

Local elections 2021

30



13 | **Leading on change**
Emergency transport
measures – learning
the lessons

16 | **Digital innovation**
Using technology in
new ways to improve
adult social care

20 | **The Protect Duty**
Improving the
safety and security
of public spaces

24 | **A blue recovery**
Climate crisis: how
wetland creation can
build resilient places

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CONTENTS



Social care

The LGA has called for a '1948 moment' to secure the future of adult social care (p15).

This month's **first** looks at the learning and resources from two very 21st-century programmes using digital technology and innovation to improve the lives of those who depend on adult social care services (p16).

Elsewhere in the magazine, we examine the LGA's response to the Government's latest consultation on planning reforms (p12); the leadership lessons to be learned from the emergency transport measures taken during the pandemic (p13); and a consultation on a new 'Protect Duty' aimed at making public spaces safer (p20).

Our public affairs team reports on the Armed Forces Bill (p9), and Lewisham's Cllr Kevin Bonavia (p21) discusses how the Armed Forces Covenant is being renewed in London.

Climate change dominates this month's comment section, with articles from the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust on a blue recovery (p24); the Forestry Commission on how councils can capture carbon by planting woodlands (p26); and Wealden District Council on taking effective local action (p27).

Good luck to everyone standing for election on 6 May and I hope you enjoy Professors Colin Rallings' and Michael Thrasher's preview of the polls (p30).

Cllr James Jamieson
is LGA Chairman



FEATURES

- 10 Looking ahead**
Restrictions lifting as vaccines take effect
- 11 Forget what you know**
Examining the vaccination rollout
- 12 Building beautiful?**
The case for a locally led planning system
- 13 Leading on change**
Learning the lessons of low-traffic zones
- 15 Social care reform**
'1948 moment' needed to create long-term plan
- 16 Digital innovation**
Support and resources for adult social care
- 20 The Protect Duty**
Improving the safety and security of public spaces



COMMENT

- 21 Covenant renewal**
Support in the capital for armed forces families
- 24 A blue recovery**
Using wetland creation to build resilient places
- 26 Carbon capture**
Planting woodlands to reduce emissions
- 27 Climate emergency**
Taking local action to tackle climate change

REGULARS

- 04 News**
- 09 Parliament** – Armed Forces Bill
- 22 Chairman and group leaders**
- 29 Councillor** – model code of practice
- 30 Elections special** – 6 May preview



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COVID-19 grant scheme extended

A grant scheme that provides support with food and bills for vulnerable households during the pandemic has been extended.

Work and Pensions Secretary Thérèse Coffey MP announced the Covid Winter Grant Scheme would be renamed the Covid Local Support Scheme and extended until 20 June, with a further £40 million allocated.

CLlr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "This further funding

will help councils to continue to provide much-needed support to low income households at risk of poverty and financial hardship as the Government continues its gradual easing of the coronavirus measures.

"Councils will, for example, be able to provide further targeted support to families entitled to free school meals during the May holiday period."

He added: "To ensure that we are able to best address the underlying

drivers of disadvantage and break cycles of poverty in the longer term, the LGA is discussing with government and partners how best to enable councils to provide integrated, preventative support to low-income households."

The grant scheme extension was announced in mid-April, as non-essential retail, outdoor hospitality, hairdressers and personal care services, gyms and indoor leisure facilities, the majority of outdoor attractions, public buildings including libraries and community centres, and self-contained hospitality accommodation and campsites reopened in the latest stage of the roadmap out of covid-related restrictions.

As **first** was going to press, the Government was reviewing social distancing measures, ahead of the next step on the roadmap, which would see indoor hospitality and entertainment – including restaurants, cinemas, theatres and concert halls – reopen from 17 May.

Meanwhile, twice-weekly COVID-19 tests are now available to everyone in England, free of charge.

One in three people with COVID-19 do not have symptoms, and ministers hope regular use of the rapid lateral flow tests will help to identify more of these asymptomatic cases and to keep cases low as the economy reopens.

CLlr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "Rapidly targeting local outbreaks will be crucial in our continuing fight against coronavirus and the expansion of testing to all adults will play a valuable part in this."

New office to tackle health inequalities

A new Office for Health Promotion will lead national efforts to improve and level up the health of the nation by tackling obesity, improving mental health and promoting physical activity, the Government has announced.

Expected to be established by the autumn, the office's lead will report to the Health Secretary and Chief Medical Officer.

A large proportion of people's health outcomes (around 80 per cent) are not related to

the healthcare they receive but to wider preventable risk factors, such as diet, smoking, and exercise.

The Office for Health Promotion will help inform a new cross-government agenda that will look to track these wider determinants of health and implement policies in other departments where appropriate, according to ministers.

It will address and tackle important public health issues,

including obesity and nutrition, mental health across all ages, physical activity, sexual health, alcohol and tobacco, and work with local government as well as the NHS, academia, scientists and others to develop evidence-informed policies.

CLlr Paulette Hamilton, Vice-Chair of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Everyone agrees that prevention is better than cure.

"Any move to help make our residents happier and healthier is encouraging and councils look forward to working with the new Office for Health Promotion.

"All parts of the public health system – including councils'

public health services – have a role to play in promoting healthier choices, preventing sickness and intervening early, to reduce the need for costly hospital treatment and social care."



Care staff 'could be required' to have jab

Staff in care homes for older people in England could be required to have a COVID-10 vaccine under plans being consulted on by the Government.

Older people living in care homes are among the most vulnerable to the virus and experts on the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) advise that 80 per cent of staff and 90 per cent of residents need to be vaccinated to provide a minimum level of protection against coronavirus outbreaks.

Only 53 per cent of older adult homes in England are said to meet this threshold.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock MP said making vaccines a condition of employment is something many care homes have called for, with some providers having already introduced similar policies.

An LGA spokesperson said: "Councils understand the need to protect older residents

of care homes and are working hard to maximise take up of COVID-19 vaccines.

"There will be a range of views on these complex issues and a tricky balance to strike in terms of the rights of individual workers and the rights of residents.

"Consideration will also have to be given to the impact of such a policy on recruitment and retention and the impact that would have on resident care.

"There is also a question about why compulsion should apply in care homes for older adults but not to NHS and care staff working in any other setting.

"We will be talking to our member councils and partners as we consider this issue further."

The consultation (see www.gov.uk/government/consultations) closes on 21 May, with decisions expected this summer.

Vulnerable people 'missed out' on support

Up to 800,000 clinically vulnerable people may have missed out on government support in the early weeks of the coronavirus pandemic, because of a lack of "joined-up systems", according to a cross-party report by MPs.

The Public Accounts Committee said "poor data" meant that it took too long to urgently identify people.

An initial NHS list of 1.3 million people eligible for support became a "postcode lottery" after local GPs and hospital doctors were invited to use their clinical judgement to add or remove people, with resulting increases ranging from between 15 to 352 per cent in different local authority areas and the list growing to 2.2 million people.

A central contact centre set up to trace people who did not respond to an initial

letter advising them to shield was unable to reach 800,000, despite making hundreds of thousands of calls a day.

Meg Hillier MP, Chair of the PAC, said that while the plans were eventually "sensibly" devolved to local authorities, it

raised questions about the balance between central decision-making and local knowledge.

Cllr Paulette Hamilton, Vice-Chair of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Protecting the most vulnerable members of our communities has been councils' number one priority throughout the pandemic.

"This included supporting those who are clinically extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 and needed to be shielded, as well as people outside this group, to access food, tackle loneliness and meet any social care needs."



In brief

Lockdown habits could continue

Working from home, walking and shopping locally are among the lockdown behaviours that look likely to remain popular after pandemic restrictions are lifted, according to a recent survey. The study for BBC News and King's College London, conducted by Ipsos MORI, suggests virus regulations may have a lasting impact after COVID-19, with almost a third of workers saying they anticipate working from home more and doing more of their shopping locally, while a quarter of commuters say they will do less travelling to work than they used to.

'Big ask' of children

The Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, has launched her 'Big Ask' survey, which is seeking to gather the views of children in England on what the Government should prioritise in planning the recovery from the pandemic (see www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/thebigask). Councils and schools are encouraged to promote the survey to students and provide support to complete it. Parents, care leavers and those working with children are also invited to complete the adults' survey to share their views about the future for children and young people today, and what they think is holding young people back. If you have any questions about the survey, please contact big.ask@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Welcome back to high streets

The Government has launched a new £56 million Welcome Back Fund to help support high streets and coastal communities as they reopen after the pandemic. Funding will be distributed to councils to pay for measures such as improving green spaces and providing more outdoor seating areas, markets, and food pop-ups. Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Economy Spokesperson, said: "After a hugely challenging time, local businesses will continue to need support. This new funding will support ongoing council efforts to help local businesses to reopen safely and successfully as restrictions start to ease."

In brief

Brownfield land

The One Public Estate Programme has launched the Brownfield Land Release Fund. This fund comprises up to £75 million of capital grant, available to eligible English councils to support local authority brownfield land release for housing, with £25 million ring-fenced to support self and custom-build delivery. One Public Estate (OPE) partnerships are invited to coordinate applications to the fund from local authorities across their OPE partnership areas. The deadline for applications is 2 June. To find out more about the fund and apply, please visit www.local.gov.uk/onepublicestate

Local elections – political leadership

With local elections taking place on 6 May, the LGA has produced a Change of Political Leadership Hub to provide advice and support to councillors and officers in councils experiencing changes in political leadership. The hub brings together practical tips and guidance, and support networks and case studies from councils that have been through such changes. Areas covered include 'no overall control', where no single party has won a majority of seats, and working with a new leader and/or mayor and/or cabinet. See www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/changes-political-leadership for more information. Councils can contact their LGA principal adviser to discuss any support needs they may have, see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-principal-advisers

Highways funding

The LGA continues to raise concerns with ministers about a £400 million reduction in highways maintenance funding for 2021/22. To help make the case to government to address this shortfall, it would be helpful if more councils could provide evidence on the impact that reductions in their allocations are having – for example, on planned maintenance work, and the local economy. Please contact kamal.panchal@local.gov.uk with any information you can share.

Strong support for remote meetings to continue

More than 80 per cent of councils would be very likely or fairly likely to conduct meetings remotely once the coronavirus emergency is over, if they had the power to do so, according to an LGA survey.

Councils were also keen (79 per cent) to continue with hybrid meetings – where members can choose to attend in person or remotely.

All the responding councils had used current powers to hold virtual meetings during the pandemic.

The results – based on responses from 74 per cent of English councils – were published ahead of legal action to allow councils to continue to hold remote meetings, with judgement awaited as **first** was going to press.

Councils have been able to hold online or 'remote' meetings since the start of the

pandemic – a flexibility which has also helped boost democratic participation, according to the LGA and others.

However, that flexibility ends on 7 May after ministers decided not to extend emergency legislation.

Hertfordshire County Council, Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Services Officers made an application to the courts to declare that councils already have the powers needed to hold online meetings, which was heard on 21 April. The LGA was an 'Interested Party' in the action, along with the National Association of Local Councils.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "The case is clear for the ability for councils to continue to be able to hold meetings flexibly."

● See p23

Councils spearheading climate change effort

Reducing food waste, installing electric vehicle charge points and protecting communities against flooding are among the many ways councils are leading the national response to climate change.

Ahead of last month's Earth Day (22 April), the LGA collated and published new statistics shining a light on councils' work on everything from waste collection and transport, to electric vehicles and parks, highlighting the huge steps being taken to cut carbon emissions and protect the environment.

For example, in 2019/20, councils collected more than 15.5 million tonnes of waste and recycling, reusing or composting – equivalent to almost 1.2 million double decker buses.

Reducing food waste has saved UK citizens more than £1 billion per year compared with 2015, according to a report from charity Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP).

Councils have installed more than 17,000 electric vehicle charging devices across England, and in 2019/20 spent just under £40 million on flood defences.

They are responsible for an estimated 27,000 parks and green spaces, vital areas in our towns and cities that help people revitalise and stay healthy.

Overall, councils spent an average of more

than £125 on environmental services per person in 2019/20.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson, said: "There is still a long way to go in our work to protect our planet, but councils will continue to lead local efforts to become more environmentally conscious."

● See p13, p24-27





Primary school applications fall

Nearly all councils in England have reported a fall in applications for primary school places, according to a survey by the Press Association.

Its survey of 71 councils found that 63 had seen a drop in applications for primary school places while just eight had seen a rise.

London's boroughs had a 7 per cent fall in applications for reception class places in September, while Birmingham had 9 per cent fewer applications compared with 2020. Councils in the south east of England, including Essex, Kent, and Brighton & Hove, reported declines of 2 per cent or more.

Some councils said some of the fall was because parents simply missed the deadline for applications on 15 January, when schools were closed to most pupils and the post-Christmas wave of COVID-19 infections was rising.

The pandemic prevented schools and councils from carrying out traditional marketing, such as open days.

Others said the falling birth rate and migration after Brexit may also be behind the decline. The fall in demand meant less pressure for places in popular schools, with most parts of the country reporting a rise in the proportion of families given places at their first preference.

Baroness Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Choosing the right school for your child is one of the most important things a parent will do and this time of year can be extremely stressful.

"Every child should have a fair chance of getting into their parents' preferred school and councils and schools work extremely hard to try to ensure that as many pupils as possible are allocated their first preference."

Ofsted review into sexual abuse in schools

Ofsted has launched a review into school safeguarding policies to support victims of sexual abuse and the establishment of a dedicated helpline.

The review, which follows the publication of anonymous testimonials of sexual abuse on a website, aims to find out whether schools and colleges have appropriate safeguarding processes in place.

It will also consider whether current guidance is understood by schools, and whether it is sufficient to help them respond effectively to allegations.

Baroness Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Any incidence of sexual harassment or assault is abhorrent.

"No child should fear going to school, and it is right that work is being undertaken immediately to consider how schools are

working to keep children safe, as well as to give children a safe place to receive support and advice.

"Keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility, and local safeguarding partnerships, including councils, health providers and the police, along with schools, will also want to consider local policies and approaches."

She added: "The introduction of compulsory relationships and sex education will be a positive step in ensuring young people understand what healthy relationships look like, and the importance of consent, respect and privacy.

"With pressure on teaching time following repeated lockdowns, it will be important to ensure time is protected for these important lessons."

In brief

EU Settlement Scheme

A report by the Children's Society charity shows that only around 39 per cent of identified EU children who have either been taken into care or are leaving care in the UK have applied to the EU Settlement Scheme, ahead of the deadline on 30 June. Baroness Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said that councils continue to support children who are in or leaving care through the EU Settlement Scheme where appropriate, but that "the impact of the current pandemic on capacity across councils, the legal system, embassies and the organisations providing outreach needs to be considered".

Young, jobless and black

Young black workers have been hit disproportionately hard in the pandemic, with nearly 42 per cent unemployed, which is three times the figure for young white workers, according to analysis of official figures by The Guardian. Prof Yaojun Li, from the University of Manchester, said there is a high risk of "hyper-cyclical unemployment" for young black people, which would cause jobless rates to rise much higher and stay high longer.

Supporting families

The next phase of the Government's flagship programme to support some of the most vulnerable families in society has been launched, with £165 million of funding. Formerly the Troubled Families scheme, the Supporting Families programme will support people to leave abusive relationships, get the right joined-up support for those with mental health issues, and help people find work. Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said the programme "demonstrated the importance of locally led and integrated approaches to prevention and early intervention for families with multiple problems". An additional £7.9 million Local Data Accelerator Fund will help councils improve how they use data to support families.

In brief

Youth custody

The Government has acknowledged a need for the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Education, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (MHCLG) to work collaboratively in respect of children and young people in custody. In its response to the Commons' Justice Committee's recent inquiry into the issue, it said that further strengthening the collaboration between partners and public agencies in the youth justice system was a "major priority". The LGA gave written evidence to the inquiry that highlighted the difficulties facing councils in resettlement planning, with councils often only contacted about young people being released from custody at very short notice.

Royal farewell

Councils flew flags at half-mast and helped their local communities express their sympathies safely following the death of His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and throughout the mourning period leading up to his funeral on 17 April. Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, on behalf of all councils across England and Wales, expressed local government's sincere condolences to the whole Royal Family.

Business rates relief

The Treasury last month announced a further £1.5 billion business rates relief fund for businesses affected by COVID-19 outside the retail, hospitality and leisure sector, which councils will distribute. The Government says it will also legislate against COVID-19-related 'material change of circumstance' appeals from businesses seeking a discount because of the pandemic, and has issued a business rates information letter to this effect. Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, welcomed the funding and said confirmation that this relief will be an alternative to any adjustments to rateable values would provide much-needed certainty to councils. Please let us have any views at lgfinance@local.gov.uk.

Number of homeless households falls

The number of homeless households in England went down 9.2 per cent between October and December last year, compared with the same period in 2019.

Figures published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government show that 62,250 households were initially assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness and owed a statutory homelessness duty.

On 31 December 2020, the number of households in temporary accommodation was up 8 per cent on the previous year to 95,370.

This increase was driven by a 45 per cent increase in single adult households and can be linked to the COVID-19 response measures, such as the 'Everyone In' initiative and the restriction on private rented sector evictions.

The LGA continues to call for a renewed focus on investing in homelessness prevention and restoration of welfare funding to at least £250 million a year.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "Going forward, there remains a need for a renewed focus on investing in homelessness prevention services."



"This should include ensuring councils have the resources to support households at risk of homelessness, including restoration of welfare funding to at least £250 million a year, and a review of the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme."

The figures were released as homeless charity Shelter called on the Prime Minister to honour his pledge to deliver a Renters' Reform Bill, after more than a third of private renters surveyed by YouGov said they had been forced to live in dangerous or unhealthy conditions because they feared eviction if they complained to their landlord.

● The LGA is holding a webinar on 'Leading the homelessness sector: a councillor's guide' on 11 May. See www.local.gov.uk/events for more information and to book a place.

Flexi-apprenticeships and skills announcements

Applications have opened to pilot new Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) in eight local 'trailblazer' areas.

LSIPs were confirmed as a new, business-led approach to prioritising skills provision in local areas in the Skills for Jobs Further Education White Paper, published in January.

Bids must be led by an established employer representative body. While not open to councils, they can play a useful role in forging links between employer and further education providers.

Applications are also live for a Strategic Development Fund, to explore how providers can work together more effectively, alongside employers and other partners, to respond to local skills priorities. This will be piloted in between 12 and 16 areas, which will include the LSIP trailblazer areas. Local authority providers are listed as an eligible provider.

Meanwhile, following an announcement in the Budget in March, the Government has launched a consultation into flexi-job apprenticeships.

This initiative is targeted at employers within certain sectors (including creative industries, digital and construction) to take on apprentices, so they can move more easily from one employer to another.

The consultation seeks views on how flexi-job apprenticeships could work in practice and the future role of apprenticeship training agencies, which continue to be used by councils.

See www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education for more information and to respond to the consultation. Please share your thoughts with the LGA by emailing jamie.saddler@local.gov.uk and jasbir.jhas@local.gov.uk.

PARLIAMENT

A covenant of support

New legislation enshrines the Armed Forces Covenant in law

Every council in Britain has an Armed Forces Covenant setting out how it will support former and serving members of the armed forces and their families locally.

The Armed Forces Bill currently before Parliament would put the Armed Forces Covenant into law, placing a duty on public bodies responsible for the delivery of housing, education and healthcare to have due regard to the covenant's principles.

During its Second Reading, the Bill was broadly welcomed by MPs as an important step forward.

However, some concerns were raised that it does not go far enough to embed the covenant fully into law and that more could be done to ensure enforcement of the proposed duty, in addition to concerns about a lack of funding for councils.

In a briefing to MPs ahead of the Second Reading debate, the LGA set out our full support for the Bill's aim to help ensure the armed forces community are not disadvantaged by their service when accessing public services.

While the LGA is supportive of the legislation, we also raised some specific concerns local government has with clause 8 of the Bill. The clause sets out the proposed statutory duty for all UK public authorities to have due regard to the principles of the covenant, but lacks detail.

This makes it difficult to fully understand the implications for councils across housing, education and healthcare services.

It is important that potential 'new burdens' are fully funded by national government and kept under review so that councils can continue to deliver high-quality services to their armed forces communities. We look forward to seeing guidance that will set out what



is expected of councils in greater detail.

The briefing also flagged the recurring challenge for councils of identifying veterans. More information about the number of veterans in our communities would help councils plan better to make sure we have the right services in place. It is welcome that work is already under way to address this.

We are working with national government to ensure councils are sustainably funded as financial certainty and sustainability will help local government continue to maintain and improve services, including honouring their important local covenant commitments.

The briefing welcomed the Government's commitment to work with local government to develop the statutory guidance that will underpin the legislation.

This should be co-produced with councils so that the new duty builds upon existing partnerships and good practice, allows local flexibility to deliver covenant pledges and supports innovative approaches.

The LGA, alongside representatives from the Welsh LGA and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), gave evidence on the covenant to the Armed Forces Public Bill Committee in March.

During this session, we reiterated our call for 'new burdens' arising from the Bill to be fully funded and kept under review, and the importance of ensuring new guidance is co-produced with local government. We also highlighted the benefits of sector-led improvement work to support the armed forces community.

The Armed Forces Bill is an important step forward and we will continue to work with government, partner organisations and the armed forces community to ensure that its delivery is a success.

The Bill is midway through its committee stage, with MPs undertaking detailed scrutiny and considering amendments. Because of the Queen's Speech on 11 May, the Bill has a carry-over motion, ensuring its progress into the next parliamentary session.

● See p21.



See www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses for the LGA's full briefing on the Armed Forces Bill



Councillor **James Jamieson** is Chairman of the LGA

Looking to the future

The vaccination programme is preventing thousands of deaths, as councils support the safe lifting of pandemic-related restrictions

The progress of the vaccination roll-out continues at pace. As **first** was going to press, almost 11.2 million people in the UK had received both doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, and more than 33.2 million had received their first dose – which is very welcome.

This national success could not have been possible without councils and their teams playing their part, and the news that we are now seeing fewer deaths and hospitalisations is incredibly positive.

The vaccination programme has prevented thousands of deaths and it will continue to protect many, many more as the rollout continues.

Meanwhile, a new Government Antivirals Taskforce has been announced, which will help identify new medicines for the treatment of COVID-19.

The taskforce will be charged with supporting the development of new antiviral treatments through clinical trials to ensure they can be rolled out to patients as early as the autumn.

It is hoped that antivirals could

help to reduce infections and limit the impact of any new variants, and also help to protect people who cannot take vaccines or those who are not fully protected after having the jab.

As we turn our attention to the future, the presence of variants of the virus means that it is likely that the vaccination rollout will be an ongoing process, with boosters required for those who have already been vaccinated.

The Government has already procured enough vaccine doses to begin booster shots later this year and is working with vaccine suppliers to design new vaccines specifically targeted at the variants of concern like the variant first found in South Africa.

Thank you for all the work you have done and continue to do to support the vaccination rollout in your areas, and in particular to encourage residents from all communities to come forward for jabs.

I know that many of you who were busy last month preparing for the reopening of non-essential retail, outdoor hospitality, gyms and indoor leisure facilities will now be working

towards the next milestone in the Government's roadmap to recovery.

From 17 May at the earliest in England, it is hoped that most social contact rules will be lifted outdoors, with people finally able to meet up indoors (six people or two households), eat and drink indoors in restaurants and pubs, and stay overnight in hotels.

These milestones are being achieved in large part because of the efforts of councils to support businesses to reopen safely and smoothly, as local government helps our high streets and city centres bounce back from what has been an enormously challenging time for local firms.

The safe and smooth reopening of our high streets and town centres, and of individual businesses, is a key priority for councils and we have been highlighting to government your work to advise and support local companies to reopen.

This work draws on experience and lessons learned from previous relaxations of pandemic-related restrictions, including the importance of collaborative working across councils, the police, businesses and the public, all of whom have a role to play in ensuring reopening continues safely.



i See www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus for our latest updates, guidance and examples of council good practice in respect of the pandemic



Councillor **Paulette Hamilton** is Vice-Chair of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board



Forget what you think you know... about vaccine rollout

The fight against coronavirus is taking place on a hyperlocal level

Last month, the LGA launched the latest episode in its 'Forget what you think you know' podcast series.

This episode focuses on the COVID-19 vaccination programme and how the fight against coronavirus is taking place on a hyperlocal level.

I had the pleasure of hosting the episode with speakers including Professor Jim McManus, Director of Public Health at Hertfordshire County Council; Dr Julie Yates, Consultant in Public Health – Screening and Immunisation Lead at Public Health England; and Eleanor Kelly, Chief Executive of Southwark Council and national adviser on vaccinations.

During the 45-minute session, we discuss how the vaccine rollout can be maintained at a local level if we are to live with COVID-19 in the future; the lessons learned from other vaccination programmes; the issues and role of councils supporting the NHS in the rollout and uptake of the vaccine among vulnerable and difficult-to-reach residents such as the homeless and rough sleepers; and the use of behavioural change techniques to encourage vaccine uptake.

There is no doubt the vaccination programme has been a tremendous

success. According to Eleanor Kelly, that achievement doesn't belong to the programme – "it belongs to the tens of thousands of frontline NHS and local government staff".

It also belongs to the volunteers, transport and warehouse operatives, delivery drivers and many others who have all played the most amazing part to ensure that the most at-risk groups in particular have now been offered life-saving vaccinations.

Local government has really played a phenomenal role during the pandemic and throughout the vaccine rollout. Councils have had to learn new ways of working, how to work in collaboration with other organisations and change the way they do things.

As Prof McManus says: "Local government has brought a 'team of teams' approach. You've got public health, plus logistics, plus elected member leadership, plus social care plus, plus...I could go on all day."

The podcast also explores some of

the more contentious issues around vaccinations such as vaccine hesitancy and health inequalities, and how councils as local champions can come together to address them.

Dr Yates believes one way to encourage vaccine confidence is to listen to populations and not assume that "one approach will work for everyone".

She says: "I'm different, and we don't all have the same questions, we don't all have the same concerns – but there are many factors that are underpinning my beliefs and my understanding and my confidence in the programme."

We have already witnessed millions of first and second doses of the vaccine administered across the country and, as we begin our transition to a new normal, we have to remain positive and alert.

I know councils will continue to play their part and lead from the front to provide support where needed.

We've got a lot of previous experience and knowledge and understanding from other immunisation programmes, so we need to build on all of this knowledge and experience to make sure that we don't forget what we already know.



You can find the LGA's podcasts on Apple, Spotify and Acast by searching for 'the LGA Podcast'. Alternatively, you can visit our website, www.local.gov.uk/lga-podcast, where all of the episodes are available, along with a transcript of – and images from – our interviews. Keep an ear out for our next episode, which will focus on the role of councils and why it is vital people vote in the local elections on 6 May. See also p22-23 and p30-31 for more elections coverage

Planning the way to recovery



The LGA has responded to a government consultation on planning policy and a new model design code



Councillor **David Renard** is Chairman of the LGA's Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board

House building will play a key part in the country's economic recovery from COVID-19 and it is vital that councils have a strong voice in planning policy behind the bricks and mortar process.

New homes must be delivered through a locally led planning system with public participation at its heart, which gives communities the power to ensure new developments are of a high standard, built in the right places, and include affordable homes.

The LGA has made several recommendations to government in our response to its consultation on the draft revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and draft National Model Design Code (NMDC).

First, the timing and purpose of this consultation is premature as the Government's response to the Planning White Paper consultation will require further consultation on changes to the NPPF, which will also need to align with any new planning legislation.

A timetable is needed as soon as possible to provide certainty about further planning consultations and overall progress on the Planning White Paper.

This will help councils already struggling with the impact of COVID-19 to undertake the transition process with minimal disruption.

Planning departments are already under-resourced and will need more funding to upskill officers and implement these planning reforms.

Between 2010/11 and 2017/18, there was a 37.9 per cent fall in net current expenditure on planning functions and planning departments, according to the National Audit Office.

Planning fees also do not cover the true cost of processing planning

applications, with taxpayer subsidies running at nearly £180 million a year.

Local planning authorities will also need appropriate resources to undertake meaningful community engagement, which is crucial to good planning, and funding for any new burdens created by NPPF revisions and the draft NMDC being taken forward.

While we support an increased focus on design, we don't believe that focusing on 'beautiful' development, which is subjective, or allowing 'beautiful' development to be fast-tracked, will lead to the quality homes and places communities want and need.

We have objected to proposals on permitted development rights (PDR), which erode councils' ability to make locally led planning decisions. PDR also undermines NPPF policies and the aim of the NMDC to create sustainable, well-designed places.

As the Government's own research has shown, PDR can create worse living environments, including overcrowding and lack of access to services and green space, which disproportionately affects black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, low-income households, older people, renters and those with disabilities.

With nearly two-thirds of councils in England aiming to be carbon neutral 20 years before the national target of 2050, we support the proposed addition of a presumption in favour of sustainable development and the critical need for climate change and mitigation.

However, we are still concerned that councils with a local plan that do not have a five-year housing land supply or are unable to meet the national Housing Delivery Test will be subject to the national 'presumption in favour' penalty – despite councils approving nine in 10 planning applications and having more than a million homes allocated in local plans.

Councils need powers to incentivise build-out of homes that have been approved and also to bring forward land that is allocated in local plans. They also need tools that will empower them to create great quality homes and places and stop poor development, rather than supporting those deemed to be 'beautiful'.

i The LGA's full response to the consultation on the NPPF and NMDC and its previous submissions on planning reforms are available at www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses. See www.local.gov.uk/keep-planning-local for the LGA's statement on planning



Dr **Tom Cohen** is Senior Lecturer, Architecture and Cities, at the University of Westminster

Leading on change

What lessons can be learned from the introduction of emergency transport measures during the pandemic?

Last summer, the Government invited councils to implement emergency transport measures under the Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF, later ATF).

In unusual circumstances, councils were asked to act in unusual ways to support social distancing and promote active travel (cycling and walking), by introducing measures such as low-traffic neighbourhoods.

Many of those changes have been welcomed and accepted, while some have been controversial and even reversed.

The process should be seen as a positive experience for councils required to make ongoing disruptive changes to hit important but ambitious carbon net-zero targets to tackle climate change, as well as deliver more sustainable and active travel.

But what lessons does EATF have for local politicians who are keen to ensure these disruptive changes can happen faster, better and more smoothly?

The LGA asked the University of Westminster's Active Travel Academy, supported by Fern Consulting, to compare areas with different EATF scheme experiences. Four linked lessons have emerged so far.

The first is about vision. Where the council's vision had already been broadly accepted by the community, it proved easier to introduce a given scheme without having to re-enter a

debate about the underlying values.

More generally, councils need to be emphatic about their vision and to explain how individual schemes will serve it.

This leads to the theme of narrative. Of the various interventions implemented, low-traffic neighbourhoods were the hardest to justify on grounds of social distancing.

Many authorities therefore struggled to present a compelling, pandemic-based justification for their actions, which were in fact more often motivated more by the climate emergency.

In some locations, the resulting dissonance in public perceptions was sufficient to jeopardise entire programmes.

A third point relates to communication. In large part thanks to the constraints imposed by central government, many authorities were not in a position to provide their communities with advance warning of the changes that were coming.

More (and clearer) notice would have reduced the shock that contributed to negative reactions.

In addition, if the widespread use of trials without extensive advance consultation is here to stay (and there is much to recommend this approach), councils need to convince their communities that schemes will be altered or removed if they are not delivering.

A good way to do this is to publicise the relevant success criteria in advance of implementation.

There is an associated need to be open about the trade-offs inherent in these types of measure: the gains may significantly outweigh the losses but that does not justify treating those losses as negligible.

This leads to the issue of trust. We found that authorities with a history of engaging constructively with their communities tended to fare better when introducing contentious changes at pace than authorities that had less of a track record in community engagement in the past.

Robust 'civic infrastructure' built over time fosters trust, confidence and strong relationships between councils (officers and elected members) and the public. The stronger the civic infrastructure, the less opposition arose, and the better equipped authorities were to respond to that which did.

Last summer, councils found themselves in an extremely challenging situation as the pandemic hit. In such circumstances, excellent work was done, and some mistakes made.

We hope that our emerging lessons will help councils respond to future emergencies but also improve schemes created under the 'business-as-usual' climate emergency response up to 2050.

i The LGA is holding a webinar on 'Stakeholder engagement in an emergency: lessons from low-traffic neighbourhoods' on 19 May. For more information and to book a place, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events

Joining forces for a greener future

Partnering with local authorities to deliver community EV-charging schemes

Central government has set out an ambitious timescale to transition the UK towards greener motoring, including the 2030 deadline which ends the sale of new petrol and diesel cars.

The Government has put in place a series of funding packages to support this transition aimed at consumers – with grants and subsidies for chargers and vehicles – and local authorities.

Yet despite these monetary pledges, many experts are worried the UK's rollout of widespread EV charging infrastructure is not moving fast enough to support the transition to electric vehicles.

The Policy Exchange think tank, for example, published its 'Charging Up' report in February stating that the country will need 400,000 public chargers by 2030, up from the 35,000 now in place.

The report also highlighted the key role public authorities needed to play in areas where commercial charging companies will typically show less interest, such as residential areas.

So what can local authorities do to help accelerate this transition to cleaner motoring,

and what options are available to them to manage the costs involved?

Each local authority area has its own demographic, geographic and funding challenges. However, The Energy Saving Trust produced a white paper in September last year setting out a range of options for authorities around charge point procurement, including the opportunity for collaboration with the private sector.

Another significant area of support comes from the Government's On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme, which has both mandated and provided funding for local authorities to increase the availability of on-street chargepoints in residential streets where off-street parking is not available.

Mer UK is working with several local authorities to help deliver EV charging infrastructure into these underserved areas. For example, we are part of the Scaling On-Street Charging Infrastructure (SOSCI), Innovate UK project in the north of England. The project, which has Durham County Council as a major partner, will install 200 fast 22KW chargers over 18 months, specifically into areas that

commercial companies would typically find less attractive because of lower usage and therefore less profitability.

Mer believes the key to accelerating EV adoption is ensuring people without driveways or garages have access to on-street chargers, providing them with the confidence to be able to charge locally and make the shift to electric viable for them. Our experience – gained in EV world leader Norway – has shown just how vital it is to install charging points into areas like these if the country is to meet its ambitious EV switching targets.

i Visit uk.mer.eco to find out more about how we can help. We can assist in offering part funding for on-street, lamppost and other EV-charging solutions, including Rapid, Ultra Rapid, Fast and overnight chargers.

Mer is part of Statkraft, a Norwegian-owned utility and Europe's largest generator of renewable energy.

We power all our public charge points with 100% renewable energy and offer UK based 24/7 customer support.

Experts are worried the UK's rollout of EV charging infrastructure is not moving fast enough





Councillor **Paulette Hamilton** is Vice-Chair of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board

Social care reform

The pandemic has reinforced the need for a '1948 moment'

In time and above all else, we hope the COVID-19 pandemic will be remembered for revealing our natural instinct to care about each other.

Whether it's been our family, friends or neighbours, what we have wanted for those around us during this time is what we want for ourselves: to live the life we want to lead.

Social care and support has shown itself to be an essential part of how we achieve that.

At the same time, the pandemic has exacerbated a number of funding pressures facing social care that existed long before COVID-19.

The 2020 Spending Review provided some, but not enough, relief, and the recent Budget was notable for its absence of either short- or long-term measures to support social care. So where do we go next?

Underpinning much of the narrative about the future of care and support from across the sector – including people with lived experience – is the idea that lessons need to be learned and applied from the pandemic, so that we do not simply return to the status quo.

To help uncover all the learning, the LGA convened a series of roundtables last summer to discuss the future of social care and how to achieve this.

Our recent report on the roundtables sets out several of the key issues identified, such as the need to start with a vision built around the individual person in their unique entirety, and which offers genuine control, choice and co-production.

In turn, participants were also clear

that trust and respect between all the different people who draw on, work in and interact with care and support matters hugely.

Alongside our roundtable report, we also published a new pamphlet setting out the principles and priorities for reimagining the function, form and funding of social care in light of COVID-19.

In our pamphlet, we stated that action is needed now on social care as part of a new long-term plan, in the

same post-war zeal and spirit of hope that led to the creation of the NHS.

This '1948 moment' should include immediate investment to help meet the continuing costs of COVID-19 on social care, particularly on the care workforce and unpaid carers, as well as investment to tackle the social care funding gap.

It should also help begin the process of moving to a new system of care and support that addresses unmet and under-met need – and improves provision, choice, control and quality – while securing a more sustainable and transparent funding model that pools risk, and protects people from facing catastrophic costs.

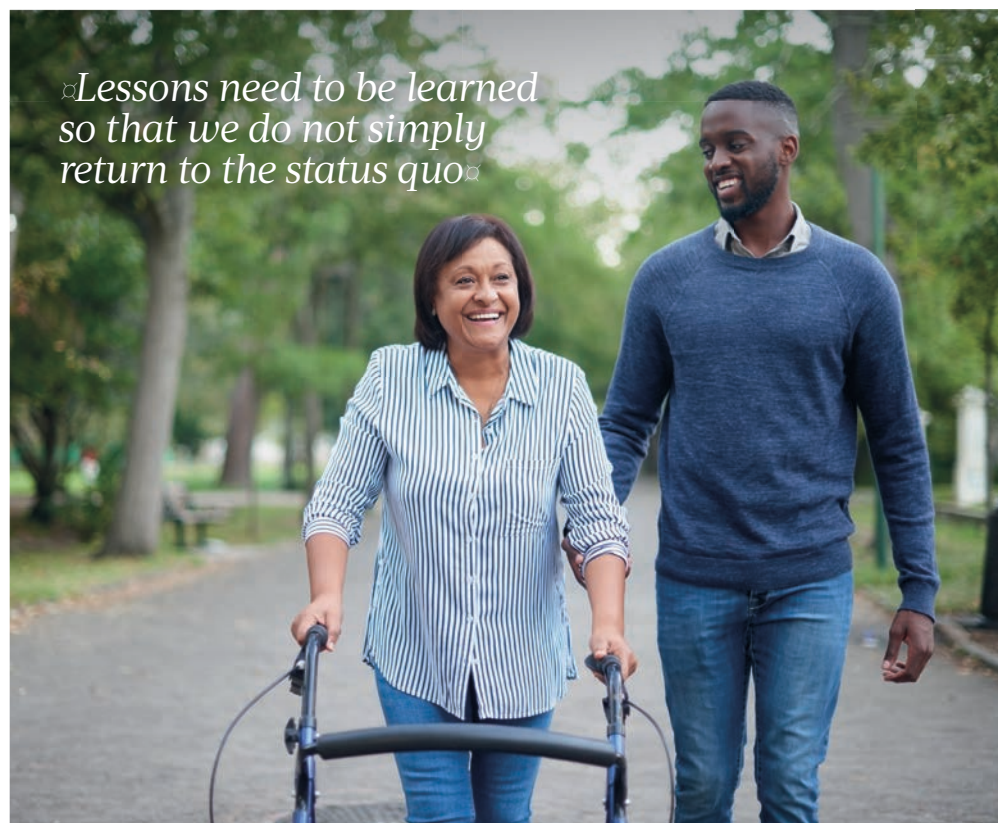
Over the past year, social care has yet again shown its value as an inherently local service, with councils playing a valuable leadership and coordination role in their communities.

Emergency funding to cope with COVID-19 costs to date has been helpful, but we need to move beyond 'more of the same', to a new era of care that puts more trust in people who draw on social care, better supports wellbeing, and enables everyone to live the lives they want to lead.

The Government needs to recognise this in the forthcoming Spending Review and publish its proposals for the future of adult social care as soon as possible, before the summer parliamentary recess.



'The lives we want to lead: where next for the debate about care and support reform?' see www.local.gov.uk/publications





Digital making a difference

Two programmes supporting digital innovation in adult social care have produced a range of resources and tools for councils

C OVID-19 has created the perfect storm: a need for us to be physically distanced and at the same time more socially connected.

It has created an opportunity to innovate and use digital technology in new ways – such as doing important day-to-day activities online like exercise classes or grocery shopping, video calls to stay connected to loved ones and even virtual care delivery.

Councils have been at the forefront of this work. The LGA and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), via the government-funded Care and Health Improvement Programme (CHIP), have provided support through two programmes that ended on 31 March.

Both provide valuable insight into digital technologies and, significantly, the conditions that enable success in adult social care.

The LGA continues to share the learning from these programmes (see opposite and right) to support local and national care and health digital transformation activity.

With strong leadership and by working with partners and people in communities, councils can continue adapting their digital social care offer, to let people live the lives they want to lead in the places they want to be.

Though we're at the end of the formal support offers for 2020/21, it feels like we're only at the start of an exciting journey ahead for the sector.

Social care digital innovation programme and accelerators

We know digital technology can help people live healthy, independent lives and enable health and social care services to be more effective, personalised and efficient.

With collaboration and funding from NHS Digital as part of their five-year social care programme, the LGA delivered funding and support to 49 projects involving 69 council teams across England to develop and share new digital approaches and technologies in adult social care.

The Social Care Digital Innovation Programme (SCDIP) provided more than \$1 million for local authorities to use technology to respond to adult social care challenges in their area.

The Social Care Digital Innovation Accelerator programme (SCDIA) provided over £470,000 for co-funded and collaborative digital projects of common and shared interest.

All projects aimed to meet the needs of people, care providers and professionals while working in partnership with technology suppliers.

Though the COVID-19 pandemic brought many challenges, project teams adapted to the changing circumstances so that digital tools could continue to support people effectively.

For example, local authorities in Essex and Hampshire piloted everyday consumer technologies such as tablets and voice-activated speakers, which now help people stay connected and feel secure in their own homes during lockdown.

Projects in the Isle of Wight and Hampshire also piloted new 'cobots' – computer-controlled robotic devices designed to assist care givers carrying out lifting and handling, which reduces the need for double-handed care and the risk of infection.

Some schemes introduced remote assessments, making the process easier and quicker for users. Derbyshire County Council carried out equipment and care assessments via phone and video, which received very positive feedback from participants.

In Kirklees, people receiving long-term care and their families could access care assessments and book social care appointments online, enabling more personalised and timely services.

Other products involved apps, such as in North Somerset where an app was used to monitor the hydration levels of care home residents, improving personalised care by recording their individual drink preferences.

Virtual support was used by several councils: five co-funded and co-produced virtual content for people with learning disabilities with videos on life and employability skills via an app.

These are just some of the many innovations, and information on the SCDIP and SCDIA products developed is now available online so other councils can access them (see below).

I was at such a loss as to how to move the care technology project forward and I am not any more. I have found the offer from the LGA to be practical, communicated in a clear way and has enabled me to link with colleagues in a way that I have not been able to do on other projects.

Commissioning project manager

Care technology support programme (#lgacaretech)

The use of care technology (telecare, assistive technology, technology-enabled care) in adult social care is increasing, but beyond the traditional button and a box is uncharted territory for many of us.

What technology is best for people and how do we support digital inclusion? How do we resource care technology and evidence value for money? How do we ensure we are on the front foot of preparing for the digital switchover in 2025?

These might be some of the questions you've asked yourself or others in your organisation – they are shared by many of us.

In January 2021, the LGA, consultants Rethink Partners and a cohort of councils came together to tackle some of these questions head on. This led to the creation of a 12-week programme of intensive support that included:

- five practical and themed masterclasses pooling expertise and experience from within and outside of local government
- an individual coaching and development offer and two care technology 'community of practices' to facilitate peer-to-peer learning
- flexible, bespoke support including to assist councils completing the LGA care technology diagnostic and planning tool (see www.local.gov.uk/care-technology-diagnostic-and-planning-resource).

We've uncovered six key lessons.

First, curiosity is key. You don't need to be a technology expert to champion or lead digital change. Be curious, willing to learn and visibly supportive of tech enthusiasts around you.

Second, be more Monet. Keep people at the core of everything you do. Go out to people, families, carers and staff, and understand what is valued and important to them – like 19th century impressionist artist Monet did when he immersed himself in the subject of his paintings.

Third, beware of 'almost digital'.

Changes to many existing care technologies are happening as early as 2023 as we move from analogue to digital connectivity. If you want a flexible and future-proofed local offer with the right data capabilities, you need to think about this now.

A little 'hive mind' thinking is our fourth recommendation. One of our biggest assets in local government is each other. This programme has helped unlock new ideas, skills, relationships and facilitated the honest exchange of knowledge and practice between councils. Be open and pool your learnings (good and bad!) so shared challenges aren't approached in isolation.

Better together is fifth. Invest time in developing strong partnerships and opportunities for collaboration. The benefits are huge and it makes sense for local people – joined-up services that people want, avoidance of expensive duplication of effort and the potential for risk and resource sharing.

Finally, there's no time like the present. Innovation and design (particularly with technology) is not linear and can often be messy. Getting started is hard, but it's ok to embrace the unknowns and get stuck in.

Twelve weeks on and we've delivered 90 hours of practical support to more than 550 colleagues in 89 councils covering every local government region.

More importantly, we are seeing a step change in care technology thinking and delivery that has been enabled by sector-led improvement.

i You can find all the tools and materials from the care technology support programme at <https://bit.ly/3e65p4M>. Councils can join the LGA Care Technology Network on Knowledge Hub (<https://khub.net/>) to connect with peers and access a repository of practical, local resources from care tech strategies to procurement documents. Contact socialcaredigital@local.gov.uk to join

i For more on the SCDIP, see <https://bit.ly/3gfXAvU>. For the SCDIA, see <https://bit.ly/32gCeX8>. NHS Digital's social care programme is at www.digital.nhs.uk/services/social-care-programme

Taking steps to address modern slavery

The unpalatable issue of forced labour – how investment managers are working with the hospitality sector to Find It, Fix It, Prevent It

At the beginning of May, International Workers' Day remembers all those around the world who contribute to the supply chains of our products and services but whose conditions may not be fair and reasonable. According to the International Labour Organization, there are 25 million people – equivalent to the population of Australia – trapped in forced labour.

But modern slavery is not just a problem that occurs abroad. London's Metropolitan Police claim that this practice is growing in the UK – and the challenges in tackling it have recently made headlines, with high-profile cases, such as sweatshops in Leicester, linked to the supply chains of major fashion retailers. When the Hult International Business School anonymously surveyed leading brands in the UK, 77 per cent acknowledged that they thought it likely modern slavery occurred in their supply chains.

Understandably, modern slavery is often thought about in relation to procurement activities – but its prevalence in high street brands means that investing in these companies can inadvertently mean profiting from modern slavery.

How to act?

Many councillors are personally passionate about eradicating modern slavery but because of its hidden nature, it is very challenging to address. Councillor Nesil Caliskan, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, referred to the "heinous crime" that "blights communities up and down the country" and stated that "we have a moral responsibility to ensure that we are taking all the steps we can. The personal initiative and commitment of individual members in driving the agenda can make a huge difference to ensuring that tackling modern slavery is a council priority and I'd encourage all members to review their council's work on this."

*Modern and slavery
... should not exist in
the same sentence*

In addition to the work councils are doing, their investment partners are also taking a stance. In 2019, CCLA, a leading investment manager for local authorities and charities, spearheaded the Find It, Fix It, Prevent It initiative to unite the investment industry

with NGOs and academics to combat modern slavery in supply chains of investee companies.

The coalition – now 56 investors with assets under management and advice of over £7 trillion – has a major focus on corporate engagement with investee companies from the hospitality sector, where investors press companies to search for modern slavery in their supply chains. The initiative also focuses on helping to shape public policy and improving the quality and availability of data available around modern slavery for investor decision-making.

Chris West, Board member for the Local Authorities Mutual Investment Trust (LAMIT) and LAMIT's appointee to the CCLA Board, said: "'Modern' and 'slavery' are simply words and concepts that should not exist in the same sentence. Modern slavery is just totally unacceptable. CCLA shares this fundamental belief with its local authority and charity clients, and is determined to use its influence wherever it can to eliminate this blight on society. Please work with us to help tackle this issue in our communities and around the world through our Find It, Fix It, Prevent It initiative."





Looking ahead

This year, Find It, Fix It, Prevent It will broaden engagement to include the construction and materials sector. According to KnowTheChain, the construction sector is the second-highest risk sector for forced labour and employs around 7 per cent of the global workforce.

Supporters of Find It, Fix It, Prevent It believe there is a moral duty to press companies to do their utmost to ensure their workers, and workers in their supply chains, enjoy fair conditions free from all forms of modern slavery. The investment sector knows that money talks and CCLA and its partners are proud to play a role in amplifying the sector's voice on behalf of those who are all too often silenced.

Disclosure: The views expressed do not constitute financial, investment or professional advice. CCLA Investment Management Limited (registered in England, No. 2183088) and CCLA Fund Managers Limited (registered in England, No. 8735639), whose registered address is: Senator House, 85 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4ET, are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

What can councillors do?

1. Add your council's modern slavery statement to the LGA website

More than 40 per cent of local authorities have already made their modern slavery statements publicly visible. Changing government legislation that will soon require all to openly declare their policies around modern slavery will serve to focus on this issue. The LGA has created a list of modern slavery transparency statements and a hub of resources to support councils; if you have not already, you can add yours by emailing productivity@local.gov.uk.

2. Take a look at your council's own procurement and commissioning arrangements.

Are there safeguards in place that seek to challenge modern slavery? And are similar safeguards in place throughout your supply chain?

3. Refer to the LGA's 'Councillor Guide to Tackling Modern Slavery'

This document can be found on the LGA website.

4. Check to see if the council's investment managers are signed up to Find It, Fix It, Prevent It

Whether it is pension fund money or the Treasury funds, the investment managers who advise councils can be signatories to Find It, Fix It, Prevent It. Check if they are, and if not, ask them to sign up to the initiative.

5. Sign up your local authority and pension fund to Find It, Fix It, Prevent It

As investors, local authorities and their pension funds can also sign up to Find It, Fix It, Prevent It directly. There is no need to be an investor with CCLA. This is a broad initiative bringing together a wide range of stakeholders to address this critical issue.

Protecting public spaces

The Government is consulting on a new duty to protect public venues from terrorist attacks



Councillor **Nesil Caliskan**
is Chair of the LGA's
Safer and Stronger
Communities Board

The past year has seen significant changes to the way we go about our daily lives, with a renewed focus on making places as safe as possible for our communities to visit and work.

But as we start to return to the public buildings, outdoor spaces and leisure venues we have all missed so much over recent months, we are also reminded of the need for continued vigilance and mitigation in response to wider public safety and security concerns.

The Government recently launched a consultation on a new statutory 'Protect Duty', which seeks to improve the safety and security of public venues and spaces – such as government buildings, parks, pubs, schools, universities, hospitals, shopping centres, public squares, music venues and sports stadiums.

Protect is one element of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy. The new proposals are aimed at learning lessons from recent terrorist attacks, and follow discussions with victims' groups such as the Martyn's Law campaign.

The consultation suggests that there is already good work being done by many organisations to help prevent future attacks, but notes there is currently no specific legislative requirement to consider or implement effective security measures by those operating sites and places open to the public.

The consultation seeks views on a number of issues, but the proposed duty will inevitably have a number of implications for local authorities – not least as owners and operators of publicly accessible venues and spaces in their own right.

The first key question is who the proposals should apply to – it will be critical to find an appropriate and proportionate threshold.

The consultation proposes that the duty should apply to venues with a capacity of 100 or more, and organisations employing 250 staff or more operating at publicly accessible locations; and should be used to improve security considerations and outcomes at public spaces – potentially bringing large numbers of venues within scope.

For those affected, the proposals suggest the duty would require risk assessment and mitigation, including using 'reasonably practicable' security

measures, such as training and planning for an attack.

For public spaces, local authorities and partners could be required to: develop local plans to mitigate risks; implement proportionate measures; and work with key partners – for instance, the police – to consider how a security plan would operate in priority local areas.

These issues raise queries about how risk assessments would be undertaken and by whom, how mitigation measures would be funded where deemed necessary, and the difficulties in identifying where responsibility for certain public spaces falls.

Finally, the proposals suggest that an inspection regime is likely to be required to ensure that those covered by a new duty are meeting their requirements. It is likely that this role will be imposed on local authorities, prompting further questions about resourcing and sustainability.

We all want to make our local spaces as safe as we can for our residents and visitors, and it is important that a new duty strikes the right balance between protecting our communities and the risks posed.

The consultation runs until 2 July and we are keen to hear your views. If you would like us to raise issues on your behalf and/or would be interested in participating in a focus group, as a regulator or a duty holder, please contact cohesion@local.gov.uk



See www.gov.uk/government/consultations/protect-duty for the **Protect Duty consultation**, which closes on 2 July



Councillor **Kevin Bonavia** (Lab) is Armed Forces Champion for the London Borough of Lewisham

Renewing the Covenant in the Capital



In the past two years, Lewisham Council has supported Renewing the Covenant in the Capital, a Ministry of Defence project which has helped local authorities across London to audit and improve their service offer to the armed forces community.

Just as importantly, the project has increased a mutual understanding of what a local Armed Forces Covenant means in practice – both for the providers of local services and local residents from the armed forces community.

While we are prepared to place our armed forces in harm's way during conflict, we also rely on them to lead on the reconstruction of devastated communities abroad and in civil emergencies at home, such as the current coronavirus pandemic.

For all this we are thankful, but we owe them more than gratitude.

There has long been an understanding – a covenant – that in return for the special burdens we place on our armed forces, they can expect their government – in all its forms of public service – to ensure proper

support for the armed forces community, including serving personnel, veterans and their dependants.

Local authorities provide many of the essential services that the armed forces community relies on – housing, education and training, and mental health support.

Too often, however, it can be easy to forget the additional challenges of a community whose experiences are often invisible to the rest of us.

Returning personnel may take time to adjust to civilian life even without suffering long-lasting physical or mental injuries in the course of their active service. All of these may well impact on the wellbeing of their families too.

So it is right that local authorities like mine in Lewisham recognise and address these challenges in local Armed Forces Covenants that set out our specific public service commitments for our citizens who are also part of the armed forces community.

In so doing, we are not unfairly giving our armed forces community any special treatment over others. Rather we seek to ensure that no-one is disadvantaged in accessing public services by reason of their own or a family member's service in the armed forces.

Every local covenant will be tailored to local circumstances. In Lewisham, our covenant includes specific guarantees in the allocation of housing and school places, as well as support for mental health and training for employment opportunities.

Our commitment also extends to the council's role as a local employer, with interviews guaranteed for job applications by veterans and their spouses as well as 10 days' additional paid leave for staff who serve as armed forces reservists.

For this we were proud to receive a Gold Award from the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme.

But for a local Armed Forces Covenant to achieve its purpose, it cannot merely exist as a policy document; it must be an ongoing relationship with the armed forces community.

Renewing the Covenant in the Capital as a project has helped local authorities across London to audit and improve their service offer to the armed forces community.

Just as importantly, the project has increased a mutual understanding of what a local Armed Forces Covenant means in practice – both for the providers of local services and local residents from the armed forces community.



See www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/services/london-armed-forces-covenant for more information, or follow on social media @londoncovenant

Time to be judged on our record



Councillor **Ruth Dombey** OBE is Deputy Leader of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group

The local election campaign is well under way – a busy time for us all!

I send a big thank you to those standing down this May. You have made a real difference to thousands of people across the country.

A special thank you in particular to Liberal Democrat councillors for everything you are doing in your communities. The Liberal Democrats and the wider Liberal Democrat local government family salutes you and your hard work.

These elections are unlike any others we have ever fought, coronavirus has seen to that. We are campaigning in challenging times, and I know we are doing it in a safe

way with the help of the LGA's and Electoral Commission's guidance.

One thing we all know is that local government has been at the forefront of the battle. We will be judged on our record of delivering for communities and our record as residents' champions, something I am proud of.

As I write, it's just been confirmed there are many more Liberal Democrat candidates standing now than when these seats were last contested. This is great news and a vote of confidence in the 'Be a Councillor' work that the LGA supports.

Our local elections campaign was launched by Liberal Democrat Leader Ed Davey MP in Watford. It was great to hear him highlighting the hard work and achievements of Liberal Democrat-run councils across the country, from Eastbourne and Lewes to South Lakeland, and Three Rivers to Teignbridge.

We have a fantastic record of delivery. It was also great to see the work of

Liberal Democrat councils and councillors highlighted in our party political broadcast.

We have so much to be proud of, from delivering thousands of new, affordable homes and being at the forefront of the COVID-19 response in our communities to delivering record recycling rates and supporting local businesses at this challenging time.

We look forward to welcoming many more Liberal Democrat councillors to the local government family and wish all those re-standing this May the best of luck.

Remember, it is not over until the polls close at 10pm!

"We are campaigning in challenging times, and I know we are doing it in a safe way"



Councillor **James Jamieson** is Chairman of the LGA

Local views on local elections

In just a few days, everyone in England and Wales will be able to vote in an unprecedented round of local and national elections.

In Wales, councils will be running elections for the Senedd and for police and crime commissioners (PCCs), with 16-year-olds able to vote for the first time.

In England, these will be the most complex set of elections councils have ever run – covering local elections that were deferred from 2020 as well as those scheduled for 2021, plus contests for PCCs and combined authority mayors.

Additionally, they are taking place in the uniquely challenging context of a pandemic.

Too often the debate around local polls frustratingly focuses on what they might mean nationally for political parties.

I was delighted, therefore, to give an interview to the BBC on why these local elections matter for our communities.



It was an important opportunity to reinforce the point that local government is part of the fabric of our country delivering vital services every day.

The things people see daily tend to be the services councils provide – emptying the bins, fixing the roads, planning where new homes are built.

We also take responsibility for some of the most vulnerable in our society, providing care for older people and disabled adults, and acting as corporate parents to some 80,000 looked-after children.

Councillors elected by residents on 6 May will make hugely important

decisions about how to provide these vital local public services, which can sometimes be taken for granted by local communities.

People rely on and trust their local leaders. The LGA's most recent polling shows that 73 per cent of residents trust their local council to make decisions about how services are provided in their local area.

As we look to recover from the devastating social and economic impact of the pandemic, we will continue to highlight that our communities need councils and the local services they provide more than ever before.



Councillor **Teresa O'Neill** OBE is a Conservative LGA Deputy Chairman

Vaccinations: a huge national achievement

Thanks to the Conservative Government's excellent strategic planning, as I write this article, more than 33.2 million first doses and almost 11.2 million second doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered, which means more than half the adult population in the UK has now had at least one jab.

At present, we are one of the world's frontrunners when it comes to the vaccination programme delivery. This is a huge national achievement – a success which would have been difficult to achieve without my party's visionary leadership.

As COVID-19 infection rates decline, we can continue to advance with the roadmap and carefully lift lockdown restrictions. This will certainly help the economy to recover gradually and improve people's health and wellbeing after the tough months we have been through.

"At local and national level, Conservatives have continued to focus on people's priorities"

Without doubt, this pandemic has tested and challenged all of us. Despite that, Conservatives, at local and national level, have continued to focus on people's priorities. Time and again, they have demonstrated that they can be trusted to deliver the best for communities and have done all they could to support people and businesses.

Only the Conservatives can help build back the country better and greener post-covid, therefore, it is important that in forthcoming elections the right candidates are elected who can contribute to achieving these objectives.

With the local elections a week away, I would like to wish those of you who are defending your seats the very best of luck. To those of you who are stepping down as a councillor, a huge thank you for your service to your communities.



Councillor **Nick Forbes** CBE is Leader of the LGA's Labour Group

Seeing sense over online meetings

Among the many coronavirus challenges local government faced in the past year, ensuring that democracy continued to function turned out to be one of the simplest.

Moving council meetings online has worked very well (aside from a few amusing Zoom hiccups) and has arguably made local democracy more accessible than ever before.

"Many councils have seen sharp increases in public participation rates"

Many councils have seen sharp increases in public participation rates over the past year, and a more flexible approach has made life much easier for those councillors, officers, and members of the public who have disabilities, mobility issues, or caring responsibilities.

This makes the Government's refusal to find a few hours of Parliamentary time to extend legislation that allows remote council meetings to continue beyond 6 May so baffling.

Why is it deemed acceptable for MPs to continue to debate and vote remotely, but not councillors?

Just a few weeks ago, the Government found time to change the law so that minister Suella Braverman could take paid maternity leave. But they won't find time to protect thousands of councillors who, for their own safety, may be unable or unwilling to attend meetings in person?

As things stand, councils will have to choose between risking decisions of online meetings being challenged in court on grounds of meetings not being valid, breaking COVID-19 regulations by hosting an indoor gathering of more than 30 people that would still exclude many councillors, or postponing AGMs and other vital meetings.

None of these is an acceptable solution. But will the Government see sense?



Councillor **Mike Haines** is the LGA Independent Group's National Lead Peer

Remote meetings boost democracy

As lockdown rules continue to ease, our councils remain at the forefront of support for residents and businesses.

With many of our areas looking towards further easing in May and increasing tourist numbers, it is imperative that we encourage residents to remain safe, despite the numbers vaccinated.

It is therefore extremely disappointing that the Government, when considering coronavirus legislation, decided not to extend remote meetings for our members.

We hope the legal challenge against this decision, due as **first** was going to press, is successful – as a premature return to in-person meetings would be a disappointing step backwards in terms of local democracy.

"A premature return to in-person meetings would be a disappointing step backwards for local democracy"

The Government has launched a call for evidence as to whether remote meetings should be a thing of the future in England (they are already allowed in Wales), but this is too little, too late, considering we have been making the efficiency, environmental and safety arguments for remote and hybrid meetings for months.

We hope ministers take the opportunity to reverse their current position before 7 May.

While members across the country busily continue to prepare for the elections in May, many took a break from campaigning in a mark of respect for the Duke of Edinburgh.

Councils have been supporting communities to express their condolences following the death of HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, on 9 April. He lived a life of public service and our deepest sympathies are with the Queen and the Royal Family at this time.



In line with rules about no promotion of candidates during the pre-election period, some LGA group articles may not be written by the group leader



Tom Fewins is Head of Policy and Advocacy at the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

A blue recovery

For someone working in conservation, the pandemic – with its close links to the destruction of our natural environment – can prompt despair at the years of ignored warnings.

However, there is also hope. This last year has highlighted quite how much people value their local green spaces – and the blue spaces as well, from the mightiest river to the tiniest rain garden.

Moreover, these extraordinary times also present a precious chance to reset our course, to build back better and to address

properly the climate, nature, and wellbeing crises we were already facing before COVID-19 arrived.

The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) has joined many other organisations in calling for a 'green recovery', and we are calling for a 'blue recovery' too, which makes better use of these blue spaces.

We propose restoring and creating 100,000 hectares of wetlands – blue infrastructure that would help people back onto their feet, renew local communities and strengthen our defences against future challenges.

In a blue recovery, every hectare of new wetland would fulfil many purposes. This could be sequestering and storing carbon, reducing flood risk, improving wellbeing, restoring biodiversity – or a mix of these benefits and more besides.

Wetland creation is exactly the kind of 'nature-based solution' approach – working with natural processes and enhancing nature to address broader societal problems – that sits at the heart of the UK's 25 Year Environment Plan.

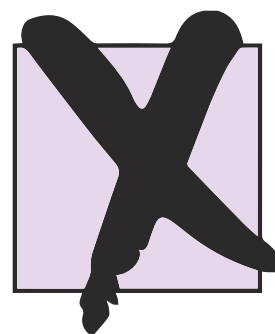
The Government has identified the use of nature-based solutions as one of



the UK's priorities in chairing the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow in November. But when it comes to wetlands, what is in it for local communities?

Across the UK, communities have benefited from wetland restoration and creation. However, our wetlands today comprise only a small fraction of their historic extent (around 90 per cent of our wetlands have been lost).

To unlock their full potential, we need



Notice of Group Elections 2021

Effective from Friday 7 May 2021

The Local Government Association (LGA) Independent Group will hold elections for the posts of Group Leader, Deputy Group Leader, and Group Treasurer between May and July 2021.

Election guidance is available from our website or on request.

Nomination papers are available from Friday 7 May, from our website or on request from the office of the Returning Officer.

Completed nomination forms must be received by the Returning Officer no later than 5.00pm on Thursday 27 May.

Only councillors from councils in membership of the LGA and able to receive support from the Independent Group, at the time of close of nominations, will be eligible to stand for election.

In the event of there being more than one nomination for a position, an electronic ballot will be held. A unique voter link will be issued to members

on Thursday 3 June and the ballot will close at 5.00pm on Thursday 1 July.

Results will be announced at the Group Annual General Meeting on Tuesday 6 July, as part of the LGA Annual Conference.

For further information please contact:
Claire Holloway
Returning Officer

Telephone: 020 7664 3156
Email: claire.holloway@local.gov.uk
www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent



Snape Marshes Nature Reserve, Suffolk



Coastal wetlands, Wales

to move from the current ad hoc approach to a strategic one. This potential is huge, since the contribution wetlands make far outweighs those made by other terrestrial ecosystems.

On the coast, salt marsh creation, such as WWT's reserve on the Steart Peninsula in Somerset, stores more carbon, more quickly than other terrestrial ecosystems.

Inland, natural flood management, which uses wetland features to slow the flow and hold water back – such as WWT's Government-backed pilot project in west Somerset – is a proven, effective and low-cost way to help reduce flood risk.

In urban areas, spending time in blue spaces – such as our project to restore the Salt Hill Stream in Slough – can be even more beneficial for someone's wellbeing than green spaces.

And from cities to countryside, many wetlands we have designed and installed are filtering out a wide range of pollutants and helping to bring life back to rivers and other water bodies.

Local communities rely upon wetlands as critical sources of 'natural capital' – the stocks of natural assets ranging from drinking water to a broad variety of wildlife that underpin our economy and wellbeing.

As a shaper of place, local authorities can use wetland creation to protect and replenish these essential local assets and to build resilient, prosperous communities for the future.

It is also good news for stretched budgets: wetland creation provides an excellent return on investment, with the Natural Capital Committee noting that this can generate returns of up to nine times the costs.

With growing pressure to tackle the climate and nature crises, as well as to face the emerging nationwide wellbeing crisis, how can local authorities incorporate wetland creation into their response?

We need an established process.



Wicken Fen Nature Reserve, Cambridgeshire

Successful wetland creation must combine practical conservation work with capacity building and community engagement. By providing training, advice, and other forms of support, we can help people create wetlands themselves.

And, through consultation and co-design, education and awareness programmes, and volunteering and employment opportunities, we can help the people who live and work near wetlands to value them into the future.

We need partnerships. No single organisation can deliver 100,000 hectares. The UK Government recognises the 25 Year Environment Plan can only be delivered in partnership and across all sectors, including voluntary organisations like ourselves, local government and communities.

We need a supportive policy and funding framework. This means identifying and addressing barriers to a blue recovery, whether this is providing critical information, making better use of existing strategies or developing funding streams. Working together, we can build a world where healthy wetlands thrive and enrich lives.

Local path to net zero

The LGA's work on a 'Local path to net zero' seeks to promote local leadership on climate action and the role of councils as essential partners, in the run-up to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in November.

Focusing on the five campaign areas identified by the UK Government for COP26 – energy transitions, clean transport, nature-based solutions, finance, and adaptation and resilience – we have planned a programme of activity including webinars, think pieces and videos in the months leading up to the conference.

We have invited stakeholders, partners, think-tanks and industry experts to share their perspectives on the importance of local action in tackling climate change.

The first of these contributions is now on our website, and this article from the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (left) is an edited version of one of these. See www.local.gov.uk/net-zero for more.



Visit www.wwt.org.uk to find out more about the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

Planting trees to capture carbon



David West is the Forestry Commissions' Project Lead for Planting on Public Land

Our climate is changing. Across the country, local authorities are grappling with how to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

New woods and forests can play a key role – not only capturing CO₂ but also delivering a multitude of other benefits.

A guide to help all local authorities respond to the climate emergency with new trees and woodland has been produced by the Forestry Commission (see information box, below).

The 10-step plan in the diagram, right, illustrates the journey which an authority needs to follow to end up with carbon savings independently verified by the Woodland Carbon Code, the voluntary standard for UK woodland creation

i 'Responding to the climate emergency with new trees and woodlands: a guide to help local authorities and landowning businesses achieve net zero' is available for free at <https://bit.ly/3e4X15v>. For more about the Woodland Carbon Code, see www.woodlandcarboncode.org.uk

projects where claims are made about the carbon dioxide they sequester.

A small number of authorities have reached step nine – where are you?

If you have embarked on this journey, we can help. The Forestry Commission is working in partnership with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to deliver the Nature for Climate Fund (NCF), providing grants and incentives for woodland creation and peat restoration.

For those considering larger-scale woodland as part of their 10-step plan, the new woodland creation lease scheme funded by the NCF and developed by Forestry England could be the answer.

The Forestry England Woodland Partnership has been launched and Forestry England is now looking for applications from a wide range of landowners – including local authorities – who are able to offer a minimum of 50 hectares for a long-term lease of between 60 and 120 years.

Once a lease partnership and rent payment is agreed, Forestry England will then design, register, plant and manage the site – completing steps six to 10 in the diagram (see right). The local authority just provides the land.

The closing date for 2021 applications is 1 June. For further information on how to apply, please visit forestryengland.uk/woodland-creation

10 steps to carbon savings

1. Declare climate emergency



2. Commit to tree planting



3. Calculate emissions



4. Write abatement, adaptation and mitigation strategies



5. Calculate area of new woodland required



6. Identify available and suitable land



7. Register land with Woodland Carbon Code (WCC)



8. Plant woodland and validate (WCC)



9. Manage and monitor new woodland



10. Verify carbon units through independent checks every 10 years. Manage. Achieve your CO₂ goals

Tackling the climate emergency



Councillor **Ann Newton** (Con) is Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning and Development at Wealden District Council

Much has been written, and declarations made, about the urgent need to tackle climate change. As local councils, we need to take this further by producing and delivering measurable action plans.

Wealden District Council declared a climate emergency in July 2019 and published its first Climate Emergency Plan five months later. However, we can't begin to set ourselves meaningful targets or measure progress until we better understand where we are starting from.

We began by analysing our own greenhouse gas emissions, as well as those of the wider district, and creating baselines for both. We also modelled the potential impact on future emissions of a range of policy and technological developments.

Ultimately, this has enabled us to identify the key intervention measures and steps needed to achieve our decarbonisation target.

It is easiest to start where we have the most control – our own assets, and almost all of our corporate and retirement living buildings are now powered by renewable energy sources.

Our main office building has been completely redeveloped to incorporate passive ventilation, solar shading, solar PV and air source heating, achieving a

Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) rating of 'excellent'.

We are developing carbon-reduction plans for our 3,000 council homes, exploring alternative heating options for our off-gas homes, and hydrogen-ready and hybrid systems for others. We know that there will not be one single solution for gas replacement, so we are investigating a range of alternatives.

We only have a small vehicle fleet, which we have started to replace with electric vehicles, and we are working with our waste contractor on how to decarbonise our waste collection service.

Perhaps the biggest impact that we can have, however, is through our ability to influence and facilitate change locally and nationally.

Emissions across our district have reduced by more than 32 per cent since 2005, but we know this is not enough. Our main challenges are emissions from transport (47 per cent of all emissions), and domestic gas and electricity consumption.

One of our current priorities is to install electric vehicle charge points into our car parks, to increase the availability of public infrastructure and stimulate the switch to electric vehicles.

Through the planning process, we have granted permissions for one wind farm and nine solar farms, and we have recently delivered a solar PV and battery storage group-buying scheme for residents and businesses.

Collectively, we are already producing enough renewable electricity to power around 40 per cent of all our housing.

We are planning the wholesale regeneration of our largest market town, and a whole range of low-carbon and ecological features are being incorporated, including low-carbon building design, the co-location of 'green' technologies, and a district heat network.

We are engaging with our local communities, to share information and exchange ideas, including recently through a virtual climate day for town and parish councils.

Our residents are active and engaged. We have a 51 per cent recycling rate and are committed to increasing this further through campaigns and education. Of the 49 per cent that is not recycled, 48 per cent goes to a local incinerator, feeding energy into the National Grid.

We know we cannot achieve our net-zero ambitions alone; we all need to get involved, and learn from each other and our communities by stimulating a wider exchange of ideas.



LGA 21

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Model councillors

Local government impacts the lives of citizens every day, providing essential services to those it serves. Its decisions directly affect the quality of life of local people.

High standards of conduct in local government are needed to demonstrate that those decisions are taken in the public interest and to maintain public confidence. They are also needed to protect the integrity of decision-making and safeguard local democracy.

As councillors, our role across all tiers of local government is a vital part of our country's system of democracy. It is important that we can be held accountable and all adopt the behaviours and responsibilities associated with the role.

Our conduct as an individual councillor affects the reputation of all councillors. We want the role of councillor to be one to which people aspire.

We also want individuals from a range of backgrounds and circumstances to be putting themselves forward to become councillors.

Councillors represent local residents, work to develop better services and deliver local change. The public has high

expectations of us and entrusts us to represent our local area, taking decisions fairly, openly, and transparently.

We have both an individual and collective responsibility to meet these expectations by maintaining high standards and demonstrating good conduct, and by challenging behaviour which falls below expectations.

Importantly, we should be able to undertake our role as a councillor without being intimidated, abused, bullied, or threatened by anyone, including the general public.

Local authorities are currently required to have in place a code of conduct of their choosing, which outlines the behaviour required of councillors.

There is considerable variation in the length, quality, and clarity of codes of conduct. This creates confusion among members of the public, and among councillors who represent more than one tier of local government.

Many codes of conduct fail to address adequately important areas of behaviour such as social media use and bullying and harassment.

Any standards process needs to have safeguards in place to ensure that decisions are made fairly and impartially, and that councillors are protected against politically motivated, malicious, or

unfounded allegations of misconduct.

Following a recommendation of the Committee on Standards in Public Life published in January 2019, the LGA developed a 'model' code – in association with key partners and after extensive consultation with the sector – as part of its work on supporting all tiers of local government to continue to aspire to high standards of leadership and performance.

The LGA model code, which was published in December 2020, is a template for councils to adopt in whole and/or with local amendments.

The LGA is encouraging all local authorities to adopt the model code to ensure consistency, with appropriate additions to meet local needs.

The code has been designed to protect our democratic role, encourage good conduct, and safeguard the public's trust in local government.

The LGA will undertake an annual review of this code to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose, incorporating advances in technology, social media, and changes in legislation.

Guidance is being prepared to explain the provisions of the code for councillors. The LGA can also offer support, training and mediation to councils and councillors on the application of the code.



ELECTIONS

A game of two halves



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



To borrow a cliché from sports commentary, this year's local elections can be interpreted as a 'game of two halves'.

As we saw last month (**first** 658), those delayed from 2020 because of the pandemic mostly reprise contests previously held in 2016 when Labour and the Conservatives emerged neck-and-neck.

Against that background, Labour Leader Sir Keir Starmer MP has some justification in calling them 'tough' for his party, which is currently some way behind in the polls.

The elections always scheduled for this May come with an entirely different context.

Four years ago, the Conservatives were well ahead of all comers, beating Labour by more than 10 points in our calculation of the national equivalent vote.

And it is no doubt with that in mind that Amanda Milling, Conservative Party Co-Chairman, has engaged in her own expectation management by claiming that her party will be defending 'an incredibly high base'.

In 2017, the Conservatives gained almost 400 seats and took control of an additional nine councils, with both Labour and the Liberal Democrats falling back. Among the 27 English counties, they won more than two-thirds of all the seats and an overall majority in all but three of them.

This year, however, only 21 of those county councils have repeat elections. Dorset and Northamptonshire have been sub-divided into unitary authorities, and Buckinghamshire becomes a whole county unitary.

Three other counties – Cumbria, North Yorkshire, and Somerset – have had their elections delayed, pending local consultation on possible structural change.

In a dozen or so counties, the Conservatives are so far ahead of the main opposition that even modest losses are unlikely to impact on their ability to control the local administration. A handful of counties are more competitive, though.

Derbyshire has a history of swinging dramatically between Labour and the Conservatives. In 2013, Labour gained 20 seats there to win control and then lost almost all of them in 2017 as the Conservatives turned the tables.

Labour's fortunes dipped still further at the 2019 General Election, losing three more of its MPs – including Dennis Skinner in his former Bolsover stronghold – such that it now holds just two of the county's 11 parliamentary constituencies.

A swing of just three percentage points from the Conservatives since 2017 is needed to put Labour back in charge at County Hall. This is Labour's best chance and surely a 'must' if the party is to claim a successful night.

The exchange of seats in Lancashire in 2017 was more modest, but sufficient nonetheless for the Conservatives to dethrone Labour as the largest party and take overall control themselves.

The elections always scheduled for this May come with an entirely different context

Their four-seat cushion is vulnerable to a less than two-point swing to Labour, with three of their most marginal seats to be found in Rossendale – where there is a tightly fought district council election too.

The Conservatives have had a majority in Nottinghamshire only twice since 1974 and fell just short last time. Labour, damaged also by the success of local Independents in 2017, must at least aim to replace them as the party with most councillors.

A five-seat turnover would do the trick, but obvious marginal chances are thin on the ground.

The postponing of elections in Somerset will have disappointed the Liberal Democrats, who won three of the county's four districts in May 2019 and had seen a prospect of making more inroads into Conservative territory.

Their attention may now turn to Cambridgeshire, another county where they have had some district-level success. They polled more votes than the Conservatives in South Cambridgeshire in 2017, won the district council by a country mile in 2018, and at least three divisions (and four seats) there could now fall to them.

Labour did win one of the 'county' unitary councils with elections in 2017 – Durham. But the party's majority has become precarious thanks in part



to defections by sitting councillors.

Having lost three formerly safe parliamentary seats (including Tony Blair's old Sedgefield constituency) at the 2019 General Election, the party cannot afford more reverses.

It is salutary to recall that as recently as 2013, three-quarters of all councillors here were Labour.

Northumberland is a more naturally politically mixed council area, with rural and prosperous suburban parts together with close-knit urban communities in places such as Ashington and Blyth.

The Conservatives fell just short in 2017, aided by a further collapse of the Liberal Democrats who had been

the largest party as recently as 2012.

As in Durham, though, the main focus will be on the nature and extent of any Labour recovery.

Elsewhere, Shropshire and Wiltshire look certain to stay Conservative as probably does the Isle of Wight.

The number of seats in Cornwall has been drastically reduced to 87 from 123, following a boundary review. Only the Liberals Democrats have ever had overall control there, but with the party still in the doldrums and Independents remaining strong, another 'hung' council looks a sure bet.

May 2017 also marked the inaugural elections for six combined authority

or 'metro' mayors. In three cases – the West Midlands, the West of England and Tees Valley – the Conservatives prevailed by a narrow margin that they must now defend.

In the West of England, where turnout in Bristol is likely to be higher than in Bath or South Gloucestershire because of coincident city mayor and council elections, Labour could benefit from the redistribution of Liberal Democrat and Green second-preference votes more decisively than it did last time.

The Conservative mayors in Tees Valley and West Midlands – Ben Houchen and Andy Street – have built relatively strong local name recognition, which will assist them in what has traditionally been Labour territory.

Mayor Houchen will be hoping also to benefit from recent Treasury largesse for the area, which has seen both freeport status and the proposed establishment of a civil service 'economic hub' in Darlington.

But although the Conservatives now hold four of the Tees Valley's seven parliamentary seats, this really should be a Labour 'red wall' heartland. The election also has a curiously old-fashioned flavour, featuring just Conservative and Labour party candidates.

The challenge for analysts is in drawing a balanced conclusion about the parties' performance from such a varying set of elections. The disparity in benchmarks can clearly be seen from a handful of local authorities that had directly comparable local elections in 2016 and 2017.

In Harlow, for example, Labour's share of the vote was 40 per cent at both the 2016 district and 2017 county contests. On the other hand, the Conservative share leapt from 35 per cent to 51 per cent, largely as a result of sweeping up former UKIP support.

In Lincoln and Tamworth, the Labour vote was similarly static, with the Conservatives jumping by more than 10 and eight percentage points, respectively.

The current national opinion poll lead for the Conservatives suggests that Labour could lose seats it won in 2016; conversely, the party must demonstrate progress since 2017, when it posted its worst local electoral performance in opposition since the time of the Falklands war almost 40 years ago.

There is the real possibility that a mixture of gains and losses on both sides could impact on the pattern of council control while appearing to deliver little net change in seats overall. Such an outcome is likely to keep the spin doctors busy as the results of the covid-impacted count trickle out in the days after 6 May.

Elections always scheduled for 2021

1,970 seats in 28 local authorities, including one metropolitan borough (Doncaster), six unitary councils, and 21 county councils.

Councils currently controlled

Con	Lab	Lib Dem	No overall control
22	2	-	4

Seats being defended mainly from 2017*

Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	Ind	Other
1,176	367	259	16	132	20

*accounting for boundary changes but not casual vacancies/defections



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