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A positive image

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Public health

Health Secretary Matt Hancock MP and Chief Medical Officer Professor Chris Whitty were among the speakers at the LGA's annual public health conference last month.

You can read about some of the announcements made (p4, p9), and about our annual public health report and findings on health inequalities (p10-11), in this edition of **first**.

Elsewhere in the magazine, we look at the pressures on councils' compliance and enforcement teams arising from the pandemic (p12) and ministers' plans to transfer governance of local fire and rescue services to police and crime commissioners (p13).

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Devolution has delivered a report calling on the Government to turbo-charge the powers of local areas and move away from the centralised model of governance in the UK (p14).

There is advice for councils on supporting jobs and skills locally (p18), and on how they can help local micro businesses recover from the pandemic (p20).

Meanwhile, tackling climate change requires local action, and ahead of the UK-hosted United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP26) in November, the LGA is gathering together think pieces and case studies as part of a 'Local path to net zero' programme of work (p21).

Cllr James Jamieson
is LGA Chairman

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Editor Karen Thornton
Design & print CPL www.cpl.co.uk
Advertising andy.shields@cpl.co.uk

Write to **first**: Local Government Association
18 Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

Email karen.thornton@local.gov.uk
Tel editorial 07464 652610
Tel advertising 01223 378 005

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Local
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New agency to tackle future pandemic threats

A new UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has been launched to prevent and respond to external threats to the country's health – such as from infectious diseases like COVID-19.

Speaking at the LGA's annual public health conference last month, Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock MP said UKHSA would lead on health security at a local, national and global level.

UKHSA will ensure the nation can respond quickly, and at greater scale, to future threats by bringing together data analytics and genomic surveillance with mass testing and contact-tracing capability, combining key elements of Public Health England with the Joint Biosecurity Centre and NHS Test and Trace, Hancock said.

Previously titled the National Institute for Health Protection, the new body will

be led by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Dr Jenny Harries, and its immediate focus will be the continued fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

An LGA spokesperson said that while UKHSA needs to operate nationally and globally in response to major health threats, this needs to be "aligned with councils' ability to react swiftly on the ground, using their local knowledge, expertise and skills".

He added: "Public health teams in councils have been at the forefront of the tremendous local response to the pandemic.

"We have learnt that responding to, and recovering from, an outbreak of this scale should start at the local level, working closely with national agencies.

"It is vitally important that we clearly define the role and accountability of each, as well as devolve more leadership, control and resources to councils."

The LGA said health protection should also be intrinsically linked to health improvement, if health inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic are to be reduced. More details about the Government's approach to health promotion were expected as **first** was going to press.

Meanwhile, in its annual public health report, the LGA has called for greater frontline funding for local public health teams, to help the country build back fairer from the pandemic and better protect communities from future outbreaks. Funding should match the growth in overall NHS funding, to at least £3.9 billion by 2024/25, it says.

● See p9, p10-11.



Fresh vision for early years

Seamless support and a 'welcoming hub' for families are among new proposals for ensuring babies and young children get the best possible start to life.

The Early Years Healthy Development Review, led by government adviser Andrea Leadsom MP, also says local authorities should be encouraged to publish a clear 'Start for Life' offer for parents in their areas, setting out local services and support.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People

Board, said: "The importance of early intervention and prevention services for children and families cannot be overstated, and this report rightly recognises the crucial support provided by councils.

"It is vital that the next phase of the review builds on the work that councils have already done to bring services for the early years together and make them as accessible as possible.

"Councils know their communities best, and want to strengthen the local initiatives and partnerships that they have

already worked hard to establish in this space, including targeting resources at the most deprived areas, despite limited resources.

"We are keen to work with Andrea Leadsom on the next phase of the review; however, if this vision is to be realised, it will need to be properly resourced.

"The Government needs to invest in early intervention and public health services, to enable councils to work more closely with the NHS, implement best practice and, most importantly, help give children the best start in life."





Right to Buy reforms 'to increase new homes'

The Government has set out a series of reforms to the Right to Buy (RTB) scheme for tenants wishing to buy their council houses, after years of campaigning by the LGA.

The reforms will give councils more freedom on how they spend the money raised from council house sales through RTB, and help them build the homes needed in their communities, according to ministers.

Following a consultation, the Government has said it will extend the time limit on using RTB receipts to build replacement homes, from three to five years.

It is increasing the percentage cost of a new home that councils can fund using receipts, from 30 to 40 per cent, making it easier to build replacement homes.

Councils will also be able to spend RTB receipts on building homes for shared ownership, affordable and social rents, and on First Homes (the Government's scheme

for discounted homes for first-time buyers).

In addition, the Government announced it will be capping the use of RTB receipts for buying existing homes from April 2022, with the aim of increasing new housing supply.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "The LGA has long called for reform of Right to Buy and we are pleased government has engaged with us and acted on councils' concerns.

"Extending the time limit for spending RTB receipts and increasing the proportion of a new home that councils can fund using receipts will boost councils' ability to build desperately needed affordable housing for local communities.

"We now look forward to working with government to implement these reforms, and it is good that it will work through any specific local challenges some councils may face as a result of the acquisitions cap." See **p24**.

Green funding boost for 50,000 households

A £562 million government cash boost for green home improvements will upgrade 50,000 households in social and local authority housing with deep insulation, heat pumps and solar panels.

The Government says this will reduce carbon emissions, help households save up to £450 a year on their energy bills, and support around 8,000 green jobs annually.

The funding will enable more than 200 councils across England and Scotland to fund a nationwide upgrade of the UK's least energy efficient homes.

The schemes include green improvements, such as cavity wall, underfloor and loft insulation, and replacing gas boilers with low-carbon alternatives such as heat pumps, where appropriate. Solar panels will also be installed on many social homes.

The Government says emissions from domestic properties currently account for around 25 per cent of the UK's carbon emissions and that these green home projects will help eliminate more than 70,000 tonnes of carbon annually. This is the equivalent of the total direct and indirect carbon footprint created by around 9,000 UK households.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "It is good the Government is investing in boosting energy efficiency in social and council housing, which will save households money, combat fuel poverty and help reduce carbon emissions.

"Councils are leading the way in tackling climate change and are committed to delivering green improvements, but have faced challenges with the competitive, short-term nature of grant funding, which requires councils to have sufficient staffing and capacity to apply.

"Providing long-term funding would better enable councils to help achieve our national net-zero ambitions, supported by giving councils the flexibility to set energy efficiency standards above the current Building Regulation standards." See **p21**.

Rough sleeping commission launched

A new independent commission chaired by LGA President Lord Bob Kerslake has been launched to examine and learn the lessons from the emergency response to rough sleeping during the pandemic.

The Kerslake Commission on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping aims to help all agencies involved in supporting rough sleepers, and understand what is needed to embed good practice seen during the last year.

LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson, one of the commission's 17 advisory board members, said: "The LGA is proud to represent councils on this important commission.

"Councils are determined to build on the success of the Everyone In initiative, which demonstrated what can be achieved when all parts of the public and voluntary sector work together to get people sleeping rough

off the streets and into safe accommodation.

"It is vital we draw on lessons learned during the pandemic, so we can end rough sleeping and make sure no-one suffers the tragedy of becoming homeless."

Meanwhile, a report by the Public Accounts Committee has recognised the "considerable achievement" of councils, the voluntary sector and government in housing people sleeping rough in the first wave of the pandemic.

However, it said the response exposed gaps in the Government's approach to tackling rough sleeping.

The report found the 37,430 people who had been supported into accommodation by January 2021 was nearly nine times the last official estimate of people sleeping rough in England (4,266) made before the pandemic.



In brief

Maternal mental health challenges

The pandemic has posed mental health challenges for women during pregnancy and early motherhood, with informal support detrimentally affected, according to research by the Maternal Mental Health Alliance and Centre for Mental Health. The LGA said: "This report shines an important light on how the coronavirus pandemic has worsened existing health inequalities, particularly for women's mental health during and after pregnancy. Councils have adapted services to support new mothers and babies during the pandemic, offering virtual contacts and high priority visits wherever possible, despite workforce pressures. Rising demand means it is essential that councils have what they need to support new and expecting mothers."

Social care in a pandemic

A survey by the Care & Support Alliance has found that more than a quarter of people with social care needs felt their health had deteriorated during the pandemic, and one in seven said they had needed hospital treatment because of a lack of care. A third of people had felt lonely, more than one in 10 had been unable to get food or shopping or to work. The LGA said social care has been on the frontline throughout the pandemic, with every part of the care and support system experiencing intense pressure over the past year: "We need a long-term, sustainable funding solution for adult social care, to let people live the lives they want to lead."

Welfare funding

Ministers have announced a £59.1 million boost to the Covid Winter Grant Scheme fund and have extended it until 16 April. It means parents can apply for extra money to help them cover the costs of children being at home over the Easter holidays. Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said while the funding boost is good, councils should be given the resource to tackle the underlying issues of poverty in their local areas. The LGA is discussing with government and partners the potential benefits of providing sustainable local welfare funding of at least £250 million per year. See p26.

Short-termism 'hampering' adult social care

Short-term funding and the lack of a long-term vision for adult social care have hampered local authorities' ability to innovate and plan for the future, according to a report by the National Audit Office.

Current accountability and oversight arrangements are also ineffective for overseeing the care market.

The report highlights that the Department of Health and Social Care has not met previous commitments to tackle recruitment and retention challenges for the 1.5 million people who work in care, and has not produced a workforce strategy since 2009 – despite committing to do so in 2018.

An LGA spokesperson said continuing uncertainty has made it difficult for councils, which are already facing significant financial pressures, to plan for care and support services in the long term. He called for extra funding to tackle the gap between what providers say is the cost of care and what councils pay.

On oversight of councils' social care responsibilities, he added: "It is important that we build on existing sector-led improvement work, recognise the role of local democratic accountability, and give a meaningful voice to

people who draw on, and work in, social care."

While the LGA continues to call for a long-term financial settlement for social care, the Government has announced additional emergency funding – including £594 million for hospital discharges, and an extra £341 million for infection control and testing in social care settings.

The LGA said it was good that this essential funding has been extended, as it provides much-needed certainty for health and care services working to support people out of hospital, and enables people to continue to safely visit their friends and relatives in care settings.



Sleep-in shifts court ruling

The Supreme Court has ruled that the national minimum wage does not apply to hours when workers are expected to sleep, including time when care workers are paid to sleep overnight in someone's home on a precautionary basis.

The LGA intervened in the case brought by Clare Tomlinson-Blake against the learning disability charity Mencap, which sought to overturn a 2018 Court of Appeal ruling.

Had the appeal been upheld, care providers and councils providing social care would have faced massive bills for back pay, increasing the huge financial pressures they already face. The Supreme Court concluded there was an exemption in national minimum wage legislation that applied to sleep-ins. In the court's written ruling, Lady Arden said that "sleep-in workers... are not

doing time work for the purposes of the national minimum wage if they are not awake".

An LGA spokesperson said: "This significant ruling is in line with councils' and social care providers' understanding of the law. As we said in our submission to the Court, the LGA strongly supports care workers being paid a fair wage for their valued work."

"Of course, this decision does not remove the need for a sustainable funding settlement for adult and children's social care, which includes important decisions on the workforce such as pay, recruitment and career development."

"The Government should bring forward its proposals on adult social care funding as soon as possible."

'Catch-up' education programme needs rethink

Education inequalities and learning gaps have been exacerbated by the pandemic to such an extent that they are unlikely to be solved by a quick "catch-up" initiative, the LGA has warned.

A new report, commissioned by the LGA, shows that potential gaps in learning have mushroomed during COVID-19 lockdowns, and are greater for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and other vulnerabilities.

The report says schools and councils have seen increasing levels of financial hardship and poverty in families through increased eligibility for free school meals, and higher levels of demand for support from early help services.

Other issues highlighted include a backlog of demand for statutory children's social care, with some councils reporting a fourfold increase in families requiring support; children entering the care system with more complex needs, often related to county lines drug

trafficking, substance abuse and increased mental health needs; extreme fatigue and risk of burnout among local leaders; and significant budget pressures, with some schools having to set deficit budgets.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "A quick 'catch-up' initiative does not do justice to what is needed to ensure the best outcomes for all children and young people.

"Instead, we need to tackle head-on the inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic.

"This requires a long-term strategy and funding to target the most vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils;

adopting more holistic working practices that have flourished during the pandemic; and realigning communications between central and local government to help develop and establish better education and support policies that put children at the centre of our recovery."



In brief SEND support

Support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is largely determined by the school they attend, rather than their individual circumstances, according to a report by the Education Policy Institute. Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said councils are struggling to meet increasing demand for SEND support and that reforms in the Children and Families Act – which extended eligibility – remain underfunded. The Government needs to urgently complete its "positive" ongoing review of SEND, and set out reforms that increase mainstream inclusion and provide councils with long-term funding certainty, she added.

Care competition investigation

A study of children's social care across Britain has been launched by the Competition and Markets Authority to consider low availability and increasing costs in children's homes and fostering, as well as concerns over private providers. A recent report for the LGA showed that the six largest providers of placements for children last year made £219 million in profit. Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said the review should also look at the "considerable debt levels" recorded by some independent providers.

Legal challenge on virtual council meetings

The LGA is supporting a legal challenge to a decision not to extend emergency legislation on virtual council meetings, calling it "extremely disappointing".

Councils have been able to hold 'remote' meetings since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic – a flexibility that has led to an increase in public participation, and that has kept people safe.

However, from 7 May, that flexibility ends – even though the Government's own roadmap out of lockdown states that indoor gatherings organised by businesses, charities, public bodies and similar organisations cannot take place until 17 May at the earliest.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "We urge the Government to reverse this decision and not force councils to have to

hold COVID-19-secure face-to-face council meetings until all restrictions are lifted.

"With supporting staff, these could easily involve up to 200 people in one room, even before adding in members of the public and reporters.

"This is likely to be a significant challenge, with councils, for example, having to source larger venues to host meetings with social-distancing measures in place – such as full council meetings, which will need to be held following the May local elections."

The LGA is supporting Lawyers in Local Government, the Association of Democratic Services Officers, and Hertfordshire County Council in an application to the courts to declare that councils already have the powers needed to hold online meetings.

Transforming children's lives

Dame Rachel de Souza, the new Children's Commissioner for England, has launched a Beveridge-style review aimed at improving all aspects of children's lives, from mental health to schooling, poverty and career prospects. Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said the review, which puts children's voices at its heart, will be a "valuable way of helping to deliver places and policies that really work for children". She added: "To better support children, we need funding to reinvest in vital universal and early help services, including mental health and wellbeing services for children and young people."

In brief

Leisure centres

An extra £100 million has been set aside by the Government to help leisure centres recover from the impact of COVID-19. Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "Councils play a critical role in delivering sport and fitness activities and maintaining the UK's leisure infrastructure. For those leisure centres that can reopen, we estimate that it will take at least 18 months before membership levels return to 80 per cent of pre-COVID levels. This means they will need additional long-term funding to see them through this challenging time and ensure that they can survive so people can continue to use them to keep fit and stay active."

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. The fund, which will be distributed by councils, will enable them to make safety adaptations to their high streets as well as facilitate more outdoor hospitality. 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 prepare to reopen safely and successfully when restrictions start to ease."

Culture recovery

Funding to support arts, heritage and cultural organisations through the coronavirus crisis must be distributed widely so communities across all parts of the country can benefit, the LGA has said. Responding to a National Audit Office report on the Government's £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund, Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "The Culture Recovery Fund is providing a much-needed lifeline for arts, heritage and cultural organisations in a time of crisis. Government should work with local councils to identify key organisations within their communities that still need support to survive."



Tonnes of recycling 'rejected at sorting point'

More than half a million tonnes of household recycling was rejected at the point of sorting in 2019/20 because of non-recyclable materials being placed in household bins, the LGA has reported.

Councils and households working together have made a real shift over the past decade to ensure they are recycling as much as possible, and councils work hard to share information on what can and can't be recycled. Subsequently, the amount of plastic packaging collected by councils has doubled over the past 10 years. But manufacturers are still producing and distributing plastic packaging that cannot be recycled and failing to contribute to the cost of disposal, according to the LGA.

Each tonne of waste collected from a household recycling bin that can't be recycled costs around £93 to dispose of

through an 'energy from waste' facility – equating to more £48 million a year in avoidable costs.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson, said: "At a time when councils are working towards achieving net zero, they are doing so with one hand tied behind their back courtesy of manufacturers who are littering our communities with plastic they know cannot be disposed of sustainably."

"We will be working with government and the waste industry as part of the Environment Bill to ensure this issue is addressed, and to understand the impact of the ban on exports of plastic waste to non-OECD countries."

"While exporting our waste was never a suitable solution, the sudden additional responsibility and cost for councils is clearly a concern." See p21.

Government launches new bus strategy

The Prime Minister has launched a new £3 billion Bus Strategy aimed at tackling the fragmented bus service market and reforming the fare system.

He said he wanted buses to "become the transport of choice" after the pandemic.

The strategy includes a new fare system with a daily price cap, all buses to accept contactless payments, as well as a new fleet of 4,000 electric or hydrogen-fuelled buses.

It also contains additional funding for councils to help support bus services in their communities.

Cllr Darren Rodwell, the LGA's Transport Spokesperson, said: "We are pleased the Government is investing in improving local bus services, and it is good this strategy

recognises the important role of councils.

"The coronavirus pandemic has shown how well councils and bus operators can work together to provide local bus services, which have been vital in ensuring essential workers can travel, and that places can continue to function."

He added: "Councils want to work with government to make sure every community is able to access a local bus service."

"We would urge ministers to also plug the £700 million annual funding gap councils faced before the pandemic in providing the concessionary fares scheme, which would help to protect local routes and reverse the decline in bus services."



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

Public health reforms



A better future for public health is possible, with local government at its heart

Last month, the nation observed a minute's silence to mark the anniversary of the UK's first COVID-19 lockdown.

This past year has seen so much heartbreak, loss and sacrifice among our families, friends, neighbours and communities. It is right that we reflect upon the terrible impact of the pandemic and the many lives taken from us too soon.

We were therefore pleased to lend support, on behalf of councils, to a cross-party campaign for an annual 'COVID Memorial Day' on 23 March, to officially commemorate the lives lost and changed, and to recognise the efforts of frontline and key workers.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's warning that a third wave of the pandemic, currently affecting many countries in Europe, could eventually affect the UK was clearly concerning.

I know that your teams will be working hard as we continue to deal with the reality that managing COVID-19 is going to be an ongoing feature of our work.

The LGA's recent public health conference was a timely opportunity to share insights and knowledge from the past year, and to look to the challenges ahead.

Opening the conference, Professor Chris Whitty, the Chief Medical Officer,

highlighted how impressively directors of public health, and the broader local government public health teams, have responded to the pandemic, with the response demonstrating strongly why public health is central to the long-term health of the population.

Professor Whitty highlighted that ill health follows deprivation, and those who have been worst affected by the pandemic are also those who are most sceptical of vaccines. He expressed concern that the effects of lockdown will push more people into deprivation, and responding to this is likely to fall within the remit of councils.

One of his key asks of local government colleagues is that we consider how we can collaborate more with academics to embed research on ill health into our work.

Also at our conference, Health and Care Secretary Matt Hancock MP announced the new UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), previously titled the National Institute for Health Protection (see p4).

Mr Hancock identified two functions of our public health system: health security and health promotion. The UKHSA will focus on the former by leading the UK's global contribution to health security research, protecting the country from external threats to health such as COVID-19, and responding to

threats "with speed and scale". More details about the Government's approach to health promotion were expected as **first** was going to press.

But Mr Hancock told conference he was "in awe" of the way local government has protected and supported residents during the pandemic, by breaking down barriers and coordinating responses to local outbreaks,

He said the Government's public health reforms – and wider health and care reforms – are about ensuring decisions are taken as close as possible to the people they affect, and that collaborative engagement with local government "is absolutely critical".

During the conference, we published our new report, 'Rising to the public health challenge of COVID-19' (see p10). It says that while the success of the vaccine rollout means the risk posed by COVID-19 should gradually reduce, the virus will be with us in some form for years to come.

It will be vital that the Government provides greater frontline funding for local public health teams, whose work will be essential if we are to build back successfully and better protect ourselves from future outbreaks.

i See www.local.gov.uk/rising-public-health-challenge-covid-19 for the LGA's and ADPH's annual public health report. See www.local.gov.uk/events for presentations from the LGA's annual public health conference, and for details of a webinar on 'COVID-19 communications: surge testing and local outbreaks' taking place on 28 April

Rising to the challenges of COVID-19

The LGA and ADPH have published their annual report on public health



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

The past year has been like no other. The COVID-19 virus has taken a huge toll on our communities, with each death a terrible loss.

In the longer term, the experience of the coronavirus pandemic and its impact, particularly on the most vulnerable in society, will long be with us.

Local councils have been at the centre of measures to tackle the spread and impact of COVID-19.

Directors of public health and their teams have worked with partners across local government, the NHS, the voluntary and community sectors, and beyond, to co-produce a magnificent team response.

They have worked quickly, efficiently, and creatively. At times of crisis, people rise to the challenge, and nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the local response to COVID-19.

Public health in local authorities has a central role in tackling the virus in local places.

It provides the leadership, expertise, partnership working, and access to local resources that are fundamental to effective place-based coordination of health protection interventions.

It also helps local areas to understand and address the economic, social and psychological impacts of the pandemic, and the serious health inequalities that have been highlighted and deepened.

Partners from other organisations who have worked with public health on COVID-19 now have a much clearer understanding and appreciation of their pivotal role, as does wider society.

Awareness and understanding of public health among the public and organisational partners and colleagues increased markedly throughout the pandemic.

Local government leaders report that their role has been an irreversible game-changer for how directors of public health and their teams are viewed in local authorities and across wider partnerships, and their influence will continue into the future.

But for the public, just as social care became equated with care homes, public health is associated with tackling disease.

This raised profile is very positive and should be built on going forward, but it will be important to emphasise that public health is a multifaceted discipline with a large range of functions.

Its basis is in scientific understanding, and its methods include epidemiology and understanding the social determinants of health, but it also involves skills such as working at the frontline with individuals and communities.

This span of functions gives public health its huge potential to make a real difference to people's lives.

Tackling a pandemic is a rapidly evolving situation, in which everyone involved has had to learn, adapt, persist, take risks, and innovate, while operating under huge challenges and pressures.

Everyone is focused on the

same goal, and there are some clear imperatives, but there are also areas about which there are different views on the best way forward, so judgements have had to be made.

Sometimes, this involves balancing needs and risks to find the least-worst outcome. Throughout the pandemic, there have been tensions between the benefits of keeping people virus-free and the negative impacts on individuals and the economy – between individual freedoms, prosperity, and collective safety.

This year's public health annual report is an important document. It looks back through the events of the past year and focuses on what public health has helped achieve. It also looks at what could have been done better.

COVID-19 was an unprecedented challenge for all organisations – national, regional and local – and, often, there were dilemmas about the best path to take.

Although the rollout of vaccines means that risks posed by COVID-19 will gradually reduce, the virus, in different forms, will be with us for years to come.

Continuing to tackle this, and reduce its impact on people facing health inequalities, will be a key task for public health long into the future.



Nor will this be the last major infectious outbreak we face, although we sincerely hope it will be the last global pandemic for many years.

We need to understand the lessons from this pandemic and apply them, so we can achieve a seamless response to future challenges.

The end of Public Health England, the new UK Health Security Agency, and the Health and Care White Paper mean we are, yet again, facing significant organisational change. The long-standing problems of health inequalities and regional inequality have become ever clearer during 2020, and the pandemic's repercussions will exacerbate these at a time when resources are limited and unclear.

At this crucial time, we must not misstep. We must come together and work at scale wherever this is most effective, but always keep the focus on local places – where people feel a sense of belonging and community, and where the direct work of health improvement and health protection take place.



See www.local.gov.uk/rising-public-health-challenge-covid-19 for the LGA's and Association of Directors of Public Health's annual report

✧The virus, in different forms, will be with us for years to come✧



Local approaches to **health inequalities**

The pandemic has exposed and deepened health inequalities in our communities

Health inequalities, such as deprivation, low income and poor housing, have always meant poorer health, reduced quality of life and early death for many people.

The pandemic has starkly exposed how these existing inequalities – and the interconnections between them, such as race, gender or geography – are associated with an increased risk of becoming ill with a disease such as COVID-19.

Importantly, because of the current crisis, we are all more aware of what is meant by health inequalities, and the ways in which they impact on people's lives. Therefore, it is vital to act now, and drive forward work programmes that reduce inequalities, prevent poor health, and improve people's opportunities for better health.

It is vital, too, that the structural inequalities in our society – for example, unemployment, overcrowded housing, and a lack of green space – are tackled, because it is changes at the root cause that will reduce health inequalities in the long term.

Local councils, aware of the circumstances of so many of their residents, are focusing on reducing these inequalities, working with the wider health system to enable recovery from the pandemic, and to build sustainable and healthier futures.

The ongoing pandemic has (at the time of writing) killed more than three million people worldwide, including 126,000 in the UK. It has infected 4.25 million people in the UK, and that figure continues to rise.

The risks of contracting COVID-19, and its subsequent impact, are interconnected and cumulative. Those who are male, older, and from a black or minority ethnic group, with an underlying health condition, working in a higher-risk occupation and living in a deprived area, in overcrowded housing, are at a greater risk of infection, of experiencing more severe symptoms, and of dying.

The potential for poorer health outcomes can relate to susceptibility to, or effects of, having the virus itself; and to the differential impact of measures put in place to address the pandemic, such as shielding and social distancing.

Consequently, local areas are likely to be considering different approaches and target cohorts for each kind of impact.

Later this month, the LGA will publish a series of briefings that will describe the national literature on COVID-19 risk factors and the evidence to date on inequalities, drawing out key themes.

The briefings will examine the impact of COVID-19 on inequalities and the impact of the pandemic restrictions on inequality. They will explore what steps councils are taking to reduce those inequalities.

We need to learn lessons from this pandemic. This is not just about the impact coronavirus is having on communities; prompted by this current pandemic, we must seize the opportunity to drive an evidence-led approach on addressing health inequalities in our neighbourhoods, villages, towns and cities.

Enforcing coronavirus regulations

Councils' enforcement and compliance teams have been stretched thin in response to the pandemic



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

As we approach the anticipated re-opening of many businesses on our high streets later this month, I wanted to reflect on the vital role councils' regulatory services have played throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

There has been huge demand for such services in the past year, which has shone a light on the pressures on environmental health teams, for example, which have been largely hidden from view and have experienced significant cuts as a result of reductions to overall council funding. Environmental health, as well as trading standards, licensing and

other teams working in the compliance and enforcement space, have been at the forefront of an array of COVID-19 activity, including enforcing business closures, supporting reopening, and the enforcement of covid-secure measures and local contact tracing.

There have been a number of challenges along the way, including tier 'tourism' and the sheer pressure of competing demands on officers. While general compliance with business closures has been high, there have been some grey areas – for example, around mixed retail, and debates over whether a Scotch egg counts as a substantial meal!

We know from our ongoing discussions with government that there has been a lot of interest at the highest political levels about what councils are doing to ensure compliance with covid rules. Our focus within the LGA has been to try to shape that focus into

measures that are workable and practical on the ground.

For example, the LGA worked closely with government to ensure that funding earmarked for covid marshals could be used flexibly by councils in a way that would be most helpful for their areas.

We have also worked hard to push for changes to ensure councils have the right powers to tackle non-compliant businesses, which will be crucial as we move through the roadmap out of lockdown. While lockdown certainly hasn't provided a break from compliance and enforcement activity, there is no doubt that work will escalate in the coming months.

Alongside our work to support councils with enforcement and compliance, including running a series of webinars, the LGA has been engaging with the Government on compliance issues on a regular basis, and encouraging it to highlight the good work councils are already doing.

Supported by government, the LGA has also developed a new online register called Environmental Health Together (EHT), to help councils experiencing staffing issues.

EHT is a register of professionals with relevant environmental health qualifications and experience, who have signed up to assist local authorities during the pandemic. It is free, and allows councils to search for candidates by location, skills and experience.

The LGA is also pushing for the pandemic to lead to long-term changes in the value and support provided to local regulatory services. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of ensuring resilience in these services, so they are there for us to draw on when needed. But the pipeline of officers is small, and the future uncertain.

The pandemic has highlighted how important local regulatory services are and the pressures they are under. So, we want to use this opportunity to push government to take the steps that are within its power to address this, including looking at longer-term funding options and ensuring a better understanding of the collective demands being made on these professions.

i For more about Environmental Health Together, please visit www.local.gov.uk/EHT. 'Local authority COVID-19 compliance and enforcement good practice framework' - see <https://bit.ly/31lrLjZ>



A trusted public service

Governance of fire services could be transferred to police and crime commissioners



Councillor **Keith Aspden** is Deputy Chair of the LGA's Fire Services Management Committee

Ministers are to consult on the mandatory transfer of the governance of fire and rescue services to police and crime commissioners, following a review.

The review was first announced in July 2020, as a part of the Government's manifesto commitment to strengthening the accountability of the 41 police and crime commissioners (PCCs) in England and Wales, and expanding their role.

Part one of the review looked at strengthening accountability and scrutiny mechanisms, identifying and sharing best practice, and the relationship between PCCs and police chief constables. Part two will commence after the May elections.

Last month, the Government announced its findings from part one of the review, stating it would also consult on mandatory transfers of fire governance to PCCs, with a Fire Reform White Paper due out later this year.

Four areas already have police, fire and crime commissioners in place,

while the rest are governed by a mix of fire and rescue authorities, county councils, or within a mayoral model.

The LGA and many fire and rescue authorities and councils provided feedback on the questions posed by the review. We are disappointed that the Government is looking to mandate transfers of fire governance to PCCs and we will ensure that the LGA feeds into the White Paper consultation on this.

The LGA believes local areas are best placed to make decisions on how they are governed, and we would not want to see mandatory transfers of governance where they are not locally supported.

There is already legislation in place to allow PCCs to take on fire governance where there is a local case that it is in the interests of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, or public safety.

The LGA believes there is no pressing need to change this position. Councillors who sit on English fire and rescue authorities do a tremendous job, and the fire and rescue service is one of the best and most trusted public services that we have – and one we should cherish.

The Government is also looking to introduce operational independence for chief fire officers. This recommendation is supported by Sir Tom Winsor, Her Majesty's Chief

Inspector of Fire and Rescue services, in his second 'State of Fire and Rescue' report published last month.

We do not believe that new legislation is needed to introduce operational independence for chief fire officers. Officers and fire authority members both play complementary and distinct roles within the fire and rescue service.

As representatives of their communities, fire and rescue authorities set the policy agenda for the service and provide democratic accountability, ensuring that the views of the community are heard in decisions affecting the delivery of the fire and rescue service.

Chief fire officers provide professional advice and guidance on issues such as risk, and manage the day-to-day running of the service.

By working together, chief fire officers and their elected members can achieve better outcomes for their communities on issues such as potential closures of fire stations.

We look forward to working with the Government on its fire reform agenda and will proactively engage with the opportunity to feed into the White Paper consultation on transferring governance to PCCs.



See www.local.gov.uk/topics/fire-and-rescue

Turbo-charging devolution

Local government's response to COVID-19 has demonstrated that it does deliver and can be trusted. Now is the time for a new devolution settlement

Never has the role of local authorities been more significant in the lives of people living across the country.

Whether it be supporting vulnerable residents with emergency food deliveries or giving lifeline grant support to local businesses, or public health teams protecting residents from COVID-19, councils have faced up to the challenges presented by the pandemic.

The response to COVID-19 reinforces the strong case for greater devolution of powers to local communities; councils have demonstrated that, with the right funding and freedoms, they can improve people's lives and support their communities.

This is why, a number of months ago, a cross-party group of parliamentarians – including LGA vice-presidents – and council leaders came together through the Devolution All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) to lead an inquiry examining the impact of the pandemic on the relationship between local and central government, and what this relationship should look like in the future.

The inquiry's recently published report calls on the Government to “turbo-charge the powers of local areas to get on and deliver both national and local priorities”, “reimagine the British state”, and end a “culture of centralisation” in Whitehall and

Westminster that is hampering local communities.

Andrew Lewer MP MBE, Chair of the inquiry, said it represented a “roadmap for the UK Government to move away from a centralised model of governance where Whitehall is overburdened, and local areas are underpowered”.

Some of its key recommendations are summarised in the panel opposite, and you can read the report in full at www.connectpa.co.uk/devolution-appg/levelling-up-devo

A devolution baseline

The Government has previously made a clear commitment to help ‘level up’ the UK, and to transfer funding and powers out of Whitehall and into local communities.

In the past 10 years, there have been several moves to devolve powers to the local level, and the English devolution agenda has most recently focused on the creation of combined authorities.

Various powers and budgets have been transferred to combined authorities from Whitehall, based on devolution deals negotiated between local leaders and central government.

The APPG's report states that “while devolution deals have helped deliver greater autonomy for some parts of the country... the lack of alternative options has hampered efforts to devolve in many local areas”.



It goes on to call on government to “commit to working with local government to set out a ‘national devolution baseline’ for England, including a list of new powers available to every council, without the need to negotiate a devolution deal, as well as further powers which are available subject to clear eligibility requirements”.

Culture of centralisation

One of the starker divides between central and local government has been a cultural one, with there often being a

✧ *Whitehall is overburdened, and local areas underpowered* ✧

reluctance in central government to trust councils with greater responsibilities. This sets the UK apart internationally, with it having “one of the most centralised systems of governance in Western Europe”, according to the report.

Many submissions to this inquiry from figures in local government and independent think-tanks alike point to the challenges presented by a long-standing culture of centralisation. For example, the Centre for Cities think-tank argued that there was “a culture of centralisation and an inherent under-estimation of the role and abilities of local government”, often



Councils should be given the powers and resources to drive green growth.
Pictured – Bristol City Council's City Hall

impeding the Government's response to emerging issues.

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, told the inquiry that the job of Prime Minister "is becoming more and more difficult in the modern world, because so much is resting on the shoulders of one person", and that "Whitehall culture is an ingrained resistance to the idea of places being more assertive".

The inquiry highlights how many in government still see local authorities as there to be "instructed rather than engaged as partners". Without substantial cultural change, devolution to a local level will be hard to achieve.

In the Ditchley Foundation's 2020 annual lecture, Michael Gove MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, also recognised the need for Whitehall to change. "If this Government is to reform so much, it must also reform itself... the structures, ambitions and priorities of the Government machine need to change if real reform is to be implemented and to endure," he said.

"We need to look at how we can develop an even more thoughtful approach to devolution, to urban leadership and to allowing communities to take back more control of the policies that matter to them."

What next?

Our international competitors and

partners have long been able to demonstrate the positive impact greater devolution has had on accountability, financial efficiency and growth.

As we look towards the long process of economic and social recovery from the pandemic, this gap in local power and autonomy across England needs to be addressed if we are to keep pace on the global stage.

Over the past decade, England has taken steps towards greater devolution. However, as the APPG report finds, this can, and must, go further and faster.

Responding to the report's findings, Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, has called the report "crucial", as it "helps move forward a much-needed conversation on devolution".

He said: "Councils and parliamentarians should now unite to ensure the Government's upcoming Devolution and Recovery White Paper brings forward at pace a new devolution settlement for England, led by councils and their local communities."

Councils are ready to play their part by working with the government to help their communities as we look to recover from the impact of the pandemic.

Councils know their communities the best, and it is important they are equipped with the powers and funding to continue to support them into the future.

Levelling-up devo – key recommendations

- The Government's Devolution and Recovery White Paper should commit to working with local government to set out a national devolution baseline for England, including a list of new powers available to every council without the need to negotiate a devolution deal, as well as further powers that are available subject to clear eligibility requirements. Devolution from Whitehall to councils should be by default, and be at the heart of national government policy.
- An English devolution task force should be established to enable discussion between national and local government on progress with devolution to councils. To ensure a co-produced approach to devolution, it should be led by Number 10, and jointly chaired by the responsible Cabinet minister and a council leader.
- The Government should build on the approach to future growth funding signalled at the recent Budget, and continue to move away from a pattern of piecemeal, fragmented, and short-term interventions. We must move towards a localist settlement that gives councils the powers and resources to drive green and inclusive growth that meets the needs of their communities.

The Budget 2021

Investment in our local services will be vital for national economic and social recovery

Last month's Budget set out plans to provide support for jobs and businesses as we emerge from the pandemic.

Councils know their local areas best and have delivered for their communities. They must be trusted to lead efforts to rebuild and level up our economy, get people back into work and create new hope for their residents.

It is good that councils have been placed at the heart of the delivery of new funds such as the Levelling Up Fund and Community Renewal Fund and the LGA looks forward to working with the Government on the detail.

However, councils are concerned by the prospect of competitive bidding as they want all our resources and energy to be used to support regeneration in our communities.

Emergency government grants distributed by councils have been a vital lifeline to struggling businesses worried about their future. It is positive that further funding will be provided to support businesses, and councils remain ready to use their local

knowledge and expertise to distribute this money quickly.

We welcome the extension of the furlough scheme, which has been vital in securing jobs that otherwise may have been lost. Going forward, it will be crucial to ensure people seeking to re-enter the labour market get the local support, advice and training they need to face the future.

Councils stand ready to work in partnership with the Government to shape and redesign its Plan for Jobs initiatives, such as Kickstart and Restart, so they are effective locally.

Many households could be economically vulnerable for some time, so we are pleased that the Chancellor announced an extension to the £20-a-week universal credit uplift. This must be kept in place for as long as it is needed so that households are not pushed into financial hardship because of vital support being withdrawn.

We were disappointed the Budget contained no mention of adult social care or children's services. The Government must urgently bring

forward its proposals for adult social care, including a clear timetable for reform, so that we can finally put the sector on a sustainable footing.

We also continue to emphasise the need for additional funding for child and family support services. As a starting point, returning the Early Intervention Grant to 2010/11 funding levels by providing an extra £1.7 billion would enable councils to reinstate some lost preventative and early help services.

The Budget included some welcome investment to reduce carbon emissions, but councils want to see further progress if we are to unlock the significant opportunities renewable energy infrastructure can provide, particularly in the green growth sector and in job creation.

i This is an edited version of the LGA's 'Budget 2021: on-the-day briefing' available at www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses. The briefing covers in more depth the Budget announcements mentioned here, as well as other announcements, including on business rates, the spending review, COVID-19 and vaccinations, economy and infrastructure, UK Infrastructure Bank, towns and regeneration study, modern methods of construction for housing, flooding, devolution, UK Shared Prosperity Fund, freeports, and homelessness.

Domestic abuse

- Additional £19 million, including £15 million across England and Wales, to increase funding for perpetrator programmes.

The LGA says: "This is a welcome emphasis on the importance of addressing perpetrators' abusive behaviour and preventing domestic abuse from occurring in the first place."

Towns Fund

- More than £1 billion from the Towns Fund for a further 45 Town Deals across England.

The LGA says: "This additional funding will help many places adapt their town centres and ensure they remain vibrant hubs for businesses and socially."

Business support

- 100 per cent business rates relief for retail, hospitality and leisure properties in England to continue until 30 June, followed by 66 per cent relief (subject to caps) to 31 March 2022.
- 'Restart' grants of up to \$6,000 per premise for non-essential retail businesses and up to \$18,000 per premise for hospitality, accommodation, leisure, personal care and gym businesses.
- Additional \$425 million of discretionary business grant funding for local authorities in England.

The LGA says: "We welcome further grants to businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the additional discretionary business grant funding."

Levelling Up Fund

- Launch of prospectus for \$4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund – for infrastructure that improves everyday life, including town centre and high street regeneration and local transport projects.

The LGA says: "It is good that councils have been placed at the heart of delivering the Levelling Up Fund... but we are very concerned by the prospect of competitive bidding."

Community Ownership Fund

- New \$150 million fund to help communities buy local amenities, such as pubs, sports clubs, theatres and post office buildings, to run as community-owned businesses.

The LGA says: "We agree with the principle of empowering communities to take responsibility for their community assets where they might otherwise no longer be available for community use."

Councils continue to lead local efforts to protect lives and livelihoods from COVID-19 but still face substantial cost pressures and income losses.

The Government has provided a significant financial package of support for councils in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the ongoing financial impact and unpredictability of the crisis means this support must be kept under review.

We continue to call on the Government to meet all cost pressures and income losses incurred by councils as a result of the pandemic.

Public finances are undoubtedly under huge strain, but investment in our local services will be vital for our national economic and social recovery.

Alongside providing a multi-year settlement in 2022/23 to put councils on a long-term sustainable footing, bringing power and resources closer to people is the key to improving lives, tackling deep-set inequalities and building inclusive growth across the country.

Mental health

- Additional £3 billion to support the NHS recovery in England, including tackling waiting times for mental health services.

The LGA says: "Councils' mental health services and wider public health responsibilities need parity of funding with NHS mental health services, so they can help the whole population to be mentally healthy."

Workforce, jobs and skills

- Furlough scheme extended to end of September.
- 'Plan for jobs' includes more job coaches.
- Increase in payments to employers who take on new apprentices.
- £7 million fund to help employers set up and expand portable apprenticeships.
- Additional £126 million in England for high quality work placements and training for 16 to 24-year-olds.

The LGA says: "We can help ensure these programmes meet the needs of different places and join up disconnected national schemes at the frontline, so they are more effective."

Armed Forces

- Up to £475,000 for Armed Forces charities to support the development of a digital and data strategy.
- An additional £10 million for the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, to deliver charitable projects and initiatives that support veterans with mental health needs.

The LGA says: "It is vital that councils continue to receive enough funding to support veterans and their families across a range of services that also affect mental health, including housing, money advice and employment support."

Welfare

- Universal credit \$20-a-week uplift extended to September.
- Other uplifts and protections for benefits claimants to continue.

The LGA says: "The national benefits system should provide the principal safety net for low-income households. Local welfare funding should be restored to at least \$250 million a year to enable councils to deliver an efficient and sustainable local safety net."

Low carbon energy

- £20 million to support the development of floating offshore wind technology.
- £68 million UK-wide competition to implement several first-of-a-kind energy storage prototypes or technology demonstrators.
- \$4 million competition for the first phase of a biomass feedstocks programme, to support the rural economy.

The LGA says: "The Budget has not set out any new investment in housing retrofit or infrastructure to reduce the environmental impact of waste and recycling services."





Stephen Evans is
Chief Executive of
the Learning and
Work Institute

Jobs on the line

Local government has a crucial role to play in jobs and skills recovery after the pandemic

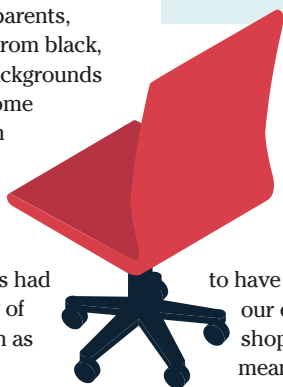
After a year like no other, the success of the COVID-19 vaccine programme means thoughts are now turning to recovery.

By the end of 2021, unemployment is projected to be almost one million higher than before the crisis, though this would have been much worse without support such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

The effects of the crisis have been unequal, with unemployment rising most sharply in cities and areas that started with higher unemployment. Young people have been particularly hard hit, accounting for three-fifths of the falls in employment.

Groups including single parents, disabled people and people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds were also more likely to become unemployed, or face drops in income that have made managing money hard.

On top of this, we know that, while employment was high overall, many local areas had pockets of unemployment or of low basic skills in things such as literacy or numeracy.



Building back better needs to be about tackling these underlying challenges, as well as recovering from the economic effects of the pandemic.

The pandemic is likely to have accelerated changes in our economy, such as online shopping and remote working, meaning more people may need

to retrain for new jobs and careers. Together, this means the crisis has created new inequalities and exacerbated existing ones. We will also be living with the after-effects of the pandemic for years to come: the labour market has taken up to seven years to recover after previous recessions.

Local government will be central to supporting and accelerating this recovery: as place-makers, engines of

Jobs and skills recovery: six key questions

The LGA and Learning and Work Institute guides identify key questions for local government to explore in identifying a challenge and working out how to tackle it:

- **What is the objective?** This helps to focus effort and identify success measures.
- **Do we understand the challenge?** Understanding the cause of the challenge can help to shape the potential solutions.
- **What works?** You need to understand and build on the evidence of what works in addressing the challenge you are facing.
- **What support and services are already available?** This can help to identify key stakeholders, as well as any gaps or disjoints in support.
- **What are the options?** These may include new support from the council, better joining up of existing support, or trialling something new.
- **How will we know it's working?** Councils need to track success as support is live, linking back to the objective, as well as building in evaluation from the start.





growth, deliverers of services, important local employers, the local glue joining up a complex web of support and provision, and much more besides.

To support councils in doing this, the Learning and Work Institute and the LGA are developing five new guides.

These look at the big jobs and skills challenges: supporting youth employment; responding to job shocks, such as the closure of a large local employer; enabling retraining; improving basic skills; and tackling long-term unemployment.

The guides pull together the evidence on what works, and give a framework for identifying the local challenge and potential responses.

A key first step is to map existing support. The complexity of employment and skills policy means there will often be disjoints or areas where better join-up would deliver better results. Given all delivery is ultimately local, this can only be done locally, and is a key role for councils.

There will always be issues where the evidence on what works is more limited, or where there are gaps in support. So, another step is identifying these gaps in evidence and support, and thinking about how best to fill them.

Perhaps the biggest message across all the guides is the role local government can play in making sure local growth, development and regeneration delivers good job and skills opportunities, and that local people can access these opportunities.

We face a big year, to help increase employment, skills and growth. These practical guides aim to help local government play its leading role in doing this.

Council case studies

Long-term unemployment

Disabled people are less likely to be in work. Local authorities and a local enterprise partnership (LEP) in the south of England supported more than 1,100 long-term workless people with health problems and disabilities through a 2016-18 project funded by the European Social Fund. The project included a transitional employment programme, providing temporary work combined with work search, from which 28 per cent of participants moved into open employment – higher than comparable programmes.

Youth unemployment

A combined authority in the north of England developed a youth employment gateway. This provided young people with personal advisers to help build their confidence and motivation, and support job applications, plus a flexible budget to spend on each participant. It exceeded its targets for helping young people find work and stay in employment.

Retraining

In the south-west of England, councils and the local LEP developed a skills launchpad. This is an online hub for skills, careers, training and jobs support. It includes Train4Tomorrow, funded through the National Skills Fund, offering 12-week training programmes focused on growth sectors such as cyber, data science, welding, and engineering. Those completing the training are guaranteed a job interview with a local employer.

Local economic shocks

Following a rise in redundancies during the pandemic, a south-west England local authority set up a redundancy support team. It aims to be the 'joining glue' for local support, including linking recently redundant workers to training support, through both the adult education budget and a £750,000 fund to provide training focused on transition to growth sectors.

Basic skills

The Citizens' Curriculum focused on co-designing a community learning programme with local people, for core capabilities such as literacy, numeracy, digital, and citizenship. A pilot in the north-west of England saw increased participation in learning and £3.68 saved for local public services for every £1 invested, through increased use of preventative services, leading to reduced need for emergency or reactive ones.



The LGA and Learning and Work Institute guides will be published
at www.local.gov.uk after the 6 May local elections



Supporting micro businesses

Councils have a key role to play in helping local small businesses recover from the pandemic



Lisa McCance is a Director at Shared Intelligence

Micro businesses of up to nine employees have been a strong and growing part of our economy in the UK for decades.

They represent more than 2.1 million businesses in England with growth of nearly 550,000 individual businesses between 2010 and 2020. They have outpaced the growth of larger companies, representing an increasing proportion of the total business base.

Micros are diverse, spread across the country and represent all sectors to differing levels. They differ in terms of their aspirations, with many set up for individuals to simply earn a living, while others crave growth – taking on employees or seeking investment in their product or service.

If we are to learn from history then we must look at the last recession of 2008. The period immediately following the financial crash saw record numbers of new businesses being formed and an appetite for business start-ups.

During the pandemic, however, research from the Office for National Statistics has shown that micro businesses have been more affected than businesses of any other size. The data shows that 28 per cent of micro businesses temporarily or permanently ceased trading, compared with 19.3 per cent of all larger businesses.

The impact on unemployment could be significant. If this large proportion of micros is not supported effectively, there will inevitably be an overreliance in the labour market on larger companies, which themselves are shedding jobs.

Our current research, commissioned by the LGA, is intended to explore three broad questions:

- What are the current challenges facing micro businesses?
- What support is available to them and who is providing it?
- What is the role of local government in supporting micro businesses?

Many councils channel their support through other organisations, such as growth hubs, and during the pandemic councils have provided direct support through business grants.

So far, our research shows that micros have reached out to councils during the pandemic more than before. This raises two key questions: once discretionary grants have been allocated, what is the future offer? And how can councils work with partners to deliver support for micro businesses that is relevant and current?

It has also highlighted a range of challenges faced by micros before and during the pandemic.

For example, the funding landscape is fragmented and inconsistent with a number of different organisations providing support, with limited focus on micros.

Micro businesses have limited networks and connections from which to find, recruit and retain talented employees.

During the pandemic, a lack of online presence was a particular barrier for many who were unable to trade online, which also highlighted a lack of digital skills among business owners.

Meanwhile, poor digital infrastructure and a lack of accessible incubator and accelerator space outside London and the South East are negative factors.

With the economy increasingly on the agenda of councils from a regeneration, skills and business growth perspective, now is the time to review the business support landscape, identify the gaps in provision and develop the role of council as an anchor organisation, a regulator, a convenor of partners and by using their extensive buying power.

Our research is now extending to explore that role further. You have no doubt heard of 'health in all policies' – now consider 'economy in all policies'.



i Lisa McCance is a Director at Shared Intelligence and is leading research into micro businesses on behalf of the LGA. Contact lisa.mccance@sharedintelligence.net for more information and/or visit www.local.gov.uk/events to sign up for the LGA's micro business webinar on 28 April



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

Local path to net zero

Tackling climate change requires local action, and councils are leading the way

Climate change is not a crisis of the future but of the present. 2020 was the world's joint warmest year on record, with temperatures 1.25 Celsius above the pre-industrial average extending to all parts of the globe, including the Arctic.

While the temperature change numbers look small, the impacts are significant. It's difficult to forget the devastating wildfires in Australia at the beginning of last year and the long-lasting heatwaves in July and August.

And of course, many parts of the UK have been battered by storms and unprecedented flooding.

These real-life weather events are going to be experienced by more people in more places, more often. Global action to respond and deal with climate change is paramount.

But it is local action and councils that deal with the challenges on the ground. We only need to look to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic to know that.

In Paris in 2015, world leaders came together and committed to an historic agreement to tackle climate change and limit the rise of global temperatures to 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels. This is known as the Paris Agreement.

This year, the UK will be hosting the next United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, from 1-12 November. This provides an opportunity for governments to accelerate progress towards the goal of the Paris agreement and net zero carbon emissions.

It also provides an opportunity to showcase the leading role of councils in tackling climate change. With at least 230 councils declaring a climate emergency, councils are well placed to meet net zero by 2050 in partnership with government, industry and communities.

Since decarbonisation must happen everywhere – from every sector, industry and business to every place, community and household – it will require a significant generational shift in the everyday activities of our lives, including how we travel, how we live in and power our homes, and even what we eat.

This can only be achieved by strong local leadership.

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 primary delivery partners.

Focusing on the five campaign areas identified by the 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 COP26.

We have invited stakeholders, partners, think-tanks and industry experts to share their perspectives on the importance of local action in tackling climate change and the first of these contributions are now on our website.

We will continue to add resources, including videos of council case studies and 'talking heads' with industry experts. You can also find the LGA's climate change improvement and support programme on our website which offers a range of resources and good practice case studies.

It is now time to translate international and national ambitions for a green industrial revolution into transformative local action – and councils, with their local partners, are leading the way.



We will be featuring think pieces and other contributions to 'A local path to net zero' in future editions of first in the run-up to COP26 – see also www.local.gov.uk/local-path-net-zero. You can find out about the LGA's wider work on climate change, the environment, energy and waste by visiting www.local.gov.uk/climate-environment-and-waste

Bringing the customer to the forefront

St. Modwen Logistics launches 'Swan Standard' philosophy

Throughout 2020 – and despite the COVID-19 pandemic – St. Modwen Logistics has been working with its partners and supply chain to craft a philosophy around the design, build and maintenance of its portfolio of St. Modwen Park developments, home to some of the world's leading logistics businesses, including Ocado Retail, international courier DHL, and XPO Logistics.

In what is a holistic overview of its schemes, and with a clear focus on its customers' needs, St. Modwen Logistics is dedicated to enhancing everything from its master planning of projects and product specification to the long-term management and maintenance of its parks.

The Swan Standard will ensure its highly sought-after core offering is supplemented with enhancements across five key areas: environment and sustainability; wellbeing; community; transport; and security. Such enhancements include commitments to drive our ambitions to achieve net zero carbon developments, with further reductions in embodied and operational carbon by delivering BREEAM Excellent buildings with EPC ratings of A and better.

Sustainability is hardwired into the Swan Standard's DNA, and buildings have heating, cooling, water consumption and lighting that is designed to reduce running costs. In addition to this, low-carbon products and designs drive the company towards net zero carbon targets, and robust detailing and product choice enhance the look, feel and longevity of the buildings.

The high-quality building components will ensure that the units are built to last, giving less cause for refurbishment, while sustainable sourcing of products that are recyclable helps

to reduce the buildings' impact on the planet.

The Swan Standard will not only benefit the wider environment, but also the people who work on and visit the parks, who will reap the rewards of well-enabled spaces, internally and externally. This will help the company continue to deliver on its commitments to achieve 10 per cent biodiversity net gains on its new developments.

Currently, it is being deployed across two of St. Modwen Logistics' flagship schemes, in Chippenham and Tamworth – the sites already feature operational net zero carbon buildings, enhanced EV charging points and sustainable power generation via PV solar cells.

Richard Carter, Senior Director – Construction at St. Modwen Logistics, said: "Our Swan Standard philosophy is a significant pillar of the core St. Modwen purpose, and is going to make a huge difference to all of our developments and customers. Our sites will now exceed the very highest specifications

that modern, forward-thinking and responsible customers expect, and we believe that the Swan Standard certifies our status as one of the leading names in the logistics space.

"Our work will also have a positive impact on the environment and the communities that our developments serve, helping us work towards our carbon-neutrality targets. From major e-commerce companies and logistics firms to leading regional businesses, we are committed to delivering high-quality logistics units for our customers. Through good design and the thoughtfulness of wellbeing features, St. Modwen Logistics' buildings with the Swan Standard will provide the company, and its customers, with premises that are fit for purpose today and into the future."

i For further information please visit www.stmodwenlogistics.co.uk or visit us on Twitter @StModwenIL or LinkedIn

*Sustainability is
hardwired into the
Swan Standard's DNA*





Fiona MacGregor
is Chief Executive
of the Regulator of
Social Housing

Council tenant and landlord relationships

Despite the unprecedented challenges the country has faced over the past year because of the coronavirus pandemic, the tragedy of the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017 is still very present in the memories of people living and working in social housing.

With the ongoing public inquiry, the setting up of the Building Safety Regulator, and the new Social Housing White Paper, much has been done to respond to the lessons of the tragedy. But there remains more to do.

Last November's White Paper was the culmination of a significant process of consultation by ministers and officials.

The fact it was welcomed by almost everyone in the social housing sector – including tenants and their representatives – and commands much cross-party support, is a testament to the groundwork that was done with a wide range of stakeholders.

At its heart, the White Paper seeks to rebalance the relationship between social landlords and their tenants, and ensure that social tenants get a fair deal from their landlords.

This ambition is set out in the White Paper's charter for tenants, describing the expectations that tenants should have of their landlord.

I think most people who live or work in social housing will find much to agree with in the charter. The challenge will come from ensuring that the ambitions are delivered for the people living in the 4.1 million homes owned and managed by more than 1,500 social landlords across the range of providers.

For the Regulator of Social Housing, the White Paper agenda will require a review of our regulatory standards and changes to the way we work, including proactively monitoring local authority landlord performance against the standards. Many of these developments require legislative changes.

The White Paper sets out the principles that will need to underpin those changes, including the need to operate in a co-regulatory way.

For local authority landlords, co-regulation means that councillors are responsible for ensuring that their local authority complies with the outcome-focused consumer standards set by the regulator and can provide assurance to demonstrate that compliance.

We think there are three clear tests that the new consumer regulation regime must

meet: it must make a meaningful difference to tenants; be deliverable by landlords; and we must be able to regulate it effectively.

The first test is vital. If these changes do not make a meaningful difference for tenants across the country, then, clearly, the aspirations of the White Paper will not have been met.

However, we also know that asking landlords for the impossible will not actually help tenants. The outcomes set out in the standards must be things that landlords can deliver in a world of constrained resources, increasing demands, and a backdrop of continued economic uncertainty.

Finally, we want to design a system that builds on the best of our current approach; outcome-focused, co-regulatory, proportionate, and risk-based.

While these changes require legislation, there is nothing to stop landlords, including local authority landlords, responding now to the vision and expectations on transparency, accountability and tenant engagement in the White Paper.

The way that social landlords have responded to the current pandemic demonstrates their willingness and ability to adapt to change and continues to demonstrate that they put the needs of their tenants at the heart of what they do.



The Regulator of Social Housing regulates registered providers of social housing, see www.gov.uk/government/organisations/regulator-of-social-housing

Violence against women and girls



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

The horrific murder of Sarah Everard brought national attention to the issue of women's safety, which was further exacerbated by the police's heavy-handed response to the peaceful vigil at Clapham Common.

Many new voices called for more funding to tackle the root causes of violence against women, but those of us in local government are, sadly, all too aware that resources have actually been reduced in recent years.

Over the past 11 years, government cuts to local authority funding have had a devastating impact on services aimed at tackling violence against women and

girls, particularly in the context of a surge in reported cases over the past year.

A report released by MPs last April revealed a worrying trend, as domestic abuse killings in the first 21 days of the first lockdown were double the average.

Women's Aid has calculated an estimated shortfall of £400 million in funding of specialist women's domestic abuse support services. The £19 million pledged by the Government in the Budget is welcome, but will hardly make a dent.

And this is not a new problem. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism's 2017 survey of 40 refuge managers across England revealed that 95 per cent of refuges had turned women away in the previous six months, either because they had physical impairments, complex mental health needs, or too many children with them, or simply because there were no beds available.

Women's Aid has highlighted that it is

specialist services, aimed at protecting some of the most vulnerable women, that will bear the brunt of this underfunding. This includes services for LGBT+, black, Asian and minority ethnic, and disabled women.

The Government's reopening of the Violence Against Women and Girls consultation is a positive step towards understanding the scale and nature of the problem. But the Government cannot claim to be serious about tackling violence against women without giving local authorities the funding they need to provide vital services.

"Cuts to local authority funding have had a devastating impact on services tackling violence against women and girls"



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

Changes to Right to Buy

The Government has announced a package of reforms to the Right to Buy scheme, in what is a significant lobbying success for the LGA, following years of campaigning.

In its response to its 2018 consultation on the use of receipts from Right to Buy sales, the Government has said it will extend the timeframe councils have to spend receipts from three to five years, and increase the percentage cost of a new home councils can fund using receipts from 30 to 40 per cent.

We are pleased the Government has engaged with us on these reforms and acted on councils' concerns. Allowing this greater flexibility will boost councils' ability to build desperately needed affordable homes for local communities.

Ministers also announced they will be introducing a cap on the use of Right to Buy receipts for acquisitions of existing homes, with the aim of increasing new housing supply.



If your council feels that the introduction of the cap will adversely affect your housing programmes and your ability to replace stock sold under the Right to Buy, please email my colleague jo.allchurch@local.gov.uk, who would like to hear from you.

Receipts will also be allowed for use on shared ownership housing and First Homes, as well as housing at affordable and social rent. The changes will take effect from 1 April 2021, with the acquisition cap being introduced from 1 April 2022 on a phased basis.

While we would like to see further reforms to Right to Buy – including allowing councils to keep receipts in full and set discounts locally – overall, this is an important announcement that brings forward positive changes for councils, and shows the Government is listening to us.

With council housing waiting lists set to increase, the Government needs to do everything it can to enable councils to provide the housing communities need, supported by the required services and infrastructure.



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

Local elections like no others

With the local elections 2021 fast approaching, voting matters now more than ever.

This will be our biggest ever set of local elections and includes a number of contests postponed from last year.

Across the country, voters will be choosing a mixture of councillors, local mayors, regional mayors and police and crime commissioners.

Through effective leadership, local authorities have supported their communities during this pandemic, while ensuring vital public services have been delivered promptly.

Many Conservative-run councils have created new ideas and found innovative solutions to help residents face these unprecedented times. For instance, Medway Council has developed a diverse range of online sessions – such as music production, quizzes and healthy lifestyles – to support the health and wellbeing of young people, and encourage

“Through effective leadership, local authorities have supported their communities during this pandemic”

them to learn a new skill. Another example is East Lindsey District Council's innovative solution to the suspension of local markets during the lockdown, when it supported local food businesses by promoting their home-delivery services via the council's website.

This election will be like no other as we are still fighting against COVID-19, and some continue to be concerned over the elections' delivery plan and the application of social-distancing measures.

Nevertheless, I would like to strongly encourage all **first** readers to vote, and motivate their community to do the same, as these elections will shape the future of our local economies, impact your everyday life, and determine how vital frontline services will run in your local areas.



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

Challenging false vaccine information

I was delighted to see the LGA running a number of webinars recently on vaccine communications and tackling hesitancy and misinformation.

It has been great to hear of the impressive work being done by councils to tackle some of the concerns and misconceptions about the vaccine.

“As councillors, we need to be leading the fight against vaccine misinformation and signposting people to the NHS and councils for the best information”

There is so much we can showcase from our councils on how we are doing this locally. You may have seen that the Government has launched a new social media campaign to tackle false vaccine information, particularly that shared among minority ethnic communities – long overdue, in my view.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has also developed a 'Check before you share' toolkit – with content designed to be shared via WhatsApp and Facebook community groups, as well as Twitter, YouTube and Instagram – to tackle false information spread through private channels.

Campaigns up and down the country are being fronted by trusted local community figures – such as imams, pastors, community leaders and clinicians – in short, shareable videos that include simple tips on how to spot misinformation and what to do to stop it spreading.

As councillors, we need to be leading in the fight against this misinformation, and signposting people to the NHS and their councils for the best sources of information.

This is what community leadership looks like. Join me in the battle, and challenge your councils on what they are doing to tackle misinformation.

We must all do our bit to keep people safe and defeat this terrible disease.



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

Putting people before politics

It has continued to be an incredibly busy time for our members as elections loom.

Our boards, executive and council leaders have met to discuss the critical issues facing our councils.

One of the most pressing is the lack of confirmation from the Government on the future of remote meetings.

To be able to do our work effectively, we need clarity on how we are to fulfil our obligations as elected members and statutory bodies without the ability to host remote or hybrid meetings.

We continue to keep the pressure on ministers as we approach our annual general meetings.

“Government announcements point to top-down reform we have neither asked for nor need”

Many of our members are now in the pre-election period and campaigning is fully under way. These elections look very different from those that have come before – but, equally, have never been more important.

Over recent months, government announcements on planning, health and our fire services, to name a few, all point to top-down reform we have neither asked for nor need. We also know that plans on devolution and reorganisation await us after the election.

The climate and biodiversity emergency, action needed to stop violence against women, and, of course, the Government's handling of the pandemic, are all at the forefront of our residents' minds.

The issues are many and diverse, but our members all offer a commitment to put people before politics.

I wish all who are standing, or who are supporting candidates, good luck. Following the elections, our regional peers will be ready and waiting to provide support.

Health inequalities and dementia



Councillor **Faisal Rana** (Lab) is Assistant Portfolio Holder for Corporate Delivery at Rochdale Borough Council

Inequalities in health services, employment, housing and many other issues are having a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of minority ethnic people.

Coronavirus has made things worse, with black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities suffering much higher fatalities than the white population, coupled with a lack of government action to deal with this tragic situation.

Meanwhile, recent research suggests the average health of a 60-year-old BAME man is similar to that of an average 80-year-old white person.

My particular concern is about the lack of information and resources being put into

the mental health needs of the BAME population, and especially those living with dementia.

My mother suffered from dementia and it was obvious she faced a lack of knowledge, understanding and inadequate support from various NHS bodies.

Health providers need to be sensitive to cultural stereotypes; some communities are assumed to be 'looking after their own', resulting in services that do not reach out to individuals and families from BAME communities.

I have been pressing local health managers for months about poor mental health and dementia services for minority ethnic people in Rochdale. Our local clinical commissioning group (CCG) has now agreed to undertake a major study into the inequalities in healthcare facing our local BAME communities, once we are firmly on a path out of the pandemic.

Colleagues might want to ask their CCG some of the questions I have, in order to



improve services in their areas too – questions about surveying the health of BAME communities, needs assessments and action plans for BAME people living with dementia and poor mental health, numbers of diagnoses, access to supported accommodation, funding, and data on the ethnicity of frontline staff supporting people with dementia and mental health needs.

Urgent action is desperately needed to ensure BAME individuals and families with mental ill-health and dementia are not left to cope alone, in fear, and without support.

Fixing the council safety net



Toby North is Senior Public Affairs Officer at The Children's Society

In April 2013, the Government changed how crisis support was delivered.

Instead of being distributed centrally through the Discretionary Social Fund, the responsibility was transferred to upper tier local authorities in England. Councils set up

local welfare assistance schemes (LWASs) to help those facing short-term financial crises.

From 2015, dedicated funding was removed, meaning that councils already facing severely reduced budgets were forced to make difficult decisions about where to allocate funds. Sadly, many cut back LWAS schemes and some closed them altogether. It's meant the amount of help available to those facing a one-off financial emergency has severely diminished.

We all know the COVID-19 crisis has had a further huge impact on council finances. The National Audit Office says councils have experienced cost pressures and income losses amounting to £9.7 billion.

Alongside this, levels of financial hardship in our communities have increased, with more people turning to local services for help.

Thankfully, the important role of local welfare was acknowledged by the Government during the pandemic through a combined £291.1 million of additional investment, delivered by the Emergency Assistance Grant, the COVID Winter Grant Scheme and the recent Easter grant.

But this money has now run out and in

2021/22 there is no further dedicated funding for local welfare provision.

With need unlikely to abate any time soon, we fear many councils will once again be unable to fund schemes or help those in crisis. This in turn will push more people into poverty, hardship and debt.

Things must change. Local welfare schemes must be recognised as a valuable part of the social security system, and we are glad that there is a broad consensus emerging across local government around this view.

As we emerge from the pandemic and look towards recovery, it is vital that we ensure there is an adequate safety net in place to support families facing financial crisis.

At The Children's Society we want to work alongside local government in the coming months to ensure that is the case.



i For more information, please contact Toby.north@childrenssociety.org.uk. To sign **The Children's Society's petition on local crisis support**, go to <https://bit.ly/38MbtNS>

Delivering on supported housing



Councillor **Sharon Thompson** (Lab) is Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods at Birmingham City Council

In supported housing, accommodation is provided alongside care, support or supervision to help people live as independently as possible.

The homeless and other vulnerable groups, such as those with support needs or disabilities, are often housed in this type of property.

There are currently more than 20,000 units of 'exempt' supported accommodation across Birmingham, funded through housing benefit, and exempt from the normal rules limiting the amount of rent covered by benefits. Potential residents are placed into it using multiple referral routes.

Supported accommodation is essential for the thousands of people who need it to live more independent lives. But it is also essential that providers honour their commitment to deliver the right support to their tenants.

Benefit tribunals and operational-level research have sometimes identified exempt accommodation as a complex and difficult area of housing benefit to administer.

The city council also has fewer powers in relation to regulation of this burgeoning sector, which needs wider policy reform on a national basis and further policy analysis.

✧ This innovative work has been recognised as best practice ✧

So, in Birmingham, after a £1 million supported housing pilot with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, we have developed a Charter of Rights and Quality Standards, which will not only help us to champion landlords who are providing a good service, but will also help us monitor those landlords who are not.

The charter, created with Spring Housing Association and co-designed with more than 50 people who have experienced homelessness, aims to make

tenants and their families aware of the service they should expect.

It is also intended to help organisations consolidate, clarify and build upon their existing practices, ensuring that they are able to respond to their residents safely, effectively and consistently, and identify clear linkages between management practices and resident experience.

The rights outlined in the charter include a right to feel safe and protected, a right to decent living conditions, and a right to challenge.

Birmingham Voluntary Services Council has spent almost two years designing our Exempt Housing Quality Standards, and is rolling them out to all providers of exempt accommodation so that the service they provide meets a high standard.

The standards will allow registered providers to demonstrate their commitment to their clients and to providing a quality housing offer through a recognised quality mark, and will allow referring agencies to identify those providers delivering quality housing with support.

We have also been able to employ an additional multidisciplinary team of

inspectors and social workers to carry out more inspections on properties, to ensure that those living there are not being exploited and are receiving the support they need to meet their often complex needs.

I am pleased that this innovative piece of work has been recognised as good practice.

However, we also need stronger regulation for local authorities, the police and the Regulator of Social Housing.

This needs to include stronger definitions around care and support, so that those who provide poor standards face consequences that will make them change their practices.

The charter and standards that Birmingham has produced will provide important learning to inform the scale of supported housing required, and to help shape future provision. Most importantly, they should help ensure residents feel happy, safe and protected in their homes.

i **Birmingham City Council's Exempt Housing Quality Standards** can be viewed at bit.ly/3trOUUpO





A celebration of older people

Cllr Ruth Bush, former Lord Mayor of Westminster, at a tea dance organised by the council



Councillor **Christabel Flight** (Con) is Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health and Older People's Champion at Westminster City Council

Silver Sunday is the national day for older people and takes place this year on 3 October. It is a special day in the national calendar, when everyone can come together to put older people at the heart of their community.

It started as a response to social isolation and loneliness among our older population. The aim was to galvanise community action to do something about it.

Now, Silver Sunday's fun and free events for older people help them to meet new people, visit new places, try new activities, connect with their local communities and with younger generations around them.

In 2019, tens of thousands of older people attended more than 1,200 free events nationwide including tai chi, concerts, walks, sports, dance classes and tea parties. Wiltshire Council used its 'Silver Sunday in Salisbury' as the catalyst for further projects, including a three-year intergenerational project in the city.

The last year has been grim, especially for older people. But despite all the pandemic restrictions in place, we still had hundreds of events take place in 2020, many virtually.

We were particularly delighted to have the enthusiastic support of HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, who said: "As a member of Silver Sunday's target audience, I can honestly say that it is a completely brilliant initiative!"

Our ambition for 2021, COVID-19 notwithstanding, is to double the 2019 success and I am asking for your help in achieving this.

Much of the growth and success of Silver Sunday since it began in 2012 has been thanks to the wonderful energy and ambition shown by local councillors and officers. We would love it if you could join the many local authorities already involved this year.

Here are a few thoughts on how you can help – I'm sure you can think of many more:

- Encourage businesses, charities, community groups and volunteers within your local area to get behind Silver Sunday and organise or host events. Councils are great convenors for these sorts of events, pulling the

public, private and voluntary sectors together in your communities for one common purpose.

- Host events yourselves for older people on or around 3 October. Here in Westminster, the council supports the Sir Simon Milton Foundation, a local charity of which I am a trustee, to run an annual tea dance for 1,000 older residents.
- Signpost older people to Silver Sunday events and activities in your area. Most councils will do this already, but Silver Sunday offers an opportunity to shout a little louder about the many great things taking place in support of your older residents. For many who already work with older people, this is a wonderful opportunity to showcase what they do all year round.
- Encourage younger generations to get involved. We love involving schools and uniformed youth organisations in our local events. Did you know, for example, that the Scouts have a 'Silver Sunday' badge that they can earn?

Do visit our website, www.silversunday.org.uk, and follow us on Twitter @SilverSundayUK for ideas, inspiration and resources, including our 'Guide for local authorities'.

After the year that we have all had, especially older people, it is time to offer them something to look forward to and raise their spirits.



SILVER SUNDAY
CELEBRATING OLDER PEOPLE



Please email info@silversunday.org.uk for more information, or visit www.silversunday.org.uk

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Local elections preview



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



The unprecedented decision to stage two cycles of English local elections at the same time means that we need to focus on the contrasting past outcomes in two separate years to make any sense of what might happen this May.

Those of this year's local elections postponed from 2020 because of the pandemic take us back to a now unfamiliar political landscape.

Most of the seats being contested across 115 councils (see table, below) last fell vacant in 2016 – just seven weeks before British politics was turned on its head by the result of the EU Referendum.

David Cameron led a majority Conservative government – his 2015 general election victory marking the party's first such triumph in more than two decades. Jeremy Corbyn was little more than six months into his term as Labour leader and facing his first real electoral test.

And the Liberal Democrats, continuing to suffer following their involvement in the 2010-15 coalition government, appeared to be languishing well behind UKIP.

In truth, the May 2016 local elections were a rather humdrum affair giving little indication of the turmoil to come.

Both Labour and the Conservatives registered a small decline in seats and councils controlled, and no party gained or lost more than 50 seats net.

Our estimate of the national equivalent vote put Labour one point ahead of the Conservatives with the Liberal Democrats just beating UKIP into third place for the first time since 2012.

So what does that benchmark foreshadow for what might happen this time? With no by-elections to guide us but with the Conservatives out in front in the polls – thanks in good part to the perceived success of the vaccine rollout – Labour does look to have its work cut out

just to stand still. Indeed, Leader Keir Starmer MP is already in the business of managing expectations by declaring that the contests will be 'tough' for his party and that a swing to the Conservatives might be expected.

The metropolitan boroughs have long been considered Labour's heartland. The party took more than 45 per cent of the vote and won three-quarters of the seats there in 2016. There was a similarly dominant performance in 2018, but in 2019 Labour went backwards overall despite gaining control of both Calderdale and Trafford.

In some areas that became tagged as part of the 'red wall', the party's support slumped. In Barnsley, South Tyneside, St Helens, and Sunderland, there was a double figure decline in vote share compared with 2016.

With only a third of seats up for election, Labour is certain to retain control of these councils, but the party needs to demonstrate it has recovered at least to 2016 levels.

More competitive councils like Bury, Dudley and Trafford merit close attention. Labour is just short of a majority in Dudley and on paper needs only a small swing to gain Belle Vale and Gornal wards. However, the Conservatives won both easily in May 2019, ahead of gaining Dudley North at the general election.

Large majorities in individual wards in Bury should help Labour hang on (though the Conservatives narrowly gained both constituencies there in December 2019). Trafford, a Remain voting area in the south Manchester conurbation, has been trending Labour in recent local elections and ought to be safe.

Among the unitary councils held over from 2020, there are all-out elections in Bristol, Halton, Hartlepool and Warrington. Labour has struggled to maintain a formal majority in Bristol, but is far ahead of the opposition parties and should retain the city mayoralty too.

Local politics in Hartlepool has been chaotic in recent years, and the town has now been thrust into the national spotlight with a parliamentary by-election likely to be held on the same day as the locals.

The outcome of both contests is unpredictable and may come down to the choices presented to electors.

The Conservatives will be seeking gains in Peterborough to make their hold on the council more secure, but are handicapped by having to defend the bulk of seats falling vacant this time and thus having limited opportunities to make progress.

In Plymouth, Labour's apparently narrow majority has already been boosted

i See next month's first for a preview of the local elections scheduled for this year

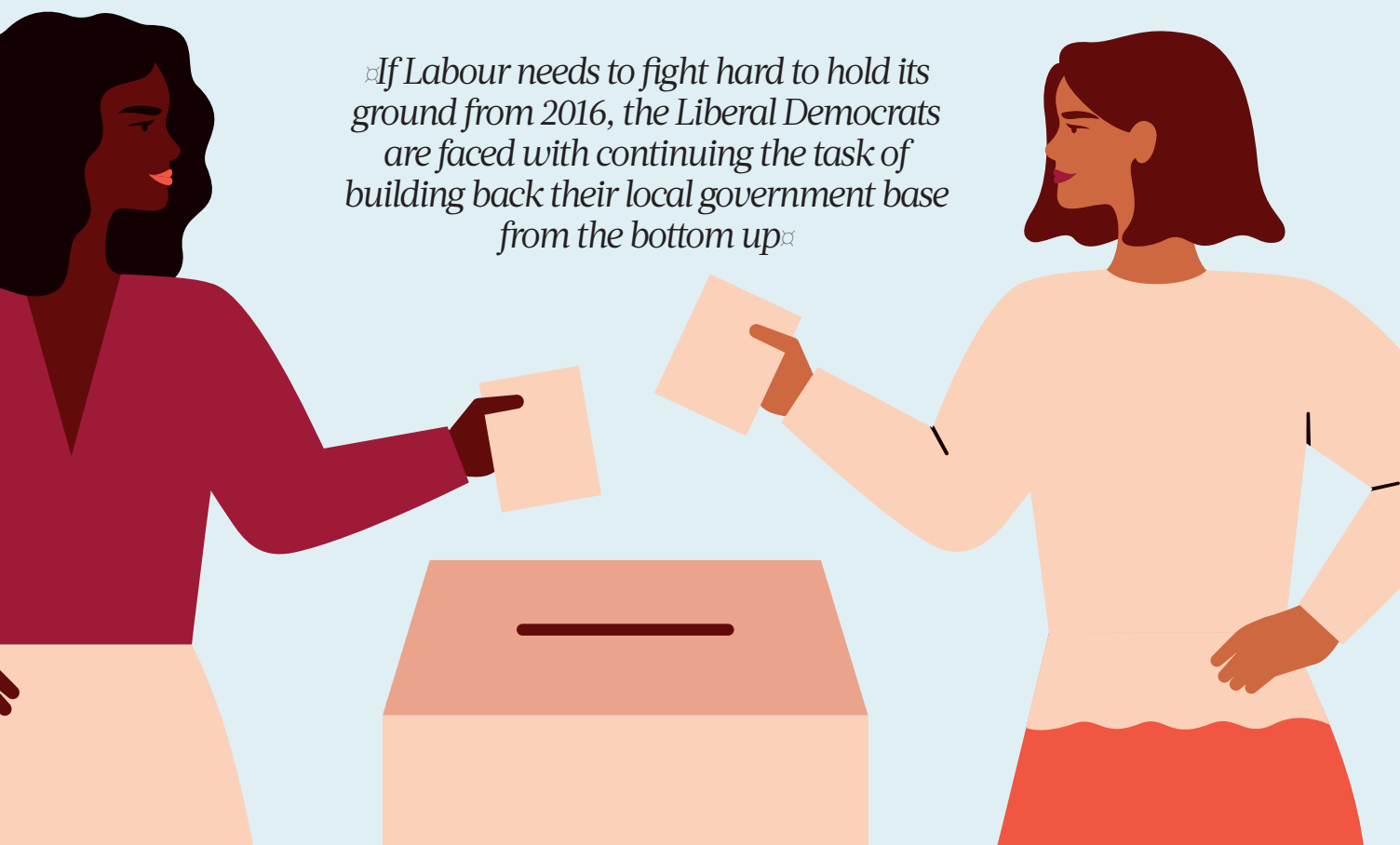
Elections originally scheduled for 2020

2,662 seats in 115 local authorities, including 34 metropolitan boroughs, 22 unitary councils, and 59 districts.

Councils currently controlled			
Con	Lab	Lib Dem	No overall control
30	51	6	28

Seats being defended mainly from 2016*					
Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	Ind	Other
894	1,263	311	44	59	91

*accounting for boundary changes but not casual vacancies/defections



✧ If Labour needs to fight hard to hold its ground from 2016, the Liberal Democrats are faced with continuing the task of building back their local government base from the bottom up ✧

by an acrimonious split in the Conservative opposition group.

District councils that hold elections by thirds tend to be concentrated in more urban areas, so here, too, Labour must be wary of any perception that it has slipped back since 2016. Councils like Ipswich and Lincoln remain solidly under the party's control despite parliamentary losses to the Conservatives 16 months ago.

Crawley has had a Conservative MP since 2010, but the local authority has swung between the two main parties over that period. It now could not be closer.

They polled the same share of the vote at whole council elections following boundary changes in 2019 and each defends six seats from then. With employment at Gatwick airport badly hit by the collapse in air traffic, post-election bragging rights could take on wider significance.

There are similarly close Labour-Conservative battles further north. A strong Labour performance in Rossendale in 2016 saw the party win 10 of the 12 seats contested. A single seat loss now would deprive it of an overall majority.

Labour appears to have more of a cushion in Amber Valley, but holding off the Conservatives in a council they held for two decades until 2019 would be a symbolic success nonetheless.

If Labour needs to fight hard to hold its ground from 2016, the Liberal Democrats are faced with continuing the task of building back their local government base from the bottom up. Councils like Cheltenham, Eastleigh (Liberal Democrat since 1994) and Watford remained loyal even through the dark days of the coalition, and they have gained Mole Valley, Three Rivers and Winchester during the past three years.

Their rare general election victory in St Albans will give them hope of getting closer to control (they won 11 wards there in 2019 compared with six in 2016), and it may be that the coincident county council elections elsewhere in southern England will also prove fertile territory.

In three authorities, though, the elections postponed from last year have 2017 as their point of comparison.

The newly created unitary authorities in Buckinghamshire, North Northamptonshire, and West Northamptonshire have inaugural contests based on three seats in each pre-existing county division.

With 147 members, Buckinghamshire Council will be the largest in the country until its boundaries and councillor/elector ratios are reviewed.

Four years ago, the Conservatives won handsomely in each of these three cases – just as they did across much of

shire England. They made more than 400 net seat gains and nudged 40 per cent in our calculation of the national equivalent share of the vote. Labour's share by contrast was below 30 per cent.

The results did not prove a good predictor of Theresa May's prospects in the 2017 general election held just five weeks later, but they are the base against which the contests always scheduled for this point in the local electoral cycle must be measured.

And that means that it is the Conservatives who could be on the back foot – as we will explain next month.

Welsh by-elections

Although a dozen or so local by-elections have taken place in Scotland either side of the strict winter lockdown, there had been no such contests in England or Wales for a year.

Wales, however, has now begun to dip its toe in the water and 18 March saw electors in three wards go to the polls.

There was an Independent hold in Conwy, and Plaid Cymru kept the seat it was defending in Denbighshire. In the Maesydre ward in Wrexham, though, Plaid registered a gain from Labour.

The slump in Labour's vote compared with 2017 is not a good augury for the party.

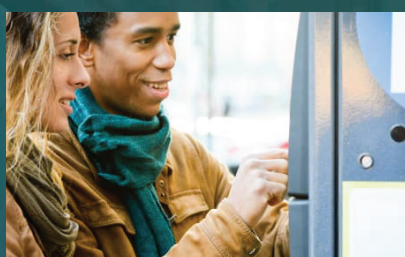


BaySentry SOLUTIONS

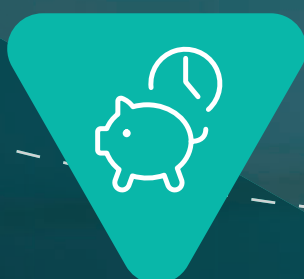
Ethical & effective car park management services

BaySentry Solutions is a parking management company operating in various public and private sectors including retail, leisure, commercial and residential.

Through ethical enforcement, we encourage drivers to adhere to parking rules and regulations, allowing car parks to run efficiently.



We strive to:



SAVE LANDOWNERS
TIME AND MONEY



IMPROVE CAR
PARK EFFICIENCY



DETER INCONSIDERATE
PARKING

For more information:



baysentry.co.uk



enquiries@baysentry.co.uk



INDIVIDUAL MEMBER OF THE
BRITISH PARKING ASSOCIATION

