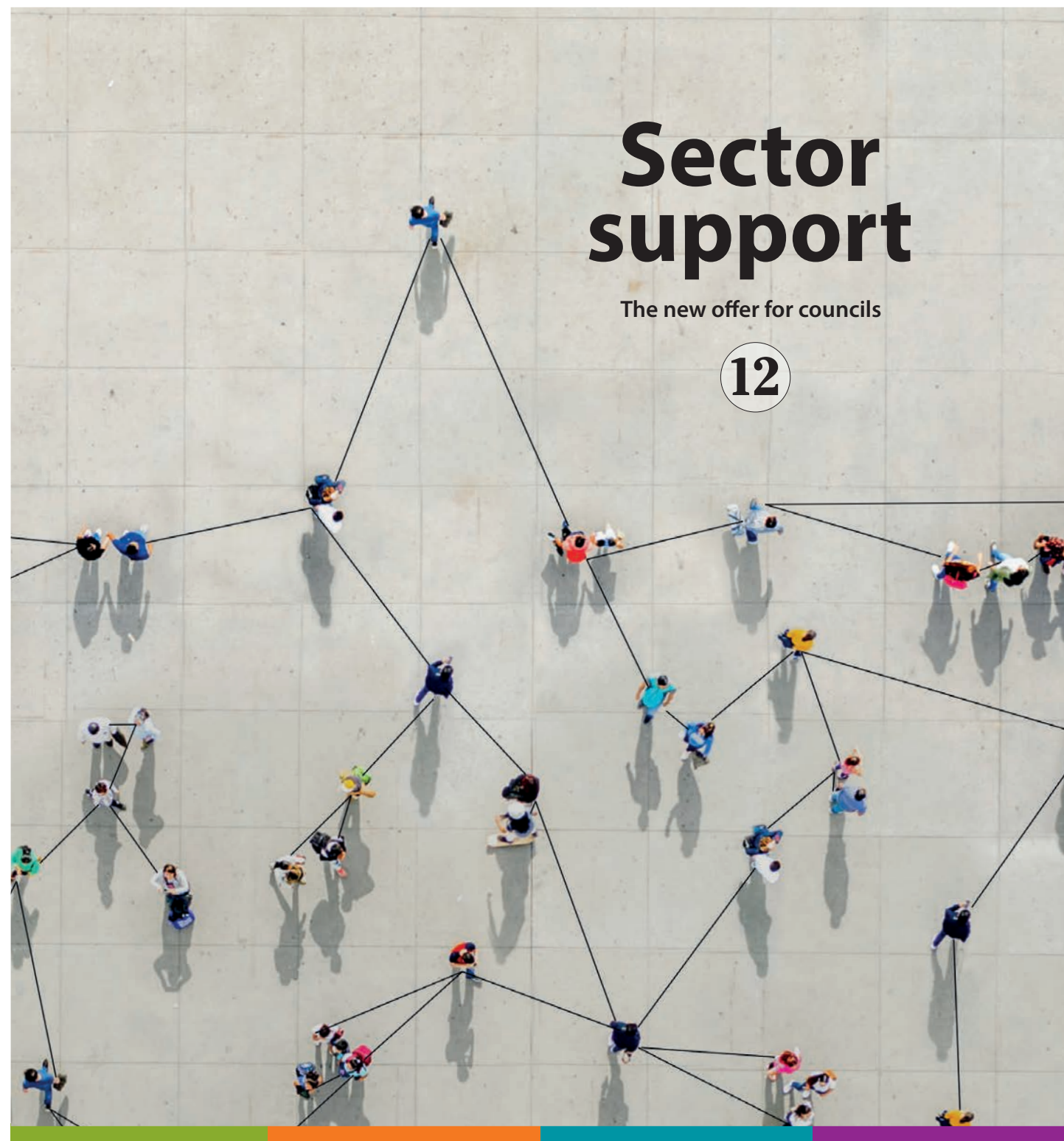


Sector support

The new offer for councils

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Full analysis of the May local elections

Helping looked after and vulnerable children with reading and numeracy



Letterbox Club is designed to support children aged 3-13 who are looked after, vulnerable or on the edge of care.

Each child registered will receive **six separate parcels**, containing up to **14 books, 10 maths games** and around **40 items of stationery**.

Letterbox Club can be purchased using the Pupil Premium Grant for **£135 per child**.

The programme is managed by BookTrust, the **UK's largest children's reading charity**.

Find out more at booktrust.org.uk/letterboxclub

Registration closes on 26 July 2021.

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A new start?

Congratulations to all of you who have been re-elected or are newly elected to local councils, and our thanks to those who have stood down, or were not re-elected, for your valuable public service.

After one of the largest and most complex set of local elections (p30), a packed Queen's Speech (p16), and (hopefully) continued progress towards the lifting of all pandemic-related restrictions in late June (p10), it feels like a new start for many of us.

The LGA has developed a support hub for new councillors (see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/councillor-development/new-councillor-hub) and is holding virtual national welcome events for newly elected councillors on 11, 22 and 28 June (see www.local.gov.uk/events).

We will again be offering support to all councils where there is a change of political control, as part of the new sector support and improvement offer to councils, which you can read more about in this edition of *first* (p12).

Finally, the LGA's annual conference takes place virtually from 6-8 July, with confirmed speakers including Communities and Local Government Secretary Robert Jenrick, Liberal Democrat Leader Sir Ed Davey MP, Baroness Lane-Fox and DJ Roman Kemp. Please book your place at www.local.gov.uk/events

Cllr James Jamieson
is LGA Chairman



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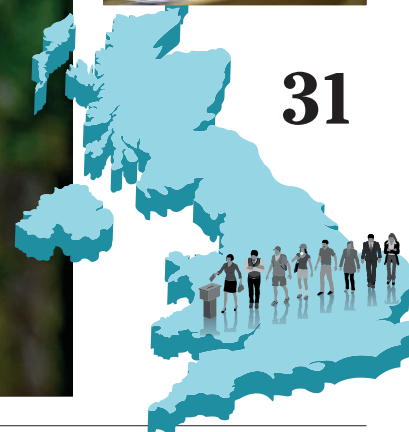
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Local
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Association

Stepping up on levelling up



The Government has renewed its commitment to levelling up as part of the recovery from the pandemic, with new announcements focusing on better access to high-quality education, improved infrastructure in town centres, and more public sector jobs outside of London.

These include details of a further 57 English high streets to receive a share of more than £830 million to improve transport links, build new homes and

transform under-used spaces, as part of the Future High Streets Fund.

The Home Office and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy are the latest government departments to relocate thousands of civil service jobs out of London, to Salford, Birmingham, Cardiff, Darlington and Stoke-on-Trent.

And the Department for Education is investing an additional £18 million in 12 more 'opportunity areas' to help early years providers, schools, colleges, universities,

businesses, charities and local authorities work together to ensure all children and young people reach their full potential.

The announcements were made as a new report from the House of Lords' Public Services Committee called on the Government to adopt a "more holistic approach" to the levelling up agenda, to ensure areas dubbed "left-behind" are not "short-changed".

Its position paper on levelling up and public services concludes that the Government needs to give local authorities and other local service providers more autonomy for levelling up to be successful, and criticises current funding mechanisms for being overly centralised.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "The pandemic has shown that, with the right funding and freedoms, councils can improve people's lives. It is important that this report recognises that the COVID-19 recovery needs to include greater powers for local councils and their communities.

"With the right powers and sustainable funding in the Government's forthcoming Levelling Up White Paper, councils can work closely with businesses and local partners to help the Government meet its ambition to level up the country." See p7.



See <https://bit.ly/3f3cuEW> for the LGA's new local employment and skills recovery learning hub

Variants mean roadmap remains under review

As first was going to press, the Government was still planning to end the remaining legal limits on social contact in England from 21 June but had warned no decision would be made until the week before, given concerns over new variants.

Thousands of cases of the B.1617.2 variant of concern, first identified in India, have been confirmed across the country,

with initial clusters in the North West and London.

Scientists believe the variant does spread more easily, but early data suggests current vaccines still work against it.

At the time of writing, more than 70 per cent of UK adults had received their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, with almost 40 per cent of people fully vaccinated.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "The new variant is a worrying development and we all need to play our part in ensuring we limit any further transmission.

"Councils and their communities, local NHS colleagues and national government have worked hard to get us to this point and I would urge everyone to listen to local

advice to ensure we all do the right things to keep our local communities safe.

"We all want to keep the roadmap on course for the eventual lifting of all restrictions, and the best way to do this is by letting councils get on with local infection control.

"Councils need local flexibility to deploy all the tools available, which may mean that we need to move to more targeted vaccinations. I would ask that the Government lets us do whatever we need to in local areas to protect our communities."

● See p10.



Empty offices 'could lead to poor housing conversions'

The LGA has warned that office blocks left empty following the pandemic are at risk of being turned into potentially substandard housing under permitted development rights, which allow developers to convert buildings into homes without planning permission.

It comes as new analysis by the LGA has found that more than 16,000 affordable homes could have been lost in England in the past five years under permitted development.

In some cases, office conversions can provide suitable accommodation, but the LGA has long had concerns about some of the substandard housing created from permitted development conversions, and the lack of any requirement for developers to provide affordable homes or supporting infrastructure.

In some areas of the country, office-to-residential conversions account for a significant proportion of new homes. In 2019/20, 56.6 per

cent of all new homes in Trafford were office conversions, with 40.9 per cent in Crawley, 37.5 per cent in Harlow, 36.7 per cent in Walsall and 36.3 per cent in Luton.

The LGA is calling for permitted development rights to be scrapped as part of a strengthening of the locally led planning system.

It fears that many offices and other types of business premises potentially left redundant because of greater home working and the economic downturn will be acquired by developers, to bypass the planning system and be turned into housing.

Cllr David Renard, LGA Housing Spokesperson, said: "Councils are committed to building the housing this country desperately needs as part of the national recovery from coronavirus, but we urge the Government to protect the future quality of new homes by permanently revoking the permitted development rights for change of use into homes."

1.1m planned homes 'still to be built'

New analysis by the LGA has revealed that more than 1.1 million homes granted planning permission in the last decade are yet to be built.

Latest figures show that 2,782,300 homes have been granted planning permission by councils since 2010/11 but over the same period only 1,627,730 have been built.

The LGA is calling for councils to be given powers to incentivise developers to build housing more quickly, including to charge developers full council tax for every unbuilt development from when the original planning permission expires.

It should also be easier for councils to use compulsory purchase powers to acquire stalled housing sites or sites where developers do not build out to contractually agreed timescales.

The number of planning permissions granted for new homes has more than doubled since 2010, with nine in 10 planning applications approved by councils. The LGA says this shows that it is the housing delivery system, not planning, that needs to be reformed.

It comes as LGA polling found that 80 per cent of MPs and 88 per cent of Peers think councils should have more financial freedoms and powers to build new homes (see p7).

Cllr David Renard, LGA Housing Spokesperson, said: "It is good the number of homes built each year is increasing. But, by giving councils the right powers to incentivise developers to get building once planning permission has been granted, we can go further and faster."

£203m for rough sleeping as ban on evictions eased

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick has announced a further £203 million for councils to help get rough sleepers off the streets and into safe accommodation.

The funding will pay for support projects such as shelters, specialist mental health or addiction services, as well as targeted support to help rough sleepers off the streets.

Councils, charities and other local groups will be able to use the money to fund 14,500 bed spaces and 2,700 support staff in England.

The funding is part of an overall £750 million package to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping this year.

Cllr David Renard, LGA Housing Spokesperson, said: "We want to work with government on a cross-departmental homelessness prevention strategy to make the success in getting rough sleepers off the streets during the pandemic the new normal, rather than a one-off emergency response, and end rough sleeping."

Meanwhile, the Government has also announced that the ban on bailiff-enforced evictions will end on 31 May.

Notice periods, previously extended to six months during the pandemic, will be set at four months from 1 June. Subject to public health advice, notice periods will return to pre-pandemic levels from 1 October.

Cllr Renard said: "We recognise that the ban on eviction enforcement, which provided vital reassurance to renters during the pandemic, cannot continue indefinitely. However, councils remain concerned over the potential rise in homelessness, and the pressure this will add to already over-stretched services."

"It is vital there is a plan in place to support and protect households to stay in their homes."



In brief

Brownfield funding

The 2 June deadline is fast approaching for the latest round of the One Public Estate Brownfield Land Release Fund. The fund supports the release of council-owned brownfield land for housing and supports self-build and custom-build projects on both brownfield and greenfield sites. Capital grant funding of £75 million is available to accelerate the release of these sites. All English local authorities are eligible to apply, with the exception of those in mayoral combined authority areas that have already had the opportunity to receive funding. To find out more, please visit www.local.gov.uk/open-brownfield-land-release-fund

Recycling review

The Government is consulting on increasing the consistency of recycling collected from households, businesses and other organisations in England. The proposals include statutory guidance on new minimum service standards for rubbish and recycling collections, and separate, weekly food waste collections from homes from 2023. Consultations close on 4 July. Cllr David Renard, LGA Environment Spokesperson, said: "We support the ambition to increase recycling and eliminate all avoidable waste by 2050. However, it is councils who know their local areas best and should be able to decide locally on how recycling and household waste is collected and what works for their residents. Any new requirements must also be fully funded."

FRS ethics code

A new Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services has been launched by the LGA, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC). Cllr Nick Chard, LGA Lead on the Core Code of Ethics, said: "The sector-led core code is designed to be flexible so it can be adopted and reflect any existing codes and governance arrangements local services already have in place. It aspires to ensure we have a positive and diverse working culture within the fire and rescue service, making it a great place to work for everyone, while also maintaining public trust and confidence."

Queen's Speech 'levels up' but not on social care

The Government has put forward its new legislative programme, with a wide range of measures set out in the Queen's Speech to Parliament including around planning, jobs and skills, health and care reform, environment, climate change and building safety.

The speech also referenced the Government's levelling up agenda and promised plans for social care reform, but there were no announcements on letting councils hold virtual meetings.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "The LGA and councils look forward to working closely with the Government to help deliver on its commitment to level up powers and invest in local areas across all parts of the country.

"With the right funding and freedoms, councils will play a leading role in the country's recovery from the pandemic, driving improvements in public health, boosting local economic growth, reviving town and city centres, building more homes, improving our roads and equipping people with the skills they need to succeed so no-one is left behind."

He said it was good that proposals on social care reform will be brought forward, but

called on ministers to set out urgently a clear timeline and "concrete funding proposals" to put adult social care on a sustainable footing, for the benefit of people of all ages who rely on its services.

He added: "We are keen to work with the Government and other stakeholders on a cross-party basis to achieve this. We cannot keep kicking this can down the road."

● See p16 and the LGA's on-the-day briefing at www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses for more on the Queen's Speech.



MPs call for 10-year social care plan

A cross-party committee of MPs has called on ministers to publish a 10-year plan for social care, with detailed costings.

In a report on the Government's White Paper on health and care reform, the Commons' Health and Social Care Committee says that without secure long-term funding, problems which have "bedevilled the care sector for decades" would not be resolved.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "The absence of a long-term, fully funded plan for social care has the potential to destabilise other proposed health and care reforms.

"A clear timeline is urgently needed from government on when concrete proposals will be brought forward."

The White Paper proposals include improving integration of care and health services and the introduction of statutory

integrated care systems (ICs) – measures now included in the Health and Care Bill announced in the Queen's Speech (p16).

The committee is supportive of these proposals, provided proper accountability mechanisms are put in place. The Secretary of State, at the committee's suggestion, has committed to include provisions in the bill to enable the Care Quality Commission to undertake ratings of ICs.

Cllr Fothergill said the LGA supports the aim of greater transparency in social care but has significant concerns about the recommendation for Ofsted-style ratings for councils' social care services.

"Assurance needs to build on existing sector-led improvement support, recognise local democratic accountability and give a meaningful voice to people who draw on social care," he said.



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Meeting in the time of coronavirus

Almost every council holds a meeting of all councillors in May, following the local elections. Because the Government didn't legislate to allow the continuation of online and hybrid meetings, many of them will have looked like this one held by Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council at the Bournemouth International Centre, at an extra cost of more than £6,000 to comply with current covid restrictions.

A High Court judgment in April confirmed

that primary legislation is needed to give councils similar powers to those granted temporarily by the Coronavirus Act 2020 to meet virtually.

The LGA continues to press for councils to be able to hold meetings online. This flexibility has been paramount in allowing access for both councillors and the public to council meetings, and councils want to be able to continue their business in this way, especially in times of emergency..

● See p27, p29.

MPs support greater powers for councils

Eight in 10 MPs say councils should have more financial freedoms and powers to build homes in their area and 72 per cent say they should have more control over local taxes, according to exclusive LGA polling by Savanta ComRes.

Four in five Peers and 58 per cent of MPs also agree that councils should be given greater powers and funding to drive employment and training schemes in their areas.

Over the past decade, England has taken steps towards greater devolution, but progress has stalled, with no new deals announced since November 2017.

The LGA is calling on government to bring forward 'turbo-charged' proposals for devolution that give all councils the power to meet the challenges and opportunities facing their communities over the coming decade,

and for an end to devolution deals designed by Whitehall.

It wants to see devolution deals that are locally led, leave nothing off the table, and that are backed by adequate resources.

LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson said: "Bringing power and resources closer to all of us is the key for all our communities to thrive.

"The pandemic has shown that, with the right funding and freedoms, councils can improve people's lives and ensure the successful delivery of those priorities that are shared by national and local government.

"Different areas of the country will need their own unique response in the coming months and years and the Government needs to empower councils to be able to play a central role helping the country recover from the pandemic."

In brief

LGA political balance

The LGA's political balance has been updated following May's local elections. The Conservative Group remains the largest party at the LGA with 39.85 per cent of councillors, followed by Labour on 35.8 per cent, Liberal Democrats on 12.46 per cent and the Independents/Others on 11.89 per cent. Cllr David Fothergill, Leader of Somerset County Council, has been appointed Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, after his predecessor Cllr Ian Hudspeth, formerly Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, was not re-elected. See p30.

New LGA president

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson is to become the LGA's new president, succeeding outgoing President Lord Kerslake. The Crossbench Peer and LGA Vice President will be formally elected at the LGA's General Assembly on 6 July, during the LGA's annual conference (see www.local.gov.uk/events). Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "Lord Kerslake has worked tirelessly as our president and has been a vital advocate for the role of local government. We thank him wholeheartedly for his dedication. We are delighted that Tanni has agreed to become our new president. She will be a fantastic advocate for us to ensure local government continues to have a strong, credible and influential voice within Parliament so that councils across the country can deliver local solutions to national problems."

Pay offer

Council employees have been offered a pay increase of 1.5 per cent from 1 April 2021.

The National Employers, which negotiates pay on behalf of 350 local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, made the offer to unions in May. It will affect around 1.5 million employees. The total increase to the national pay bill resulting from this offer is £279 million (covering the period to 31 March 2022). This pay offer does not apply to council chief executives, senior officers, teachers or firefighters, who are covered by separate national pay arrangements.

In brief

Fly-tipping

Councils had to clear up 976,000 fly-tipping incidents in 2019/20, from tarmac and asbestos to tyres and even a boat, at a cost of almost £50 million. Despite local authorities cracking down on offenders and the number of court fines increasing by 30 per cent, the LGA is calling for sentencing guidelines to be reviewed as the number of fly-tips refuses to decline. Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson, said: "Fly-tipping is inexcusable and isn't just an eyesore for residents, but a serious risk to public health, creating pollution and attracting rats and other vermin."

Mental health and wellbeing

The Government has announced a further £17.4 million in mental health funding for schools and colleges to help them recover from the pandemic. The funding will be used to train senior mental health leads and improve partnerships between health and education leaders in local areas. In response, Cllr Teresa Heritage, Vice Chairman of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, highlighted the vital role of local councils and schools in helping children with their mental health and wellbeing, and the importance of early support to reduce the need for clinical interventions.

School uniform

A law has been passed confirming that schools will have a legal duty to follow new statutory guidance on the cost of school uniforms. The guidance, to be published in the autumn, will encourage schools to consider high street alternatives to branded items and include guidance on encouraging second-hand uniform, schools' arrangements with suppliers, and ensuring parents have access to clear information about uniform policies. An LGA spokesperson said: "This new law will help parents avoid being pushed into debt in order for their children to look smart, by making school uniform more affordable."



Millions 'could be lost' from school budgets



A total of £118 million for disadvantaged pupils could be lost from school budgets in England this year because of a government change in how this funding is calculated, new LGA analysis shows.

The pupil premium funding, which pays for free school meals and academic support, amounts to £1,345 a year for every eligible primary age pupil, and £955 for every eligible secondary age pupil.

However, for the 2021/22 financial year, this funding will be based on the October 2020 census of pupils instead of the January 2021 census.

As a result, schools with children who have become eligible for this funding during the pandemic will not receive any additional funding for another whole year.

An LGA survey of councils and analysis of government census figures shows that this change could result in a loss of pupil premium funding of around £93 million for primary schools and £25 million for secondary schools.

This equates to an average loss of around £600,000 in primary school pupil premium funding per local authority area.

The LGA is calling on the Government to change the date of pupil premium reporting to ensure that schools receive funding for all eligible pupils this year.

Cllr Teresa Heritage, Vice Chairman of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Councils and schools want to work with the Government on education recovery and share concerns about the needs of disadvantaged children who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

"Pupil premium funding is vital to support the Government's levelling up agenda and education recovery plans. It is imperative that the Government ensures that no school loses out in receiving this vital funding this year and that no child is left behind."

Rise in EHCPs 'a pressing issue' for councils

New figures show that the number of children and young people in England with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) was up 10 per cent at 430,697 in January 2021.

Meanwhile, an Ofsted report states that some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in mainstream schools are not getting enough help to support their learning and development.

The study found that specialist support from multi-agency services often complements the support offered by schools and is valued by families and school staff, but that it is not always timely or implemented appropriately.

Cllr Teresa Heritage, Vice Chairman of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said it was good that Ofsted's research recognises that multi-agency support for pupils with

SEND often complements the support offered by schools.

But she added: "The continued rise in demand for overall and new EHCPs remains a pressing issue for councils.

"All children, including those with SEND, will undoubtedly need additional support in the coming weeks and months due to the impact of the pandemic.

"The Government needs to urgently complete its ongoing review of the SEND system. It needs to set out reforms that increase mainstream inclusion, provide councils with long-term certainty of funding to meet the needs of all children with SEND, and give councils the power to hold education partners to account if their provision for identifying and supporting children with SEND is not adequate."

PARLIAMENT

Lobbying for local government

The LGA has published its annual report on its parliamentary work

The LGA is the national voice of local government.

A vital part of our role is working with parliamentarians to inform their scrutiny of legislation that affects councils, and to shape the reports of select committees and all-party parliamentary groups.

The LGA benefits from a significant profile in Westminster. Since April 2020, we have provided briefings for 51 parliamentary debates and 25 debates on legislation.

LGA representatives appeared before 39 parliamentary inquiries and we have produced 77 written submissions to help inform a wide range of recommendations in parliamentary reports.

We have also informed debates on primary legislation and been quoted more than 500 times in Parliament. This profile is vital in ensuring councils, their aspirations and their concerns are well represented.

In the past year, we have worked on several key pieces of legislation, including the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the Fire Safety Act 2021.

On the former, we highlighted the important role councils will continue to play in tackling abuse, and helped secure new funding to help councils with the introduction of the act. We also worked with the Government as it committed to developing a national domestic abuse perpetrator strategy, something the LGA has long called for.

On the latter, we highlighted the need for greater protection for leaseholders affected by fire safety issues, which the Government has said will be dealt with in the Building Safety Bill, announced in the Queen's Speech (see p16). Meanwhile, to



address our concern about the shortage of fire safety assessors, the Government brought forward amendments to ensure that the legislation will protect responsible persons in law where they are genuinely unable to review their fire risk assessments, and to ensure that higher-risk premises are assessed before lower-risk ones.

Through our engagement with parliamentary committees, we continue to provide thought leadership, setting out the challenges councils face and the opportunities to do things differently on a wide range of issues.

Colleagues from local government give generously of their time to provide evidence to parliamentary committees and inquiries on behalf of the LGA, our special interest groups, and their own councils.

Highlights from the numerous inquiries addressed in the past year include:

- the Public Accounts Committee's report into the cost and effectiveness of NHS Test and Trace, which said that, had councils been involved earlier in the test and trace programme, it could have led to a more effective system

- the Health and Social Care Committee's report, 'Social care: funding and workforce', which highlighted our analysis of the funding gap in adult social care services and echoed our call for a long-term, sustainable funding solution for the sector
- the Public Accounts Committee's report on housing rough sleepers, which recognised the vital work of councils in rapidly housing rough sleepers as part of the 'Everyone In' programme
- the Education Committee's report on adult skills and lifelong learning, which included information about our proposal for further devolution through a 'Work Local' model, and recognised providers of adult and community learning as 'the jewel in the crown of the nation's adult education landscape'.

The LGA continues to work on a cross-party basis across Parliament to promote the views of local government, ensure that the value of local place-based leadership is recognised in national decision-making, and to demonstrate why councils are so important to a healthy democracy.



This is an edited version of 'LGA in Parliament 2020/21', which you can read in full at www.local.gov.uk/parliament/lga-parliament-202021



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

A shot in the arm

Vaccination uptake is key to tackling the pandemic, including new variants



As **first** was going to press, the success of the vaccination programme and the sacrifices made by communities across the country had helped to reduce the number of COVID-19 deaths and hospitalisations to their lowest levels since last July.

In England and Wales, subject to ongoing precautions and limits on numbers, people are finally able to eat and drink indoors in pubs and restaurants, and meet family and friends in their homes.

Cinemas, hotels, theatres and museums have reopened and some foreign travel is permitted, in what is the most significant easing of pandemic-related restrictions yet.

I know that you and your teams have been working hard to ensure that this latest step on the roadmap is managed as safely as possible, and are now planning ahead for when all restrictions are (hopefully) lifted on 21 June.

The worry, of course, is the spread of new variants. At the time of writing, there were dozens of local authority areas with five or more confirmed cases of the B.1.617.2 variant of concern first identified in India, and thousands of cases in the UK overall.

We know that vaccination is our best option to tackle this awful virus, and more than 20.8 million UK adults have

now received both doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, which is really positive news. I recently had my second dose and am hugely grateful to all the people who made that possible.

It is so important that we encourage everyone to get vaccinated. Analysis by Public Health England indicates that up to the end of April, the vaccination programme had prevented 11,700 deaths among those aged 60 and over and at least 33,000 hospitalisations among those aged 65-plus – based on people receiving their first jab only.

Vaccination uptake rates in England

✧ We know that vaccination is our best option to tackle this awful virus ✧

remain high, with all priority cohorts showing well over 90 per cent nationally, while Wales is even further ahead based on the percentage of its population to have received a first jab.

However, in response to the Indian variant, and in addition to increased 'surge' testing in affected areas, the Government and NHS England are bringing forward second jabs for people aged 50 and over or who are clinically vulnerable, and have urged local authorities and voluntary and community sector organisations to

continue to do everything they can to maximise uptake.

Younger people aged 36 and 37 are also now being invited to book their vaccinations. As more and more people are invited to come forward, it is crucial that we engage with those who are harder to reach.

I know that all of us across local government have been and continue to work flat out to ensure vaccinations reach all of our communities; we know our local areas best, and there has been some incredible work developed on vaccination uptake. Some of this is available on the LGA's website (see below).

Consequently, the LGA continues to urge government to allow local flexibility so that councils, working closely with our NHS partners and others, can do whatever we need to do to protect our communities – including potentially moving to more targeted vaccinations.

Councils have local outbreak management plans in place. The Government needs to let us get on with implementing them so we can continue to play our part in the national effort against COVID-19.



For LGA resources on vaccinations, including council case studies and using behavioural insights to improve vaccination uptake, please visit www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-vaccinations

Forget what you think you know... about councils

The LGA's podcasts aim to improve public understanding of what councils do

Last year, the LGA launched its new podcast show, *Forget What You Think You Know*. The podcast aims to uncover truths about councils and the services they deliver, and highlight the key challenges councils face to keep these services running.

Each episode features special guests, who discuss key topics and what they would like to see changed to help councils deliver for their communities.

Our aim is for the podcasts to provide a helpful insight for those who are new to local government, and to give the general public a better understanding of what councils do for them.

In our most recent episode, launched in May, Esther Barrott, a graduate on the National Graduate Development Programme, takes us on a journey to find out more about what councils do and how they work, the general perceptions that surround them, and the importance of local elections.

Esther is joined first by Cllr Peter Fleming, Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, who shares why he got involved in local government and what the role of a councillor involves.

"You have got to love people; we are in a people-to-people business", he says, describing how a five-minute walk up the high street can take 40 minutes because people stop him to talk about everything from sustainable transport and economic development to whether the council should buy a building as an investment.

Also featured is Jackie Weaver, Chief Officer of Cheshire Association of Local Councils, who gives an insight into the story behind the famous parish council meeting that made her an internet star,

and talks about why voting in local elections is so important.

"It's probably the local elections that are going to have far more impact on our lives than the national politics," she says.

"My interest is really more about local communities and helping people to do what they think is right for their local community. I do feel very strongly that, in local democracy, there's a place for everybody."

We also hear from Lord Simon Woolley, Founder and Director of Operation Black Vote, on why it is important that diverse audiences engage with councils and local democracy.

Councils "could be engines of change", he tells Esther – but they have to look at themselves, their senior

teams and their council chambers, see "where the gaps are", and act.

"They say that their doors are open, but it's not enough. It's not enough because [of] the cynicism of many communities, including working class, [who] feel, 'What's the point of engaging, when the people that are making these decisions don't care about me?'" says Lord Woolley.

"Leaving it to people that don't care about you is not a good plan for democracy, is not a good plan for your children's education or housing or health. It's getting the citizens to realise that they are the democratic masters and recognising that those in the council chambers, the local council chambers, are the democratic servants."

This is the fourth episode in the *Forget What You Think You Know* series, and follows previous podcasts on the COVID-19 vaccination rollout, homelessness, and council housing.

A new episode will be available each month, with forthcoming topics including devolution, employment and skills, and climate change. Please show your support by listening, downloading, subscribing, and sharing the podcast with your friends and family.

 Visit www.local.gov.uk/lga-podcast for more information, or download our podcasts by searching 'LGA podcast' on Apple podcasts, Spotify and Acast

FORGET WHAT YOU THINK YOU KNOW



Support for councils

Climate change

Achieving reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and increasing biodiversity will remain core priorities of councils for the foreseeable future.

Councils have already begun urgent action to implement steps toward green recovery from COVID-19, to combat the negative impacts of climate change and to deliver net zero carbon by 2050. The LGA's climate change programme supports councils to respond more effectively to these challenges through a range of initiatives. These include:

- the Net Zero Innovation programme, in collaboration with University College London, which brings together local authorities, universities and other stakeholders to address climate challenges at the local level
- a free greenhouse gas accounting tool, developed with Local Partnerships (see next month's **first** for more on this).
- our Climate Change Hub, providing a single platform to access our climate change tools and support, including leadership training, webinars, podcasts, guidance, toolkits, and council case studies – see www.local.gov.uk/climate-change.

The LGA has launched the new sector support and improvement offer for councils



Councillor **Peter Fleming** is Chairman of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board

Councils operate at the very heart of their communities. From caring for the most vulnerable to driving economic growth, councils provide support to help people improve their lives and the leadership needed to make shared local priorities a reality. This has never been more important. Councils' ability to meet the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic is possible because of the remarkable relationship they have with their communities.

The sector support offer, funded by the UK Government, is shaped by what councils tell us they need to respond to the opportunities and challenges they are facing.

The support offer has its basis in

the sector-led improvement approach, which is underpinned by the following core principles:

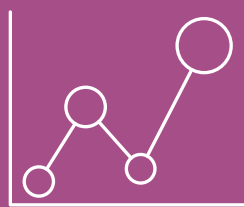
- councils are responsible for their own performance and improvement
- councils are primarily accountable to local communities
- councils have a collective responsibility for the performance of the sector as a whole
- the role of the LGA is to maintain an overview of the performance of the sector and to provide tools and support.

In employing this approach, the offer extends across political and managerial leadership, and involves use of member and officer peers, to ensure robust, strategic and credible challenge and support.

The updated sector support offer is designed to support councils as they respond to issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, including financial challenges, community engagement, public health, and other issues relating to



SUPPORT
COUNCIL
IMPROVEMENT
USING PEER
SUPPORT



SUPPORT
FINANCIAL
RESILIENCE AND
ECONOMIC
RECOVERY OF
COUNCILS



SUPPORT
COUNCIL
LEADERSHIP,
WORKFORCE AND
COMMUNICATIONS



SUPPORT
SAFER AND MORE
SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES

Changes in political leadership

The LGA has updated and refreshed its advice and support to councillors and officers whose councils may be undergoing changes in political leadership following the local elections on 6 May.

This support offer is flexible, tailored and free, involving access to experienced member and officer peers, support networks, practical tips and guidance, and shared learning opportunities.

The support offer can include (but is not restricted to):

- support through the leadership transition, post-election – both formal and informal
- workshops and away days with top management and political teams, to

- support and help build relationships
- support to clarify strategic priorities
- mentoring for leaders, portfolio holders and chief executives
- the sharing of learning, including access to closed webinars and good practice from councils that have experienced a change of political leadership and/or being in 'no overall control'
- guidance to recognise when systems and relationships are not working and what to do next
- mediation.



Visit www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/changes-political-leadership **to find out more**

economic recovery and renewal.

We also offer a range of programmes to help develop and enhance councils' local leadership and workforce, and to engage with residents and transform services, involving access to learning and development opportunities and performance data.

We provide councils with further support to meet their statutory requirements and develop communities that are safer and more sustainable, including comprehensive climate change support.

There are four pillars to the support offer for 2021/22, covering the following programme areas:

- supporting council improvement using peer support
- supporting financial resilience and economic recovery of councils
- supporting council leadership, workforce and communications
- supporting safer and more sustainable communities.

Children's services, adult social services and cyber security remain core issues for councils and the LGA continues to offer support through programmes funded by other government departments, alongside programmes

including One Public Estate and the Planning Advisory Service.

We look forward to seeing more of you in person when social distancing measures ease and we are able to restart more elements of face to face support, including the corporate peer challenge programme. As councils are now focusing on the future, a peer challenge may provide a welcome opportunity to take stock and look ahead.

We will continue to make use of remote and blended support where you would welcome this.

Councils can access and learn more about all the available support from our regionally based principal advisors and regional teams – see below.



You can find your principal advisers at <https://bit.ly/3416uGv>

Please visit www.local.gov.uk/ SLI-offer to find out more about the LGA's sector support and improvement offer. See www.local.gov.uk/childrens-services-improvement for support with children's services, and for adult social care see <https://bit.ly/2QE4DnV>

Equalities, diversity and inclusion

Councils have a critical role to play in reducing inequalities and enhancing inclusion and cohesion within their communities, and recent consultation with the sector has highlighted that this remains a core priority.

The LGA's equalities, diversity and inclusion (EDI) hub brings together our range of support and resources on these issues, including:

- equalities peer support, including peer challenges and an equality framework for local government and fire and rescue services
- access to leadership programmes, which offer learning and development opportunities for councillors and officers
- workforce support, including advice on EDI in the workplace
- case studies, providing examples of good practice from councils across the country
- community cohesion, inclusion and equality support, which includes a number of resources on this subject area.

The hub supports councils' ambitions relating to EDI and community cohesion, as well as helping them meet their obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

Ensuring greater diversity, equality and inclusion within councils' own organisations and communities is important for local government and provides a clear pathway for a more vibrant democracy, supporting better life outcomes and representation for all.



See www.local.gov.uk/equalities-diversity-and-inclusion-hub **for the LGA's EDI hub.**

Contact your principal adviser to discuss bespoke EDI support for your council

UK Leisure Framework **update**

As it completes its fourth year, Jamie Groves, MD of Denbighshire Leisure, and Sarah Watts, CEO of Alliance Leisure, look at the impact of the UK's first dedicated leisure development framework

Why did you launch the UK Leisure Framework?

JG: Launched in 2017, the UK Leisure Framework was designed to help public sector bodies transform their leisure offer with successful and sustainable facilities. It was borne out of the success of our first partnership with Alliance Leisure, where we spent almost £10m upgrading facilities after years of under investment. This led us to develop the framework, appointing Alliance Leisure as leisure development partner, to help other local authorities by removing the burdens of public procurement.

How is the framework benefiting local authorities?

SW: The UK public sector procurement process is one of the longest and most expensive in the EU. By making the process quicker and easier, the framework makes the development of public sector leisure facilities much more efficient and affordable. The focus on reducing costs and improving efficiencies means local authorities can dedicate more of their budget to the development.

The framework adopts a full-service approach, including design, business planning, funding, construction and marketing. Working with experts in leisure regeneration and maximising efficiencies at every stage of the development helps ensure the finished project delivers desired outcomes and creates income-generating opportunities that drive sustainability.

What impact has the framework had?

SW: The framework has ensured the



successful completion of vital leisure projects designed to deliver lasting impact. Projects range from new pitches, such as the first 3G pitches in Anglesey, to transforming leisure facilities at scale as we helped Inverclyde Leisure to do, investing £2.6m in three leisure centres to achieve a 75% increase in net income and 51% rise in membership.

JG: To date, 41 projects have completed under the framework and 12 more are currently under way. Regardless of their size or cost, all projects are designed to impact local health and social outcomes by creating healthier communities, while also being economically sustainable to ensure local authorities achieve their income targets.

How can the framework help local authorities after the pandemic?

JG: The need for public leisure will be greater than ever post-pandemic, but facilities have

to be much more relevant if they are to create better social and financial returns for local authorities. By mitigating the risk and making developments easier and more cost-effective, the framework will allow councils to invest in the right leisure provision to bring economic, health and social benefits to their communities.

SW: Local authorities will need to broaden their offerings, both indoors and out, to create active environments that can be used by as many members of the community as possible to ensure value for money. The UK Leisure Framework is a proven vehicle for delivering inspiring schemes that increase opportunities for physical activity.

i For more information about the UK Leisure Framework visit www.LeisureFramework.co.uk

41 completed projects

120 completed project questionnaires

£144m committed investment

12 projects under way

Developing hybrid working

Councils are considering different ways of working in light of the pandemic

As we follow the Government roadmap to easing COVID-19 restrictions, attention has returned to the future of the office and how the ways we worked previously may change.

Discussions are focusing on hybrid working – a way of structuring work, communication, working hours and physical locations to enable our council staff to be as productive as possible, no matter where or when they work, and with whom.

We can learn many lessons from the new ways of remote and distributed working that the national lockdowns imposed on us.

However, we must also be aware that, in many instances, our covid-enforced working practices mostly relied on ‘lifting and shifting’ our office environments into our homes, or on frontline staff rapidly

developing new ways to deliver services according to what was emerging on a daily basis.

This was not proof of the success of ‘the great home-working experiment’, as some have billed it. This was about many employees trying to work differently in a crisis and adopting ways of working for that – and this will be difficult to sustain in the longer term.

However, this ‘shock’ to traditional workplaces has opened up the

Do new ways of working create opportunities for all staff?

possibility of exploring what different ways of working we could develop – ones that could truly represent our organisational principles and deliver our ambitions for our communities, while meeting the changing needs and desires of our staff and communities.

When considering such far-reaching changes to our working practices, there are some significant workforce issues to bear in mind.

The key questions to answer are whether hybrid working is right for your council, and why. For example, is moving to a hybrid model about managing financial pressures, and responding to recruitment and retention challenges, or being more eco-friendly (by having less commuting and travelling to work or fewer offices)? Whatever it is, start at the beginning, and explore all your organisation’s strategic objectives and how different arrangements of hybrid working could help you to deliver those.

Other key issues and questions to consider include:

- location – some local government roles will have less flexibility on where they are able to be performed
- consultation and engagement – employees, elected members, local partners and other stakeholders all need to be involved in thinking about, and developing, hybrid working practices
- productivity and performance – how will you manage and motivate staff when they are working more remotely?
- teamwork and collaboration – how will teams come together, share ideas, innovate, and learn from each other when they are working remotely?
- leadership and management – do managers understand how to manage and motivate staff who don’t sit next to them?
- employee health and wellbeing – what are your staff telling you about what works for them?
- equality, diversity and inclusion – do new ways of working create opportunities for all staff or just some? How do you avoid a two-tier workforce?
- finance – will different working patterns and locations save or cost money?
- governance and accountability – do your governance and reporting systems support more devolved decision-making and agility?

We examine each of these issues in more depth on the LGA’s website, at www.local.gov.uk/developing-hybrid-working-local-government, where you can also find out more about the LGA’s wider support for workforce and HR.

Our aim is to stimulate debate, share practice, generate innovation and shape ideas to help you develop new ways of working that are meaningful for your council.



The Queen's Speech 2021

Government outlines its plans for homes, health care, jobs, skills and the environment

Measures to reform the planning system, increase health and care integration, invest in new jobs, improve building safety, and tackle climate change formed a key part of the Queen's Speech announced after May's local elections.

Councils know their local areas best and stand ready to help lead efforts to ensure this new legislative agenda is transformational and delivers meaningful, positive change for people and communities.

Levelling up was one of the key themes of the Queen's Speech, and councils will be central to efforts to address the stark inequalities exposed by the pandemic.

One of the main lessons from the crisis is that councils can innovate well and help create and deliver new services from scratch and at speed.

All councils can support the drive for economic recovery and new infrastructure investment, build more homes where needed, join up public services, and provide greater access to jobs and prosperity.

With the Government setting its sights on delivering its target to build 300,000 homes a year, the speech contained significant commitments to reform the planning system.

The LGA reiterated that councils are granting permission for nine in 10 planning applications and are not

a barrier to development, yet more than 1.1 million homes given planning permission in the past decade are still to be built.

Councils want to work with government to reform and strengthen our planning system, ensuring it is locally led and delivers sustainable development.

The speech also saw the Government introduce a new Skills and Further Education Bill, aimed at tackling rising levels of long-term unemployment caused by the pandemic.

Councils are uniquely placed to bring together partners in local places to address these challenges. With adequate resourcing and powers, councils can bring together diverse national schemes to ensure delivery on the ground is more effective.

While the Government committed to bring forward plans to reform the social care system, councils urgently need a clear timeline.

It is vital that this is also converted into concrete funding proposals, to provide sustainable support to people of all ages who draw on social care to live the life they want to lead.

Many councils will also be disappointed to hear that the speech did not include legislation to allow them to hold online and hybrid meetings (see p27, p29). Councils want the flexibility to meet in this way and continue their business, especially in times of emergency.

Environment Bill

- Strengthens local powers to tackle air-quality issues.
- Protects nature by mandating 'biodiversity net gain' in the planning system.
- Introduces a consistent approach to recycling across local authorities in England.

The LGA says: "The Bill points to a new relationship between local and national government when it comes to the environment and, while councils are best placed to take the lead on this agenda, they will need adequate funding and access to skills to deliver on our shared ambitions."

Health and Care Bill

- Lays the foundations for a more integrated health and care system.
- Gives the NHS and local authorities the tools they need to level up health and care outcomes across the country.

The LGA says: "There should be local flexibility, with health and local government leaders working as equal partners to establish the Integrated Care Systems Health and Care Partnership in a way that works for each area and builds on existing effective partnerships."

i Other items of interest to councils in the Queen's Speech include reform to online safety, a drive to cut the UK's carbon emissions, bus reform, animal welfare and the Armed Forces Covenant. See www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses for the LGA's detailed on-the-day briefing

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Building Safety Bill

- Creates the Building Safety Regulator, with a duty on council regulators and fire and rescue authorities to cooperate with it.
- Introduces new duties for those responsible for residential buildings over 18 metres or seven storeys.
- Makes provisions for a levy on developers.

The LGA says: “This Bill cannot come soon enough, as our broken building safety system needs reforms to be enshrined in tough new legislation. Residents have a right to be safe and to feel safe in their own homes, and the construction industry and those with legal duties now need to step up and deliver the cladding remediation work required.”

Draft Online Safety Bill

- Requires major platforms to set out clearly in their terms and conditions what legal content is unacceptable on their platform, and enforce these consistently and transparently.
- Places a duty of care on companies to improve the safety of their users online.

The LGA says: “We are concerned about the increasing spread of mis- and disinformation, and incidents of intimidation and abuse of elected representatives. Both pose significant threats to local democracy, as well as public health and community safety, and we welcome measures to tackle these issues.”

Procurement Bill

- Simplifies and reduces the number of procurement procedures from seven to three.
- Introduces processes for procuring ‘at pace’ during a crisis, with strengthened safeguards.
- Establishes a single data platform for supplier registration.
- Tackles unacceptable behaviour, such as supplier fraud.

The LGA says: “There are additional unacceptable behaviours to be included under grounds for exclusion beyond what is proposed, such as tax evasion, data protection, equalities, modern slavery, and professional misconduct.”

Levelling up

- Levelling Up White Paper to be published later this year.
- New policy interventions to improve livelihoods and opportunities in all parts of the UK.
- Levelling up defined as creating good jobs, skills and productivity in places that have seen economic decline.

The LGA says: “With the right funding, freedoms and devolved powers, councils can work with partners to drive improvements in public health, boost local economic growth, revive town and city centres, build more homes, improve our roads, and equip people with the skills they need to succeed, so no-one is left behind.”

Planning Bill

- Local plans to provide more certainty over the type, scale and design of development permitted on different categories of land.
- A new, more predictable and transparent levy to replace existing systems for funding affordable housing.

The LGA says: “To tackle the housing crisis and meet the Government’s target of building 300,000 new homes a year, councils need to be given the powers to get building on a scale not seen since the 1970s, when they built 40 per cent of new housing.”

Skills and Post-16 Education Bill

- Offers adults the opportunity to retrain in later life through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee.
- Reforms post-16 skills system through a ‘Skills Accelerator’, enabling employers and providers to collaborate to develop local skills plans.

The LGA says: “If the Government is to fulfil its ambition to support adults back into training and education, councils and combined authorities must see their Adult Education Budget, which has been halved since 2010, restored in full.”

Transforming estates in a post-pandemic world

The COVID-19 pandemic has sparked a major shift in focus for the public sector. As local authorities develop plans to support the UK's recovery, the role of estates transformation has become more significant than ever before

Back in 2018, the Cabinet Office launched its estate strategy, aiming to deliver the best possible public services, release surplus land for housing and boost growth across the UK. But the landscape has since changed dramatically, with the pandemic accelerating the need for a complete reassessment of long-term estate strategies that can factor in both the economy and the environment.

So how can the public sector use its estates to drive efficiencies while stimulating much-needed economic and environmental growth?

Reimagining the future

By repurposing and commercialising estates, contracting authorities can generate revenue and vital cost-saving efficiencies to fund the growing demand for their services and facilitate a strong economic recovery.

In November 2020, the Office for National Statistics found that high street footfall fell 45 per cent compared with the same period in 2019. This adds to an existing trend identified by the LGA that footfall had dropped more than 10 per cent in the past seven years, with the recent dramatic increase in home working likely to impact high street areas even further.

Despite the easing of lockdown restrictions, many UK employees are hoping to step away from traditional in-office working on a permanent basis. It seems that employers support this change: a CIPD study of 2,000 UK employers found that 63 per cent plan a permanent shift to hybrid working.

This mass shift to home working has also led the public sector to question if their office space is fit for purpose, or whether a hybrid or home working model should be implemented in the future.

While it's important that public sector recovery plans support a healthy economic recovery, they must also build

on decarbonisation commitments. As the Government works to build the largest economic recovery packages in modern history, there is unprecedented potential for the nation to meet the UK's national target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and work towards a new, decarbonised future.

Construction is being heralded as the cornerstone to achieving this target through home building, the repurposing of retail assets, using derelict land, and holding effective office spaces – all of which will play a significant role in contributing to the net-zero goals and injecting opportunities into communities across the country.

Now, more than ever, contracting authorities must look to outcomes-based procurement processes that can prioritise social value and decarbonisation in all infrastructure and building projects.

A unique procurement solution

Bloom Procurement Services offers a comprehensive procurement solution for the public sector through its fully compliant open-

access marketplace. With a proven track record in delivering estate-transformation projects, the procurement specialist can help contracting authorities to maximise efficiencies in estate management and deliver, on average, savings of up to 19 per cent against budget.

As the delivery partner to the innovative NEPRO³ framework, Bloom offers a broad range of categories of spend across the built environment and estates-transformation space. Its dynamic marketplace contains experts in high-street regeneration, achieving carbon net zero, and the repurposing of estates to deliver pound-for-pound value for the taxpayer.

When using the Bloom marketplace, contracting authorities can benefit from a range of VCSEs, local SMEs and established organisations already doing business in the marketplace. If the supplier you are looking to work with is not currently accredited, Bloom can rapidly onboard them and make a direct award, giving you a compliant and efficient route to project delivery.

If you'd like to discuss how Bloom can help your organisation deliver an effective estates-transformation programme, contact its team today.

i For more information, please visit Enquiries@bloom.services, <https://bloom.services/estates-transformation/> find us on twitter at twitter.com/TalkBloom, or linkedin at linkedin.com/company/bloom-procurement-solutions/





Celebrating local democracy

Local authorities, from Iceland to Turkey, are finding innovative ways to improve communication between residents and councillors



Councillor **Bryony Rudkin** is an LGA Representative on the Council of Europe

We continue to live and work in very special circumstances, which can make it difficult for us to fulfil our responsibilities in delivering more vibrant and supportive services to our local communities.

Nevertheless, over the past months we have been taking full advantage of the opportunities presented by new technologies for both service delivery and engaging our communities.

Have you wondered how these challenges are being met by our counterparts across Europe? Could we learn from their initiatives, or maybe we have something to offer to them?

The European Local Democracy Week is a pan-European initiative co-ordinated by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe since 2007.

It was modelled on an earlier initiative of the LGA, giving us another reason to embrace it. Throughout the year, across Europe – from Iceland to Turkey, the Azores to the Urals – local councils and their national associations organise initiatives aimed at promoting citizen

participation in decision-making, fostering dialogue between the community and their councillors, and strengthening trust in elected representatives and institutions.

Participating councils can schedule their own local democracy week and organise events at their convenience during the year. However, a flagship event takes place at the Council of Europe each October, where the most outstanding and original initiatives are showcased.

During 2020, which was my first year

Trust between local people and their council is key to the good functioning of democracy

as Lead Congress Member for Local Democracy Week, 196 councils from 19 countries took part in more than 500 activities.

The pandemic required the organisation of online events, to enable the involvement of residents, and there will probably be a similar approach this year, as most participating councils have created online tools that provide innovative methods of communication between local people and their councillors.

I'll highlight a few initiatives to give

a flavour of some of the activities of recent years: the Romanian municipality of Râmnicu Vâlcea developed an online platform that offers a new way to interact with the mayor; Lviv (Ukraine) informed its young citizens about the many opportunities available to them for public involvement; Lüleburgaz (Turkey) signed Transparency International's Local Transparency Pledge; and Valongo (Portugal) has introduced numerous activities for young people, notably through the creation of a participatory youth budget, and last October held an online conference on local democracy, with global participation.

And, not least, at home in the UK, our colleagues in Kirklees held a public debate enabling local people to say what they expect of a councillor.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to develop innovative ways to maintain residents' participation and their confidence in our capacity to deliver effective responses to the health crisis while continuing to provide essential local services.

I am convinced that trust between local people and their council is key to the good functioning of democracy, and the ultimate glue that holds our communities together.

Local councils can help significantly to reconnect with communities and restore confidence in democratic processes and institutions – and, today, much of this can be done online as well.

i If you are interested in learning from initiatives from across Europe, or participating in the 2021 European Local Democracy Week in October, please visit www.congress-eldw.eu to find out more

Steering a path to net zero

The LGA has published a new workbook to help councillors tackle climate change



Local authorities have a crucial role to play in achieving the UK's 2050 net zero greenhouse gas emissions target.

While local authorities are directly responsible for only 2 to 5 per cent of local emissions, through their policies and partnerships they have strong influence over more than a third of emissions in their area.

Work to cut these emissions is already under way; most UK councils are developing or have developed climate action plans, including the 300-plus councils that have declared a climate emergency.

To help councillors play an active role in supporting their local authority and their communities in working towards the net zero target, the LGA has produced a workbook providing insight and assistance with the key skills they will need to work effectively in this area.

The workbook sets out why tackling climate change is important, outlines

the main sources of greenhouse gases, explains what 'net zero' is, looks at some of the wider benefits of taking action – for example, improving health, increasing the energy efficiency of homes, and creating 'green' jobs – and looks at the vital role of local authorities.

Local authority practice can directly shape emissions in many ways, such as through ensuring new council-owned buildings are designed to be low carbon, retrofitting existing building stock, minimising the need for transport, and ensuring that low-carbon methods of transport are encouraged and enabled.



You can download 'A councillor's workbook on the local path to net zero' at <https://bit.ly/3tZXLi5>
For more information about the LGA's wider work on climate change, please visit www.local.gov.uk/climate-change

Policy-making can also have far-reaching impacts. For example, one of the most powerful levers that local authorities have to cut carbon is through their role in place shaping. Many local authorities are using their powers in relation to buildings, transport systems, waste services and the natural environment to help deliver their decarbonisation ambitions.

Councils can exert significant influence on the supply chain by requiring their suppliers and contractors to be working towards net zero.

They can also encourage and enable emissions reduction by others – for example, through convening a local climate change partnership that brings organisations from the public, private and third sectors together to work towards reducing emissions; and supporting community groups that wish to take climate action, through development of renewable energy schemes or active travel initiatives.

The workbook suggests key questions councillors can ask (see box, left), considers the costs and benefits of climate change action, and includes a series of council case studies and examples.

Councillors have an active role to play in supporting their local authority and communities on climate change. Strong political leadership that underpins a council's ambition and supports action will be critical to meeting councils' net zero ambitions.

Overarching action to cut carbon – key questions to ask

- Has your council created a cabinet position (or equivalent) with responsibility for climate action/net zero?
- Has your council measured its carbon emissions and developed a climate action plan?
- Has a policy and service review been conducted to align policy, spending and functions with net zero?
- Has a net zero training and capacity-building programme been carried out within the council?
- Has your council adopted a decision-making process that considers the carbon impact of any decision?



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

World Environment Day 2021

Councils are leading on a whole range of climate projects and initiatives

On 5 June, the UK and beyond will be celebrating World Environment Day – an annual United Nations initiative that has been encouraging awareness and action on protecting the environment since 1974.

This year, the day will be used to raise global awareness on restoring our planet's ecosystems. You may be thinking about the Amazon rainforest or the Himalayas – or our oceans' coral reefs.

But ecosystems are also much closer to home. Nature is all around us, and I for one have grown a much stronger appreciation for the parks and woodlands on my doorstep – and even

i You can find more council case studies on our [climate change support page](https://www.local.gov.uk/climate-change) at www.local.gov.uk/climate-change. We are looking to showcase more as COP26 approaches. **If you would like to contribute a case study or wish to find out more,** please email climate@local.gov.uk



my garden – over the past year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ecosystems and the environment are local; they are implicated in the things we buy, the places we go, the food we eat and the clothes we wear.

The environment is also personal. It's encouraging that the benefits of the environment to our health and wellbeing have become increasingly recognised – and that is why, on World Environment Day, we are shining a light on local environmental projects by councils and communities.

There are a whole range of climate projects and activities that councils are leading, alongside their residents and businesses. We want to take this opportunity to highlight some of these, and provide examples of the excellent environment work happening locally.

For example, the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames undertook a project to restore the Berrylands Nature Reserve, a local space rich with wildlife, woodland and a mosaic of habitats. It is looked after by local volunteers.

At my own council in Swindon, we launched a solar offset scheme at the Chapel Farm solar site in April 2020. Not only does it provide clean electricity to nearby homes, but it was also part-financed by the local community, with residents receiving a financial return on their investment.

Leeds City Council has undertaken an innovative project to tackle flooding. The major river Aire that flows through the centre of Leeds can cause large-scale flooding and the council delivered one of the largest flood-alleviation schemes using new technology – a moveable weir – to protect the city.

Finally, the UK's first zero-emissions zone was created by Oxford City Council to tackle high levels of air pollution. Only vehicles with zero emissions are allowed into the zone free of charge. The council is also working with local businesses and traders to switch their modes of transport to zero emissions by introducing electric cargo bikes for deliveries.

The LGA has worked with these councils to create short films that tell us more about their projects. This is part of our 'Local path to net zero' series, which seeks to promote and showcase local climate action in the lead up to COP26, the UN Climate Change Conference taking place in Glasgow in November. Please visit www.local.gov.uk/net-zero to view the series and films.



Welcome events for newly elected councillors

Following the elections in May, the LGA is pleased to invite all newly elected councillors to attend one of its national welcome events, hosted via Zoom. This will be a great opportunity for new councillors to explore what their role means, learn about challenges facing local government, and meet colleagues from other councils. The sessions will cover a range of national and regional issues of interest, and provide an opportunity to meet experienced councillors and hear more about the LGA's support for members.

The virtual events are free of charge and will run for 90 mins on **11 June (2.00pm)**, **22 June (10.00am)** and **28 June (5:30pm)** and delegates can choose to attend **one** of these sessions to suit their availability. The sessions will be hosted by the LGA and will complement councils' own induction programmes.

Delegates can register through the LGA's events page
www.local.gov.uk/events



The LGA Independent Group

Annual General Meeting 2021

The LGA Independent Group will hold its 2021 AGM virtually on Tuesday 6 July, between 9.30 and 10.45am as part of the LGA Annual Conference.

Members submitting Notices of Motion to the AGM must attend the meeting to speak to the motion or send a nominated Independent Group member as a substitute to speak on their behalf. The form to complete with your proposed motion is available from the group office.

To secure your free place, please contact the Group Office at independent.group@lga.local.gov.uk, quoting 'Independent Group AGM' in the subject line.

Deadline for submission of motions is 22 June 2021.

Group elections 2021

The Local Government Association (LGA) Independent Group are holding elections for the posts of Group Leader, Deputy Group Leader, and Group Treasurer via electronic ballot.

A unique voter link will be issued to members on Thursday 3 June and the ballot will close at 5.00pm on Thursday 1 July 2021.

Results will be announced at the Group Annual General Meeting on 6 July 2021.

For further information please contact:

Paul Goodchild, Returning Officer
Email: paul.goodchild@lga.local.gov.uk

COMMENT



Steph Waddell is
Assistant Director,
Impact and Knowledge
Mobilisation, at the Early
Intervention Foundation

Child victims of domestic abuse

The new Domestic Abuse Act 2021 legally recognises children as victims. We now need to make sure that this translates into meaningful change in the way we support these children.

We have estimated that more than 15,000 children suffer domestic abuse in any two-week period, and we know that the impact on them can be wide-ranging and long-lasting.

Child victims of domestic abuse are significantly more likely to experience abuse in their own adult relationships, to develop drug or alcohol dependency, and to suffer a range of mental health problems.

We have been working with four local places to understand their priorities in relation to children who experience domestic abuse, and the nature and availability of support for these children.

This work has exposed a raft of system challenges, which are impacting on the quality and availability of this essential support.

We know, for example, that local authority funding constraints remain a major challenge to the provision of local services.

Directors of children's services across the country are trying to balance budgets and rationalise services, while retaining the most effective support offer possible for children and families.

Statutory services are focusing on crisis support and reducing the immediate risk of harm to children, while local authority funding for prevention activity or longer-term therapeutic support is short-term and vulnerable to cuts.

Many of these wider services are provided by the voluntary and community sector, and are propped up by piecemeal

funding from a range of sources, leaving them in a precarious position.

Demand for support commonly outstrips supply, meaning children are missing out on the kind of help that can be vital to their health and wellbeing.

Efforts to improve the quality and availability of support for children are also stymied by the fact that we have very little understanding of what works – either to support child victims or to prevent domestic abuse in the first place.

By this we mean, very few of the programmes or practices currently delivered in local areas have been rigorously evaluated.

There are a range of reasons for this, including some methodological challenges (such as poor study design and small sample sizes), but, essentially, funding and carrying out local evaluations in the context we have described is incredibly challenging.

Local councils cannot resolve these systemic issues on their own. We are calling on the Government to

establish a long-term, cross-departmental fund dedicated to improving our understanding of what works, and supporting the use of this knowledge in local service delivery.

This fund should invest in robust impact evaluation of the most promising and widely delivered programmes, building our understanding of the nature of approaches that are proven to be effective.

The fund should also respond to the current reality of local systems and build capacity to evaluate small-scale, local programmes, as well as practice-based approaches and system improvements.

The Domestic Abuse Act provisions are a welcome step forward and a critical recognition of the harm that domestic abuse does to children.

The Act will not in itself lead to a change in the way that these children are supported. We need to turn our attention

immediately to ensuring that the support that is available is sufficient, sustainable, and informed by evidence.



Congratulations on a successful campaign



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

This May saw elections like no other, and after a long weekend of counting, I'm pleased to say that our numbers increased along with our position on council administrations.

Within the LGA, we have also increased our proportion of members, and we remain the third-largest group in terms of the number of councillors, with more than 500 more councillors than the Liberal Democrats.

To all of our new members, welcome to the LGA Independent Group. We represent and support all Independent, Green and smaller-party councillors across England and Wales, and we very

much look forward to working with you. To our returning members, congratulations on a successful campaign. This year's elections again demonstrated that there is a credible and trusted alternative to the big Westminster parties.

As with all elections, we also lost some brilliant councillors, and we pass on our thanks to all of those who were unsuccessful this year – they have contributed so much to their residents.

It is not easy standing as an Independent or smaller-party candidate, and on behalf of the whole group we want to congratulate those who stood, and those who supported them, in seats in every region of England, as well as for the Senedd in Wales (see p29).

As a group, we move forward bigger in number and will be hoping to influence the Government's agenda, recently announced in the Queen's Speech.

Further changes to our planning system are imminent, along with the

levelling up fund, the delayed Environment Bill impacting on our waste and recycling services, and maybe some overdue clarity on a long-term solution for social care.

We also expect plans to potentially link devolution to our council structures, although this has yet to be announced.

We now also turn our attention to our group elections, as we do every two years. This year, you will be asked to vote for group leader, deputy leader and treasurer. We are holding our elections electronically for the first time and your ballot paper will be emailed to you on 3 June. Please look out for this and cast your votes.

"There is a credible and trusted alternative to the big Westminster parties"



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

Unsung local heroes of democracy

The polling booths and paperwork may have been packed away, and the news agenda may have moved on, but it is worth reflecting on more than just the results of May's local elections, important as they were (see p30).

In England, this was the most complex set of elections ever delivered by our elections officers and administrators – two years of local polls in one, multiple by-elections held over because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and contests for police and crime commissioners and combined authority mayors.

And all done in the middle of a national and international public health crisis.

Councils pulled out all the stops to ensure the 6 May polls were held efficiently and were COVID-safe and secure, and I want to reiterate my thanks to everyone involved for doing such a tremendous job.

This should serve as a huge source of



pride for us all in local government, and proves yet again why our democratic system is rightly held in such high esteem.

Another local democratic 'success' during the pandemic was the swift move to online meetings – and thanks are due in this case to the unsung heroes of council IT departments.

They have helped us keep local government's democratic processes going, despite COVID-19 restrictions – and, in many cases, online meetings have enhanced local democracy, by allowing more members of the public to attend meetings 'virtually'.

So, in light of the absence of any

mention of this in the Queen's Speech, the LGA continues to make the case for councils to be allowed to hold meetings remotely.

Finally, congratulations to all of you who have been elected or re-elected to serve your communities, commiserations to those who have lost seats, and huge thanks and good luck to those who are standing down.

The LGA is offering support to all councils where there has been a change of political control, or a move to no overall control, and has developed a support hub for new councillors to complement councils' induction training – see www.local.gov.uk for more.



Councillor **Izzi Seccombe** OBE is Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group

Historic results for the blue team

On 6 May, voters went to the polls for the UK's biggest ever set of local and national elections.

The results in England were disheartening for Labour and historic for the blue team. I am delighted that we have retained our dominant position in local government and can continue to deliver high-quality public services to our communities.

The results are an endorsement of the hard work of Conservative councillors locally, while also indicating that the success of the vaccine rollout and the Government's levelling up agenda resonated with the public.

As a result of the elections, we made substantial gains, including winning the Hartlepool by-election, gaining overall control in Cornwall, Nottinghamshire and Northumberland, increasing our majority in the Tees Valley and West Midlands mayoralities, and electing police and crime commissioners in places such as Leicestershire, Cleveland and Humberside.

"I am delighted that we have retained our dominant position in local government"

I would like to thank everyone who played a role in securing these extraordinary results. I was up for election myself, and am therefore aware just how challenging campaigning was, and how we all had to find creative ways to engage with voters.

I also wish to express my heartfelt commiserations to those hard-working and dedicated Conservative councillors who lost their seats – they are friends who have all given so much to public life.

My warmest congratulations go to all those Conservative councillors who were newly elected or re-elected, and I am looking forward to meeting and working with you.



Councillor **Darren Rodwell** is the Labour Vice Chair of the LGA's Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board

Ripping up our planning laws

Take back control' was a message that resonated with many people during the Brexit referendum, the fallout of which continues to fuel the public's attitude to politics five years later.

The sense that many people hold of having lost the power to influence their lives, streets, and towns is clearly strong. Which is why it is so baffling that the Government seems so determined to take control away from people in the key area of planning.

"It is baffling that the Government seems so determined to take control away from people in the key area of planning"

The Queen's Speech contained a second attempt by ministers to rip up our planning laws, just months after Tory rebels saw off a first attempt.

It is a complete disaster in the making – instead of communities 'taking back control', they are instead taking away the right of citizens and communities to have their say over development in their area.

Moving to zoning arrangements and automatic planning permission means fewer opportunities for local accountability and oversight. Communities and councils will find it much harder to make sure the right sort of homes are being built, and ripping up planning regulations will inevitably lead to poorer quality housing.

I hope that MPs of all parties who care about their communities having a say will unite to vote it down.

On a different note, can I say a big thank you on behalf of LGA Labour to the councillors of all parties who were not re-elected in May, or who stood down. We wish you well for whatever comes next.



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

Breaching the 'blue wall'

First of all, I would like to congratulate all those councillors who were elected on 6 May, especially the Liberal Democrat ones. We were holding elections in the most difficult of situations, during a major public health crisis.

We have heard a lot about the Labour 'red wall' in the Midlands and North of England, but very little about what has been happening to the Conservative 'blue wall' in the South, which we have breached in several places.

In addition to some stunning Liberal Democrat wins in the North, in places such as Chesterfield, Sheffield, Barnsley, Rotherham and Sunderland, we saw gains across the South and East of England – and in three-way battles, in places such as Stockport, we held our own.

"The age of no-go areas for the Liberal Democrats is over"

Congratulations to my Liberal Democrat colleagues in seizing St Albans and taking control of Cambridgeshire and Oxfordshire from the Conservatives.

We gained seats in Wiltshire, Surrey, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Buckinghamshire, Wokingham, Devon and West Sussex – and, in Shropshire, we saw one of our youngest councillors ever elected.

We held councils such as Cheltenham, Eastleigh, Mole Valley, Three Rivers and Watford, seeing the 'blue wall' crumbling in this election as the Liberal Democrats moved forward in former Tory heartlands.

From Cheltenham to Cambridgeshire, Wiltshire to Woking, there are fewer and fewer safe places for the Tories in their 'blue wall'. The age of no-go areas for the Liberal Democrats in traditionally Tory southern cities, towns and villages is over, as it is in 'Labour heartlands'. Both parties should be looking over their shoulders.

Free Wi-Fi for care leavers



Councillor **Michelline Ngongo** (Lab) is Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families at Islington Council

When Microsoft launched its fledgling Internet Explorer to the public in 1995, few would have guessed the web's immense impact on society.

For most of us, life today would be unthinkable without internet access at home – it's a utility, on a par with water, gas and electricity.

But for many care leavers, the expense of setting up Wi-Fi broadband is yet another major hurdle as they learn to live independently and find their feet in the world.

Shouldn't our care leavers be able to log on at home, where they can get help with setting up a business, update a CV

and apply for jobs, take college courses, register for council services, manage their finances and, of course, stay in touch with friends without worrying about the cost?

I'm very proud that Islington Council is the first local authority in the country to ensure that, as part of our offer to all care leavers, access to home Wi-Fi broadband will be provided free for the first 12 months they live independently.

We were the first to answer this call from Ibrahim Hassan Ali, an Islington care leaver and Chair of the Care Leavers National Movement (CLNM) – the young persons' voice of the National House Project charity, which has spearheaded the Keep Care Leavers Connected campaign.

It aligns perfectly with our campaign to create a fairer Islington for everyone, helps address digital poverty among some of the borough's most vulnerable young people, and dovetails with the help and support already in place for our care leavers.

As well as our comprehensive offer to



care leavers, we were among the first councils to scrap council tax for care leavers to the age of 25. We remain committed to offering new and exciting opportunities to care leavers, including mentor and creative work opportunities.

With broadband access nothing less than essential these days, I'm proud to lead the way by backing the CLNM campaign – and urge other councils, as corporate parents for thousands of care leavers across the country, to follow suit.

i For more on the CLNM and its Keep Care Leavers Connected campaign, watch www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSlh3DXKFKE, see www.clnm.co.uk or follow @CLNMovement on Twitter.



It's hard to think of anything more important to our children and young people right now than the opportunity to flourish in a good school.

Failing schools are a problem not only for the pupils, but also for their families, their hard-working teachers and their communities. Young people need excellent schools to forge a positive future in the world.

We can all agree on that, but the question is how? How can we quickly turn around failing academies? I say we need to be able to return failing academies to local authority control, yet

Turning around failing academies



Councillor **Zoe Nolan** (Lab) is Cabinet Member for Children and Families at Milton Keynes Council

the Government is blocking this. Why can a failing academy not be returned to the local authority? Why is there no mechanism for this to happen?

It's a one-way street, where a failing local authority school has to become an academy, but if an academy fails then it is simply replaced by yet another academy. Too often that has led to more failure, the process is slow and cumbersome, and precious time and trust are lost.

In Milton Keynes, we are demanding our largest academy, Stantonbury International School, is returned to the control of the local authority, but we

have been told there is no mechanism.

We have to put political dogma aside. Our children and young people deserve better from us, and the local authority should be allowed to step in and take control. These are our children and we do not want to keep letting them down.

The pandemic has seen local authorities forge a new role with all their local schools, working together to keep everyone safe, and to continue to support all schools and enable them to share the very best of practice.

My challenge to the Government is that we should be allowed to take a school that is letting everyone in our city down back into local authority control.

When things go wrong and schools fail, we want to be able to say to those young people that we did everything possible, including challenging political nonsense, to quickly get their future back on track.

Meetings for the 21st century



Cllr **Dr Ellie Chowns** (Green) is Cabinet Member for Environment, Economy and Skills at Herefordshire Council

The failure to permit councils to continue holding online meetings is difficult to understand and impossible to excuse.

While the transition to online wasn't without hiccups, it has had many benefits overall.

For example, online meetings are good for transparency. In Herefordshire, meetings that previously attracted a handful of people have had hundreds of views on YouTube.

Moving online has generated a significant increase in public engagement with council business – and this can only be a good thing for democracy.

Online meetings are good for public health. Most councillors are over 60, and a significant proportion have serious health conditions and may have been advised to avoid indoor interaction.

We all know there's a real need to diversify council make-up so that we are more representative of our communities. Online meetings make it easier for those with caring responsibilities, 'day jobs', and disabilities to participate. It's certainly made it much easier to juggle my political role with my part-time job and parenting.

Councillors themselves are overwhelmingly in favour of continuing online meetings. One of the reasons (especially important in rural areas) is that they save travel time – reducing greenhouse gas emissions and freeing up time that can be better spent serving our local communities.

Of course, there are still reasons to meet face to face. Online meetings don't offer much opportunity for the informal mingling and conversations over the coffee pot that can help build relationships.

Debate can flow more easily, face to face. And in-person meetings are important for the public to make their views heard – not just through questions, but through noisy applause from the public gallery or protests outside.



All these are key aspects of a vibrant democracy that we need to retain. But the last year has shown us that ultimately, the future is hybrid.

Councils need the freedom to decide the best format for each meeting, taking into account its nature and the level of public interest.

If the Government is serious about democracy, public health and inclusion, it should legislate immediately to give councils these freedoms.

Managing the risks of public meetings



Councillor **Simon Greaves** (Lab) is Leader of Bassetlaw District Council

Despite COVID-19 restrictions still being in place and the virus starting to spread again, the Government now requires us to stop virtual meetings and return to public ones.

So, all of us who serve in local authorities and all our staff who so staunchly help us run our councils have to take a risk that no other branch of government is asked to – to meet in person and in public.

If we don't, then the services we supply will grind to a halt and the people we were elected to serve will pay the price.

Thanks to everyone's hard work and with fantastic support from the people of

Bassetlaw, we have one of the lowest COVID-19 infection rates in the region. But we know coronavirus is still a threat, and we have a duty to our electorate to maintain these low levels.

The first test for us was our AGM, on 19 May. We committed to making it the most covid-free meeting possible and asked a specialist testing company, Event Testing Ltd, to help us.

We decided all our councillors and staff would test for the virus within 24 hours of the AGM and access to the meeting would be dependent on proof of a negative test.

There were some teething problems, especially among members without smartphones and a few of our veterans who struggled with the technology. But by adapting our council iPads and providing good technical help, both our councillors and staff attended with proven negative covid tests on the night.

In addition, we were determined to

make the council chamber as covid-safe as possible, and installed an 'eco chamber' – a sanitising airport style chamber – to ensure no external contamination was carried into the town hall.

I am convinced that while COVID-19 and all its mutations remains a threat to us all, we have to take whatever precautions necessary to ensure when our council meets in public it does so safely for the sake of the community we serve, our staff and our councillors.





Lynne Reed is National Lead for Family Nurse Partnership and Parenting Programmes at Public Health England

Support for young parents

No child should have their life story written before they are born, but the fact is that many do.

If your mother is a teenager, for example, you have less chance of meeting developmental milestones; less chance, even, of surviving into infancy.

The vulnerability of a parent is a predictor of disadvantage for the child.

i To find out more about Family Nurse Partnership, or if you think this might be beneficial for your residents, please email Lynne.Reed@phe.gov.uk or visit www.fnp.nhs.uk



Is this inevitable? New research about the Family Nurse Partnership programme suggests not.

Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) is an intensive, home-visiting programme for young, first-time parents, commissioned by 60 local authorities in England

Family nurses enable young mums and dads to develop the skills to provide sensitive, responsive care: the foundation for secure attachment.

This makes a critical contribution to their child's development. It builds the right conditions for their child to arrive at school ready to learn – a crucial milestone

for reaching their educational potential, which is a predictor of living a healthy life, and being in employment and out of the criminal justice system.

A new study published by the National Institute for Health Research this year showed that children whose parents enrolled in FNP were 26 per cent more likely to achieve a good level of development in their first year at school, compared with their peers.

What is really remarkable is that this school-readiness effect appears years after the end of the intervention. The Early Intervention Foundation has described this as "rare". FNP is the only programme of its kind to improve cognitive outcomes in children five years after parents have graduated from the programme.

The study shows that universal provision isn't enough to change the life course of children who otherwise fall far behind the general population. High-quality parenting support, such as FNP, can't change the adverse circumstances a child lives with, but it can influence the kind of changes that have an impact on the life that child will go on to live.

This insight is timely as we respond to the hidden harms of the COVID-19 pandemic for children, young people and families.

Making tourism good to go



Councillor **Gary Peace** (Con) is Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Digital Transformation at Isle of Wight Council

The Isle of Wight is a very special place. It is a special place to live, to work – and to visit.

Each year, we welcome more than 2.4 million visitors to the island, who spend more than £330 million in a normal year.

The overall economic impact on the island is nearly half a billion pounds, and approximately a third of its population rely on tourism and hospitality for their employment.

As we all know, COVID-19 has had a major impact on businesses – and, with a tourism-based economy, it has potentially impacted here more than in some other locations across the UK.

The reopening of the island's tourism

economy in a safe and collaborative way was, and remains, key to the Isle of Wight's recovery.

VisitEngland, the government-funded national tourism agency, provides regular updates on the levels of confidence people are displaying to travel and visit, and, very early on, we became aware that the demand for staycations was going to be high.

We wanted to ensure that, in reopening our tourism economy, we fully considered the need to protect our local population, who are here all year round and not just for two weeks every year. This was a real conundrum.

That is why, when we were planning for reopening again in response to the

Government's current roadmap out of lockdown, we – along with Visit Isle of Wight – placed the Visit England 'We're Good to Go' standard and its ethos at the heart of everything we developed and communicated.

This shows the tourists, our residents and the local people who work in tourism and hospitality that businesses are following the protocols and doing everything right; we wanted to give confidence to everyone who is touched by tourism and hospitality here on the Isle of Wight.

I would urge you all to bring the 'We're Good to Go' standard into your communications as we begin to cautiously move towards full reopening and, ultimately, the road to recovery.



i To find out more about Visit Britain's 'We're Good To Go' COVID-19 industry standard and quality mark, please see www.visitbritain.org/business-advice

Remote meetings – what do residents think?

The High Court has ruled that a change in the law is needed to permit councils to continue to opt for online meetings, including hybrid ones, after 7 May.

Without legislative change, councillors will have to meet face to face again, as has always been the case.

Councils have made their views clear via the LGA's survey (**first** 659), which showed more than 80 per cent of councils would like to continue the use of online meetings.

This is perhaps understandable given a great many authorities are rural and geographically huge.

But we need to go back to core principles: first, local democracy is an essential service; second, we must make accessibility for the residents we serve as convenient as possible; third, we should be visible in the services and functions that we are passionate about delivering.



However, we also need to 'get over ourselves'. Awareness of meetings is low; general interest in them, arguably, even lower. My experience is that public attendance at meetings is often minimal. I can also say that I have not noticed a deterioration in the quality of debate from online (or an improvement).

The LGA may wish to consider research on public opinion concerning accessibility and the merits/demerits of online meetings. For example, if it is difficult for councillors to travel to meetings, it will be for residents too.

Ultimately, local democracy should be for the convenience of residents, not councillors. My preference is for a return to in-person meetings, but I am open to being persuaded by resident-focused research into the issue.

Cllr Jason Hughes (Con), Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames



A moveable feast

Reconnecting with neighbours as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted will be great.

However, recent research by OnePoll – carried out on behalf of The Big Lunch, the UK's biggest annual get-together for neighbours – found that more than 20 million people in the UK are suffering re-entry anxiety.

Around 55 per cent of the UK's population are still wary about socialising without restrictions, while around 10 million people say they have forgotten how to have a proper conversation.

Despite the apprehension, there are more than 25 million people who are relieved about the prospect of socialising without restrictions – so, The Big Lunch aims to help those who aren't to build up their social fitness and feel confident about getting back out into their communities.

That's why, this year, The Big Lunch is a truly moveable feast, teaming up with good causes across the UK to celebrate summer 2021 with a whole 'Month of Community' from 5 June – and it's not too late to get involved and support events in your area!

Now in its 12th year, The Big Lunch is an Eden Project initiative designed to encourage communities to join in whenever and however works best for them. Online, on the doorstep, over the fence or on the go – there are lots of different ways to have a Big Lunch safely this month.

To find out more, please visit www.edenprojectcommunities.com/the-big-lunch/councils or follow us on social media at #monthofcommunity.

Lesley Brummitt, Programme Director, Eden Project Communities

Putting communities first

Following elections to the Senedd in Wales, I wanted to flag the success of Independent candidates.

I came second to Labour in the constituency of Islwyn, beating the three other major parties (Plaid Cymru, Conservatives, and Liberal Democrats), with 19 per cent of the vote.

I was my own election agent, financed myself, wrote and organised my leaflets and campaign and, with a few friends, delivered 16,000 leaflets by hand.

We did not stop throughout this campaign and I was pleased with 4,723 votes – having campaigned for the Islwyn/Bedwellty communities for the past 40 years as a local activist and councillor.

I remember my first count, asking

my head teacher, who was a JP, to sign my declaration form so I could attend, and watching Neil Kinnock's votes being weighed.

My mentor was Independent Angus Donaldson, who died in 2014. He once stood against Michael Foot, and became a Caerphilly county councillor and mayor – he was a true inspiration to me.

Every community I have lived in and served has inspired me – to engage, consult, help everyone, and fight injustices and individual problems. Independents put communities first, regardless of their voting habits.

Councillor Kevin Etheridge (Ind), Leader of the Independent Group, Caerphilly County Borough Council

ELECTIONS



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



Electoral bounces and bombshells

The vaccine rollout provided a spring electoral bounce for the governments of all three nations of Britain.

In England, the local elections further boosted the Conservatives by consolidating their General Election success in many leave-voting areas of the North and Midlands.

Labour, by contrast, registered a net loss of council seats for the fifth time in six years, leaving it to take comfort from a couple of victories against the run of play in mayoral contests.

The writing was on the wall for Labour once the Hartlepool parliamentary by-election became one of the first results to be announced at breakfast time the day after the 6 May polls.

With most councils taking longer than usual to count because of COVID-19 restrictions, this gave the Conservatives a head start in setting the agenda for post-election analysis – not that the initial council returns told a hugely different story.

□ The pre-EU referendum era had a different feel □

In Dudley, the Conservatives gained 12 seats from Labour and took control with more councillors than they have had at any time in the authority's 50-year history. In neighbouring Sandwell, they went from zero councillors to nine.

On the other side of the West Midlands conurbation in Nuneaton and Bedworth, Labour lost 10 seats direct to the Conservatives to post an all-time low tally.

The bulk of the party's losses came as expected in seats last contested in 2016 and held over for a year because

of the pandemic. Then, Labour had been neck and neck with the Conservatives in the polls and the politics of the pre-EU referendum era had a very different feel.

An overall comparison with five years ago shows Labour losing more than 250 seats as their vote share dropped by more than 3 percentage points. The Conservatives, on the other hand, made a similar number of gains and advanced by more than 7 points on average.

They benefited in large part from the unwinding of what was still quite solid UKIP support back then to help them across the line. The Hartlepool parliamentary result writ large.

Things were less dire for Labour in the North West. Liverpool and Manchester still have no Conservative councillors. Labour is no longer the largest party in Bolton, but it did stave off the threat from both Conservatives and Independents in Bury.

But it wasn't only in the North that Labour suffered. Towns and cities in southern England, which became synonymous with the Blair electoral tsunami two decades ago, are now in Conservative hands.

Southampton and Harlow flipped directly from Labour; Basildon and Gloucester are no longer 'hung'; and the Conservatives are now the largest party in Plymouth, having toppled the previous Labour regime.

The elections for county and county unitary authorities, which were always due to be held this year, took place against the rather different background of Theresa May's local triumph (and, as

it turned out, electoral false dawn) in May 2017.

In truth, there hasn't been much overall movement since 2017 for either major party, though individual results do help paint a wider picture.

The Conservatives trebled their majority in Derbyshire from eight to 26 seats and took more decisive leads in Lancashire and Nottinghamshire.

In a move that will interest councillors across the country, Mansfield MP Ben Bradley was elected in Nottinghamshire and announced he intends to combine Westminster duties with being leader of the county.

In Durham, Labour lost 20 seats

on top of a similar number it had surrendered in 2017. More confirmation of its 'red wall' problem.

In some parts of the South, though, where there are more affluent and remain-supporting voters, it was the Conservatives who fell back.

In Oxfordshire and Surrey, both Liberal Democrats and

Greens made progress at Conservative expense.

In Cambridgeshire, the Conservatives lost overall control with Labour and the Liberal Democrats each gaining ground.

In West Sussex (and in the Worthing district contests), Labour won seats in line with gradual changes in the local demography to a younger, more university-educated population.

The signs of this 'new

politics' can be seen in other results too. The Liberal Democrats gained St Albans and held on comfortably in other strongholds such as Cheltenham and Winchester.

In Bristol, the Greens gained a dozen previously Labour seats and the two parties are now tied in the council chamber.

But in Cornwall, with its older leave-voting electorate, it is a different story. In a county in which the Liberal Democrats won every constituency at the 2005 General Election and were the largest party on the council for a quarter of a century until 2009, they now have just 13 out of 87 councillors.

This pattern can be put into context by one of Labour's few moments of celebration during what became a weekend of bitter election fallout and recrimination. The party's unexpected victory in the second round of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority mayoral contest contains two related lessons.

First, the number of parties competing for left-of-centre votes immediately puts them at a disadvantage against a single centre-right party in 'first-past-the-post' elections.

Second, electoral success can follow overt or tacit pacts between them.

The sitting

Conservative mayor was comfortably ahead on the first ballot with Labour in second place. The second preferences of the Liberal Democrat were then distributed almost three to one in favour of Labour, allowing its candidate to come through to win.

Most other mayoral contests took a predictable course – though the contrasting yet landslide victories of Conservative Ben Houchen in Tees Valley and Labour's Andy Burnham in Greater Manchester can teach all parties a thing or two about the power of personality and of being seen to deliver for your community.

One less remarked upon aspect of this election round was the large number of casual vacancies being filled. More than a year of pent-up demand was released on 6 May with as many as 260 contests taking place in councils without other scheduled elections.

These, too, proved a bonanza for the Conservatives, who made 64 gains and sustained just two losses.

One of Labour's rare gains did, however, have both practical and symbolic significance. It took a seat from Independents in Bolsover to regain control in a council covering the constituency held for half a century, until his defeat in December 2019, by party stalwart Dennis Skinner.

Local election results in England, 2021**

	Seats	Councils
Conservative	+315	+10
Labour	-346	-11
Liberal Democrat	-2	-
Other	+33	-1
No overall control	-	+2

Councils controlled (England) 2021

Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Ind/other	No overall control
139	77	22	5	88

Councillors (England) 2021

Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Ind/other
7,128	5,142	2,362	2,228

** Compared to pre-election, including councils without elections, local by-elections, defections and structural/boundary changes

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