saturday was devoted to more structured discussions and learning.

A highlight was a talk from a councillor about the work she is doing nationally and in her own community, demonstrating how visibility, advocacy and practical action can combine to make a real difference.



Participants on the LGA's 2026 LGBTQ+ weekend event

The sessions throughout the day showed just how varied the challenges are in different parts of the country – but also how much we can learn from one another.

Whether people were attending for the first time or returning, everyone seemed to take away something useful, not least the reassurance that many of the issues we face are shared.

On Sunday, the focus shifted to personal skills, with training from an experienced actor on effective speaking, presentation and body language.

This was a reminder that communication is not just about what we say, but how we say it – and that confidence, presence and clarity all matter when we are representing our communities and advocating for change.

One thing that most of us learned from this was the importance of 'less is more'. Long speeches at council meetings lose

audiences and you don't have to repeat what others have said.

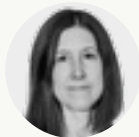
Perhaps the most important lesson from the weekend was that, despite our different political traditions, party politics does not have to be a barrier to working together. The shared commitment to equality and to challenging the suppression of LGBTQ+ rights provided a strong common purpose across the political spectrum.

In a time when those rights can feel increasingly under pressure, that sense of solidarity across parties is not just welcome, it is essential.

The weekend was not only a chance to reflect and learn, but also to return to our councils better equipped, more confident and more connected to a wider network of colleagues who share the challenges and the determination to make local government more inclusive. ●

i The next LGA 'Focus on Leadership' LGBTQ+ weekend event takes place from 13-14 February 2027, in Coventry. To find out more and book your place, please email Grace Collins MBE, Adviser – Leadership, at grace.collins@local.gov.uk

Faster buses, stronger growth



Alison Edwards is Director of Policy and External Relations at the Confederation of Passenger Transport

Buses are Britain's favourite form of public transport, carrying 11 million passengers every day.

Up and down the country, they provide vital connections in local communities. But there's a problem – too often, they're too slow.

The average pace of a bus journey is just 7.1mph in London, and 11.7mph in the rest

of England. For time-pressed commuters, busy families and key workers, that simply isn't good enough.

The Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) has recently published a report showing a mere 10 per cent improvement in journey times would generate 147 million more passenger journeys and deliver a remarkable £5 billion dividend to the national economy.

Faster buses mean shorter and more reliable journeys for passengers, whose time saved on journeys can be used more productively – whether that is working, studying, or spending time and money in town and city centres.

So, how can this be achieved? There are three key levers local authorities can pull.

The first is road space priority. More bus lanes on major roads, and operating around the clock, are the most effective way to take public transport out of congestion.

Second, traffic-light priority enables buses to escape bottlenecks as quickly as possible – and it can be equally effective, and less visible, than bus lanes.

Third is improved coordination of street works, which have contributed to a 13.5 per cent real-terms increase in bus operators' costs per kilometre since 2019.

We know priority schemes

can deliver strong returns. The Eclipse busway in Hampshire, which opened in 2012, recorded a benefit-cost ratio of £6.94 for every £1 spent.

That is a powerful example of how well-designed schemes can be more than transport interventions – they can be an investment in productivity, connectivity and local growth.

The message from CPT's report is clear. Increasing bus speeds is not just about helping buses move more quickly; it is about helping local economies move forward. ●

i See cpt-uk.org to find out more



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Multi-party politics merry-go-round



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

The merry-go-round of multi-party politics continues, with nine of 20 seats exchanging hands in recent local by-elections.

Reform UK gained three seats from the Conservatives, but two others moved in the opposite direction.

The Liberal Democrats and Greens each inflicted defeat on the Conservatives, but the outcomes of those contests point to local rather than national circumstance.

More parties are contesting local elections, but the withdrawal of Independents is also affecting the distribution of electoral support.

In nine cases, an Independent had contested the previous May election but not the by-election, making it difficult to interpret these results.

The Conservatives were favourites to take Fylde's Kirkham ward, having finished the closest party challenger to the three Independents elected in 2023.

A complicating factor this time was the presence of Reform's Joshua Roberts on the ballot, who took the county division

in 2025, but the absence of an Independent worked to the Conservatives' advantage.

Malvern Hills Independents easily won Alfrick, Leigh and Rushwick last time, with two-thirds of the vote, but chose not to contest the vacancy. The Liberal Democrats came bottom then, but won a four-party strong race this time.

Last May, Reform won Essex, adding to its impressive portfolio of county council control. It also gained 13 seats on Rochford Council.

This time, the Conservatives chose Stuart Belton for the Rayleigh West county vacancy and his wife Danielle to contest the district seat. Reform's vote fell by 15 points in both elections.

By contrast, Reform gained Hawcoat and Newbarns from the Conservatives in

Westmorland and Furness, winning almost half the vote from a standing start. Their victory was built on the decline of both the Conservative and Labour vote combined, with the absence of any Independent.

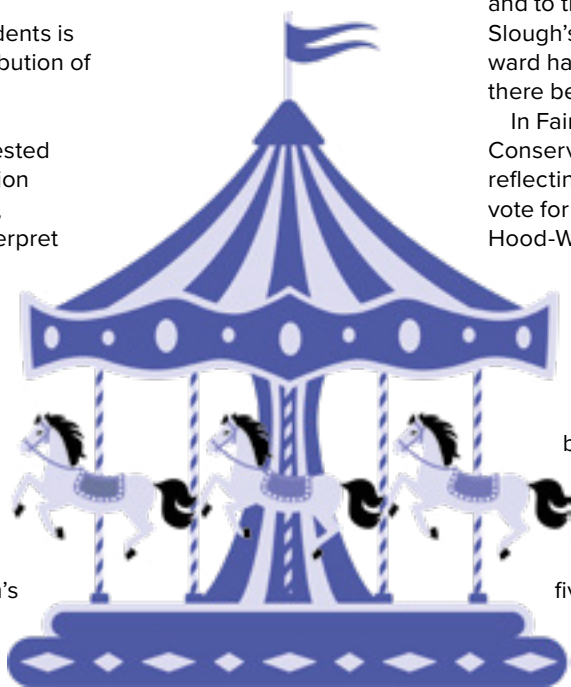
A crop of by-elections in Wales stemmed from councillors resigning after being elected as members of the Senedd. Reform took advantage in Conwy, taking Tudno and Gogarth Mostyn from the Conservatives.

Both wards featured well-supported Independents at the previous election, but none this time. Reform won both seats from a standing start, albeit one with less than a quarter of the votes.

The Conservatives lost seats to the Liberal Democrats in Swansea's Fairwood ward, and to the Greens, who gained Slough's Cippenham Green ward having not contested there before.

In Fairwood, the Conservative vote slumped, reflecting the strong personal vote for former Cllr Paxton Hood-Williams, whose death prompted the vacancy.

In Slough, seven Labour councillors left the party in 2024 over Gaza to sit as Independents, but then joined the Liberal Democrats a year later. In the end, the Greens edged it by five votes over the Conservatives, with Labour in third place. ●



By-election results

Cheshire West and Chester, Christleton and Huntington
CON HELD
2.5% over Green | Turnout 44.6%

Conwy, Gogarth Mostyn
REF GAIN FROM CON
6.1% over Con | Turnout 26.1%

Conwy, Tudno
REF GAIN FROM CON
21.5% over Con | Turnout 23.2%

Dacorum, Apsley and Corner Hall
LIB DEM HELD
8.4% over Ref | Turnout 30.8%

Dorset, Bridport
LIB DEM HELD
20.4% over Ref | Turnout 42.6%

Essex, Rayleigh West
CON GAIN FROM REF
6.1% over Lib Dem | Turnout 31.9%

Fylde, Kirkham
CON GAIN FROM IND
33.3% over Ref | Turnout 34.0%

Lancaster, Castle
GREEN HELD
54.2% over Lab | Turnout 24.8%

Lewisham, Crofton Park
GREEN HELD
0.3% over Lab | Turnout 26.9%

Malvern Hills, Alfrick, Leigh & Rushwick
LIB DEM GAIN FROM IND
3.5% over Con | Turnout 37.8%

New Forest, Bransgore, Burley, Sopley and Ringwood East
CON HELD
15.0% over Green | Turnout 32.2%

Rochford, Sweyne Park & Grange
CON GAIN FROM REF
31.3% over Ref | Turnout 37%

Slough, Cippenham Green
GREEN GAIN FROM CON
0.3% over Con | Turnout 32.1%

Swansea, Fairwood
LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
6.7% over Lab | Turnout 35.9%

Swansea, Morriston
LAB HELD
3.3% over Ref | Turnout 20.8%

Swansea, Mumbles
CON HELD
18.9% over Lab | Turnout 37.2%

Westmorland and Furness, Hawcoat and Newbarns
REF GAIN FROM CON
23.9% over Lab | Turnout 27.2%

Wrexham, Acton and Maesydre
PLAID HELD
4.7% over Ref | Turnout 23.5%

Wrexham, Grosvenor
PLAID HELD
21.5% over Ref | Turnout 24.1%

Wrexham, Queensway
PLAID HELD
3.5% over Ref | Turnout 16.2%

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