

13

Building back local

The case for a localised
planning system

10 | **Party conferences**
How local leadership
can address national
challenges

16 | **Youth opportunities**
Young people's voices
need to be heard in
and on councils

21 | **Leading the charge**
Councils' role in
providing infrastructure
for electric vehicles

30 | **Devolution guide**
Learning lessons from
the experience of
combined authorities

**NATIONAL
CHILDREN AND ADULT SERVICES
CONFERENCE 2021**
24 – 26 NOVEMBER

The National Children and Adult Services

(NCAS) Conference is the annual opportunity for those with responsibilities in social care, children's services, education, health and related fields to hear about and respond to the very latest thinking on key policy and improvement agendas.

This year's conference will be held virtually over three days. Widely recognised as the most important annual event of its kind, the conference offers members and officers across councils and their local and national partners the opportunity to hear from high profile ministerial and keynote speakers and engage in sessions on current and future challenges.

For more information and to book your virtual space, please visit **www.ncasc.info**

Speakers include:

Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary
of State for Children and Families

Kate Green MP

Shadow Education Secretary

Professor Chris Whitty

Chief Medical Officer,
Department of Health and Social Care

Dr Jenny Harries OBE

Chief Executive, UK Health
Security Agency

CONTENTS



The case for local leadership

The party conferences kick off in September, and the LGA will be holding events at each to discuss how we harness the power of local government to level up across the country (p10).

We also hear from the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group about their party conference (p12) – see next month's edition for contributions from our Labour and Conservative groups.

Elsewhere in this month's **first**, we look at the importance of a localised planning system (p13), the 'Case for change' report from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England (p14), and the Government's new strategy on violence against women and girls (p15).

We all know that we need to encourage a more diverse range of people to represent our communities in local government, and this month we hear from young councillors and how they are making a difference (p16).

With the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) taking place in Glasgow in November, we continue our long-running series of related articles, with a look at the LGA's Net Zero Innovation Programme (p20) and a report from Local Partnerships on councils' role in providing charging infrastructure for electric vehicles (p21).

Cllr James Jamieson
is LGA Chairman



16



20



22

FEATURES

- 10 Party conferences**
Making the case for local leadership
- 12 Lib Dem event**
The 'blue wall', climate change and planning
- 13 Localised planning**
The key to safe, healthy and prosperous places
- 14 The case for change**
Children's social care review's first report
- 15 Support for victims**
Tackling violence against women and girls
- 16 Youth opportunities**
Younger voices need to be heard on councils
- 20 Net-zero innovation**
Town and gown joint work on climate change
- 21 Leading the charge**
Providing infrastructure for electric vehicles
- 22 Digital pathfinders**
Up to £20K to find local digital solutions
- 23 Autism strategy**
Supporting people in their communities

COMMENT

- 24 Rural powerhouse**
Driving devolution in North Yorkshire
- 28 A unified voice**
A new partnership in Lincolnshire
- 28 Good business city**
Supporting local jobs and economic growth
- 29 Local regeneration**
New taskforce for responsible business

REGULARS

- 04** News
- 09** Parliament – priority bills
- 26** Chairman and group leaders
- 30** Councillor – delivering devolution
- 31** Local elections



31



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

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

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

Circulation 17,000 (August 2021)
first is published online at
www.local.gov.uk/first at least two days
before the magazine. To unsubscribe
email first@oscar-research.co.uk

Photography
Getty Images and iStock.com

The inclusion of an advert
or insert in **first** does not imply
endorsement by the LGA of
any product, event or service.
Contributors' views are their
own and do not necessarily
reflect the opinions or policies
of the LGA.

Local
Government
Association

Nine in 10 residents support increased biodiversity

Ninety-four per cent of residents polled by the LGA want to see increased biodiversity in their area, including the planting of trees and protection of green spaces.

The survey asked people what they would like to see their council do to tackle climate change.

Encouraging people to be more eco-friendly through recycling and using less plastic, and increasing the use of renewable energy, were both high on the list, with more than nine in 10 wanting to see these changes.

Around 90 per cent of councils have declared a climate emergency, and many have been working hard to devise and implement innovative and effective plans to increase and protect biodiversity.

These include: City of York Council, which is creating an extensive community woodland, with the ambition to plant 50,000 trees by 2023; a North Devon Biosphere Reserve, jointly funded by three local authorities, which will include a new nature recovery plan in line with the Government's pledge for 30 per cent of the UK to be protected by 2030; and Surrey County

Council's ambitious target to plant 1.2 million trees – one for every resident – by 2030.

A recent report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that expected global temperature increases will wreak havoc across the world.

The LGA is warning that an ecology skills shortage is a worrying barrier to achieving net-gain goals in the biodiversity sector, with only one-third of planning

authorities in England having access to an in-house ecologist.

Cllr David Renard, LGA Environment Spokesperson, said: "The impact of climate change on weather patterns is having a devastating effect on households and businesses, and councils are seeing first hand the impact it has on their communities.

"Net zero can only be achieved if decarbonisation happens in every place, community and household.

"We continue to call for a national fiscal and policy framework to address the climate emergency, accompanied by long-term funding for councils, which would mean they can properly plan ahead on the needs of their local communities as a whole to support this."

● See p20-21, p26



Type 2 diabetes in children up almost 60%

The forthcoming Spending Review must invest in community sports and leisure facilities, along with long-term funding for local authority weight-management services and healthy schools initiatives, to help counter the obesity crisis, the LGA has said.

Type 2 diabetes treatment rates in children and young people – a condition normally seen only in older adults and closely linked to obesity – has rocketed by nearly 60 per cent in just five years, new LGA analysis reveals.

It says the latest figures highlight the urgent need to kick-start efforts to tackle childhood obesity following repeated lockdowns and the impact of the pandemic, which has meant some children and young people have found it harder to access support to manage their weight and live more healthily.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "It is extremely worrying that we are seeing more

young people develop Type 2 diabetes, a preventable condition that is rare in children and more typically develops in adults over the age of 40.

"These figures are yet another sobering reminder that there is much more to do to reach the Government's bold ambition of halving the number of children with obesity by the end of the decade.

"This is why the Government should use the upcoming Spending Review to invest in councils' public health budgets, if we are to realise our shared ambition of helping our children and young people live healthier lives as we build back better from the pandemic."



Serious child harm cases up nearly a fifth

The number of incidents reported by councils of children being harmed rose by almost a fifth in the past year, according to new figures.

There were 536 'serious incident notifications' in England during 2020/21, up 87 (19 per cent) on the previous year, and up 41 per cent since 2015/16.

Children aged under one continue to make up the highest proportion (36 per cent) of such notifications, with 191 incidents last year. Notices relating to child deaths increased by 35 (19 per cent), from 188 to 223.

The LGA is extremely concerned about children's safety amid extra pressures on families during the pandemic, with acts of abuse more likely to go unseen 'behind closed doors' during successive lockdowns.

Councils have tried to protect budgets for child protection services, investing an additional £1.1 billion over the past two years. Despite these efforts, soaring demand means councils

still overspent their children's social care budgets by £832 million in 2019/20.

The LGA says this is clear evidence of the urgent need for further investment in children's social care and has reiterated its call for the reinstatement of £1.7 billion of early intervention funding removed since 2010.

Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "The pandemic has put extra pressure on families, particularly those living in difficult circumstances, which can fuel harmful acts of abuse or neglect.

"Councils have been working hard with their partners to identify this and provide the help children need, but it is vital that children's social care services are funded to meet this need.

"The Independent Review of Children's Social Care (see p14) has already identified that there is no situation in the current system where we will not need to spend more to keep children safe. The Government must heed this warning."

'Extend incentives for apprenticeships'

The LGA is calling for financial incentives to help employers create apprenticeship programmes to be extended beyond the end of the furlough scheme.

The current scheme provides employers with an additional £3,000 to take on an apprentice and is due to end at the end of September – the same date as the end of the Government's furlough scheme.

The LGA is calling on government to

extend incentives until at least 31 March 2022, to enable employers to use them as part of local economic recovery plans.

An exclusive LGA survey of councils has also revealed that local authorities have invested more than £200 million to create more than 55,000 apprenticeships in 150 qualifications over the past four years.

Cllr Sir Richard Leese, Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board, said: "It is clear that, as the furlough scheme is phased out, there is the real possibility of a rise in the number of people out of work or training.

"To ensure people can get access to apprenticeships when they are needed the most, it is vitally important that the incentive scheme is extended.

"This scheme has already helped businesses and local authorities create tens of thousands of life-changing apprenticeship opportunities for people in their local communities.

"By extending the scheme, councils can work with local employers and the Government to ensure that the country builds back better from the pandemic."



In brief Afghan refugees

Thousands of Afghan refugees will be resettled in the UK after the Taliban seized control of Kabul, the Government has promised. The new scheme will see up to 20,000 Afghans offered a route to set up home in the UK over the next five years, supported by local authorities, with 5,000 set to arrive in the first year. LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson said councils want to work with government "to design any new resettlement scheme, so it ensures new arrivals get the support they need to settle into their new communities and considers ongoing pressures from other existing schemes". He added: "Councils have a proud history of supporting efforts to protect and support refugees and want to support the resettlement of those fleeing Afghanistan."

Long Covid



An estimated 945,000 people are experiencing self-reported Long Covid, according to the latest data from the Office for National Statistics on the prevalence of ongoing symptoms following COVID-19 infection in the UK. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "With nearly a million people self-reporting symptoms and evidence that Long Covid disproportionately affects those living in the most deprived areas, those with an existing health condition or disability, and people working in health and social care, we need to start planning now for what could be a potential increase in requests for council help and support."

● See p7

Vaccination programme

More than three-quarters of UK adults had received both doses of a COVID vaccine as **first** was going to press, with more than 70 per cent of young people aged 18 to 29 in England having received a first dose. Under-18s and people who have been double jabbed who become a close contact of someone who has tested positive for coronavirus no longer have to self-isolate, but are advised to take a PCR test as soon as possible to check if they have the virus and for variants of concern.

'Multi-agency approach needed to beat crime'

The Government's 'Beating crime plan' needs to go beyond the role of the police and ensure a multi-agency approach with a stronger focus on early intervention and prevention, the LGA has said.

The LGA has welcomed the plan's recognition of anti-social behaviour as an issue, and the extension of Project Adder to eight more local authorities. Project Adder combines tough law enforcement with increased provision of treatment and recovery services to tackle drug-related crime.

The LGA urged government to ensure violence reduction units are extended to all police forces in England and Wales with five-year funding settlements, rather than year-on-year funding.

Cllr Nesil Caliskan, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said government investment in specialist support in schools is positive, and that councils are best placed to ensure this support reaches those who need it most.

Young people excluded from school are more likely to be involved in youth crime, and the majority of young people in justice settings have speech, language and communication needs.

Cllr Caliskan added: "This plan focuses heavily on the role of the police in tackling crime after it has happened and highlights the need for a joint effort from everyone involved in the criminal justice system.

"Councils have a crucial role to play in preventing crime, supporting victims, and creating safer and stronger communities.

"We look forward to working with government and partners on the various upcoming commitments to reduce crime and support victims, while using the skills not just of the criminal justice system, but local government also." See p15.



Thousands spend summer holidays in temporary accommodation

Enough children to fill more than 4,500 classrooms spent the summer holidays in temporary accommodation, latest figures show.

When pupils broke up from school, there were 119,830 children in England in temporary accommodation for the end-of-term break.

The LGA says this underlines

the need to build more social housing. It wants to work with government on a long-term plan to tackle homelessness, so everyone has a safe and secure permanent home, as part of the recovery from coronavirus.

It is calling on the Government to let councils build back locally, by giving them the powers and resources to deliver a social housing building programme of 100,000 new homes a year, to help address the housing shortage.

The LGA is calling for further reform of the Right to Buy scheme so that councils can

retain 100 per cent of receipts, have flexibility to combine Right to Buy receipts with other government grants, and set the size of discounts locally.

By doing this, councils could get building much-needed homes more quickly.

Cllr Darren Rodwell, LGA Housing

Spokesperson, said: "Having a safe, secure, permanent home is the bedrock of any child getting the very best start in life, so it is tragic that thousands of children spent their summer holidays living in temporary accommodation.

"This is a sad reflection of the lack of housing in this country and demonstrates the urgent need to build more social homes.

"This won't happen overnight, but it is vital that councils, working with government, are given the powers to get building homes again at a scale that drastically reduces homelessness, as we look to build back the nation following the pandemic."



Licensing powers 'should include public health'

Current licensing laws need to be updated to require operators to take public health into account in running their premises, as well as wider safety and crime issues.

The LGA has long called for the Licensing Act 2003 to be updated to allow for action where premises fail to protect the health of their communities.

Alongside greater access to NHS data, including hospital admissions and ambulance call-out details, councils would be able to reduce NHS costs and save lives.

Excessive alcohol consumption is estimated to cost the NHS £3.2 billion a year, with additional costs falling to social services, police and businesses.

But despite the established link between consumption and the availability of alcohol, councils currently find it challenging to ask for

modifications to licences on health grounds.

A public health objective would also ensure that councils are better prepared to deal with a future pandemic, allowing them to use established procedures for ensuring businesses take appropriate public health measures to protect customers.

Cllr Nesil Caliskan, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said the past year "has shown us the importance of businesses taking measures to protect public health".

She added: "Councils want to support businesses and enable them to be successful, and do not want powers to refuse every application. But they also have a duty to protect their communities from infection and ill-health, and create vibrant and safe town centres for their residents."

Health inequalities exacerbated by pandemic

COVID-19 has created a 'perfect storm' of existing inequality and disease, leading to higher rates of coronavirus infections and death among the most disadvantaged people, the LGA has warned.

A lack of access to skills and training, and overcrowded housing, are among the deep-rooted, structural issues that need to be tackled if we are to build back better from the pandemic, according to a recent report by the LGA.

While councils are doing all they can to protect their communities from the worst effects of the pandemic, the LGA says it is clear that fundamental change is necessary to address the multiple health inequalities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19, including those related to age, gender, ethnicity, occupation and geography.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "COVID-19 has cruelly exposed and exacerbated the many social and health problems that existed before the pandemic, which need to

be urgently addressed as part of our national recovery.

"We know that where you live, your age, ethnicity, gender and job status all play a part in determining your chances of living a healthy, long life. As we start to return to a more normal way of life, we want to work with government to ensure we finally address the longstanding health inequalities preventing us from levelling up the country.

"This should mean greater, more consistent funding for councils' public health services, alongside other local government services, such as housing and employment, all of which can influence the future health and life chances of our communities.

"By ensuring that everybody, no matter their background or where they live and work, is able to realise their potential of living a long healthy life, we can truly build back better from the pandemic."

● See www.local.gov.uk/perfect-storm-health-inequalities-and-impact-covid-19 for the full report

£1.6bn for new disability strategy

More accessible housing, easier commuting and better job prospects are among the proposals in the Government's new 'National disability strategy', which reflects the experiences of disabled people across the UK.

The strategy sets out 100 immediate commitments supported by £1.6 billion in funding, of which £300 million will be invested in support for children with special educational needs and disabilities in schools, and an online work passport to help disabled students move seamlessly from education to work.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chair of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Through their responsibilities for vital everyday services, councils are already at the heart of enabling disabled people to live their best possible lives and tackling inequalities."

He added: "Our transport networks must be accessible for all people. Councils help provide the national concessionary fares scheme, which offers free off-peak travel

for disabled people. By fully funding the scheme, government would help ease the pressure on stretched council budgets and protect cherished bus services.

"The forthcoming Spending Review is an opportunity to ensure that councils have the necessary funding to achieve real and lasting change for disabled people. It is also vital that we urgently get a long-term, sustainable funding solution and a vision for a care and support system that is fit for the 21st century."



£338 million for walking and cycling

The Government has announced a £338 million investment in walking and cycling, as well as changes to the Highway Code to give greater protections to non-car users on the road.

The funding will go towards supporting road reallocation schemes to encourage greater active travel, funding for new cycle lanes, and improvements to pedestrian footpaths.

Changes to the Highway Code include a new hierarchy system, emphasising how those who can do the greatest harm on the road have the greatest responsibility to reduce the risk they may pose to other road users.

Cllr Darren Rodwell, LGA Transport Spokesperson, said: "Councils are at the heart of promoting and enabling more sustainable local journeys, and more government support for cycle lanes – and new Highway Code guidance to make it safer on the roads – will help us deliver safer cycling options to get more people on their bikes.

"Transport is the biggest source of carbon emissions in the UK, and thousands of people are prematurely killed every year from traffic-related pollution.

"The UK cannot meet its climate change targets and clean its toxic air without increasing cycling levels – this requires more safe, segregated cycling infrastructure and new rules for safer roads, to encourage more people to take up cycling.

"However, if councils are to be able to continue to drive greener forms of transport across the country, it is important that the Government's upcoming Spending Review goes even further and provides longer-term funding certainty."

In brief

Digital skills

With the tech industry earmarked by the Government as a key pillar of the country's recovery and future growth, councils have vital roles to play in retaining and attracting the tech industry to local areas, and ensuring local people have the more specialised digital skills employers need. 'Councils' role supporting the digital skills pipeline', a recently published LGA resource, outlines these roles and highlights successful interventions. The research found that: employment growth for tech-specialist occupations will outstrip that for the workforce as a whole; tech employment growth will be strongest outside of the traditional hot spots of London and the South East; and growth will be highest for management and development positions, while tech support will see more modest increases. See www.local.gov.uk/publications for the full report.

Events insurance

The LGA has welcomed a £750 million government-backed insurance scheme to help the live events sector plan with confidence. Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "This is an incredibly positive step in supporting our struggling events industry, which has faced continuous uncertainty over the past 18 months. Events are a critical part of our cultural economy, providing thousands of people with jobs, supporting businesses and enhancing the cultural fabric of communities."

Council pay

The National Employers for local government services have made an improved, final pay offer of 2.75 per cent for the lowest-paid staff and 1.75 per cent for other staff, up from 1.5 per cent for all staff previously. The three local government unions – UNISON, GMB and Unite – have confirmed that their respective consultation ballots on the final pay offer will run through to late September/early October. All three unions will be recommending that the pay offers be rejected.



The legacy of Team GB's success during this summer's Tokyo Olympics risks being lost without further investment in grassroots and community sport facilities, the LGA has warned.

Councils provide the majority of public swimming pools and leisure facilities. However, they are expensive to build and maintain, with increased pressures to divert funding from sports to fund statutory services, such as adult social care.

Three in five swimming pools and 63 per cent of main sports halls are past their expected lifespans or overdue refurbishment, resulting in some facilities remaining closed after the pandemic and in need of costly repairs.

The LGA is calling for a second round of National Leisure Recovery Funding, worth £700 million, to keep facilities operational, and longer-term investment through the upcoming Spending Review to refurbish the estate, raise environmental

standards, and ensure services are future-proofed.

Investment in sport and leisure facilities is essential in increasing the development of young people, preparing them with vital life skills and healthy habits.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "The country is hugely proud of the tremendous achievements of our athletes at the Tokyo Olympics. Their success could lead to a legacy of inspiring young people to take up sport and healthy lifestyle habits.

"We must take action now if we want to ensure this success is repeated, and that young people from all backgrounds can aspire to compete in future Games.

"Local leisure facilities play a vital role in ensuring our communities can get healthy and active, but they are also the starting point in discovering bright new sporting talent, that can go on to represent Team GB on the world stage."

'Increase fly-tipping fines'

Fines for fly-tipping must be increased significantly, as current sentences handed down fail to match the severity of the offence committed.

Changes have been proposed in a letter to the Sentencing Council – co-signed by the LGA, alongside 158 local authorities and 10 professional bodies – including encouraging the use of quicker, cheaper, easier-to-administer fixed penalty notices (FPNs) by ensuring court fines always exceed the £400 maximum FPN.

As it stands, a 12-step process is used to determine the sentence for a fly-tipping offence, with a deliberate offence incurring 'minor' environmental harm bringing a fine of 600 per cent of weekly earnings.

Based on average UK earnings, this should

amount to more than £3,000, but in 2019/20, 2,671 court fines were issued at a total value of £1,170,000 – an average of just £438 per fine.

Twenty thousand incidents of fly-tipping occur each week in England.

Cllr Darren Rodwell, LGA Environment Spokesperson, said: "Fly-tipping currently costs local taxpayers almost £50 million a year to clean up, which could be better spent on other vital services in our communities – but until the fine matches the crime, the burden will continue to fall on residents.

"We are eager to work with government to update its sentencing guidelines to ensure that those caught and prosecuted for fly-tipping receive significant fines that help to offset the huge costs to councils and ensure they never offend again."

Building safety and health care integration



The Building Safety Bill and the Health and Care Bill will be two of the LGA's legislative priorities in the autumn, when Parliament returns from recess in early September.

Giving evidence to the bill committees, which examine each piece of legislation in detail, provides an opportunity to shape thinking around these important measures for councils.

The LGA expects that the Building Safety Bill will strengthen the building safety system in the UK, especially in relation to new buildings.

The bill establishes a Building Safety Regulator (BSR) to implement the new, more stringent, regulatory regime for higher-risk buildings – defined as residential buildings higher than 18 metres. Care homes and hospitals higher than 18 metres are also covered at the design and construction stage.

The BSR will oversee the safety and performance of all buildings and competence within the industry and among regulators.

“Regulations and guidance need to ensure intentions are realised”

The most controversial aspect of the bill remains the question of who pays to remediate the consequences of 20 years of systemic failure in building safety.

While the Government has made large sums available to remediate dangerous cladding, a significant proportion of the fire safety failures uncovered after the Grenfell Tower disaster are not related to cladding. The Government has refused to fund these or social blocks with non-ACM dangerous cladding.

This will prevent councils and housing associations from making a greater contribution to providing the housing the nation requires, improving the existing housing stock, meeting energy targets, and making buildings safe.

In the private sector, leaseholders

are facing the costs of interim measures, rising insurance charges and remediation bills that could bankrupt them in some cases, while thousands of flats are unsellable.

The LGA is concerned that the failure to protect leaseholders will leave councils to pick up the pieces as homeowners are made homeless and dangerous buildings are left unfixed.

Meanwhile, the Health and Care Bill seeks to remove barriers to integrating services to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities.

The LGA broadly supports the bill's focus on improving the health and wellbeing of the population and the duty of bodies to have regard for this in making decisions.

We are strongly in favour of the duty to engage with patients, carers and representatives, and hope and expect that there will be further guidance to help this.

The requirement for NHS integrated care boards and local authorities to establish a health and care partnership to produce an integrated care strategy is helpful, as is recognition of the importance of health and wellbeing boards.

The legislation will give local systems the flexibility to make their own arrangements for joining up services and setting their own strategies for improving population health, but regulations and guidance need to ensure these intentions are realised.

Increased powers for the Secretary of State in NHS reconfigurations may undermine the role of health overview and scrutiny, and we will be seeking assurances that these powers will be used in consultation with local authorities and NHS organisations affected.

There is a new role for the Care Quality Commission and the Secretary of State in the review and performance assessment of councils' adult social care services.

We are working to ensure the assurance process is proportionate, includes a clear and continuous role for existing sector-led improvement work, and takes account of the significant financial pressures facing adult social care.



To read the LGA's parliamentary briefings on the Building Safety Bill and the Health and Care Bill in full, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament

Party conference season

The LGA is making the case for local leadership to address national challenges

COVID-19 has dominated the political agenda for the past 18 months, with government spending hundreds of billions of pounds and mobilising every part of the public sector to protect lives and livelihoods.

The role of councils has been widely recognised throughout this time of national crisis, and local leadership has been essential. Councils have supported their residents, and adapted and innovated as they led their communities and created new services from scratch.

Councillors and council staff have been on the frontline in the battle against the virus, as directors of public health and their teams helped minimise the spread of the virus, boosting the National Test and Trace programme with local insight.

Alongside the NHS, councils played a key role in the vaccination programme, supported the homeless

and the vulnerable into safe accommodation, and distributed various grants to their local communities – at the same time as keeping other vital local services going, such as waste and recycling.

As the political party conferences return this autumn, they present a key opportunity to highlight the important contribution of councils throughout this period and how they are leading their communities towards recovery.

“How do we harness the power of local government to level up?”

The LGA will be using the conference season to explore how, with the right funding and freedoms, councils will play a leading role in the recovery from the pandemic: driving improvements in public health; boosting local economic growth;

reviving town and city centres; building more homes; improving roads; and equipping people with the skills they need to succeed, so that no-one is left behind.

Our Chairman, Cllr James Jamieson, and political group leaders Cllr Nick Forbes CBE (Lab), Cllr Izzi Secombe OBE (Con), Cllr Joe Harris (Lib Dem) and Cllr Marianne Overton MBE (Ind), and LGA President Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson (Crossbench), will be joined by many others from across local government in taking the message of local leadership to party conferences.

The conferences are an opportunity to press the key themes around our ‘Build back local’ campaign (www.local.gov.uk/build-back-local), which calls on central government to trust councils to be its delivery partner, delivering



Sir Ed Davey MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats



Sir Keir Starmer MP, Leader of the Labour Party



Boris Johnson MP, Leader of the Conservative Party

i For the latest information on LGA events at the party conferences, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament/party-conferences-autumn-2021



of local government to level up across the country’.

Our councillors will also debate a range of topics – including levelling up, devolution, planning, affordable housing, children’s social care and boosting local economies – at events organised by stakeholders, ensuring councils have a strong voice in policy discussions throughout conference season.

The 2021 Liberal Democrat conference will be held online from 17-20 September. It will be the second with Sir Ed Davey as leader, and he will be looking to build on his party’s local successes in the May council elections.

In Brighton (25-29 September), Labour leader Sir Kier Starmer is likely to make a number of domestic policy announcements, and set out a direction for the party and its plans for the country.

Meanwhile, the Conservative Party will be meeting in Manchester (3-6 October), having entrenched its position as the largest group at the

LGA following the local elections. The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, will also continue to set out his vision for the UK, as we learn to live with coronavirus.

In October (22-24), the Green Party meets online and in person in Birmingham, and will continue to build on its local success, championing its members’ proposals for environmental and economic change.

The conference season draws to a close on 29 October, with Cllr Marianne Overton leading the LGA Independent Group’s conference. This is open to all members of the LGA Independent Group and is free to attend, and will be held in a hybrid format at the LGA’s Smith Square offices in London.

The conferences and the upcoming parliamentary session are going to be vitally important in making the case for building back local.

We will be working with councillors, parliamentarians and partner organisations to make the positive case for local leadership in addressing the challenges the nation faces.

recovery locally in a way that has the greatest impact for their communities.

The LGA will again be hosting our own debate at each conference, with high-profile speakers including ministers, shadow ministers, senior councillors and other influencers, as we consider ‘how we harness the power

LGA events at the **party** conferences



Liberal Democrats conference

Online
17-20 September

- **LGA debate**
‘Build back local: how do we harness the power of local government to level up across the country?’
Sunday 19 September, 4.20pm to 5.30pm
- Speakers include:** Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Leader of Durham County Council (Chair); Cllr Joe Harris, Leader of the LGA’s Liberal Democrat Group; Tim Farron MP, Liberal Democrat Local Government Spokesperson; Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, LGA President; Polly Mackenzie, Chief Executive of Demos.



Labour Party conference

Brighton
25-29 September

- **Association of Labour Councillors evening reception**
Sunday 26 September, 8.00pm to 9.30pm
Albert Room, Grand Hotel, Brighton
- Speakers include:** Cllr Nick Forbes CBE, Leader of the LGA’s Labour Group
- **LGA debate**
‘Build back local: how do we harness the power of local government to level up across the country?’
Monday 27 September, 1.00pm to 2.30pm
- Speakers include:** Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Deputy Leader of the LGA’s Labour Group (Chair); Cllr Nick Forbes CBE, Leader of the LGA’s Labour Group; Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, LGA President; Anneliese Dodds MP, Labour Party Chair and Chair of Labour Policy Review.



Conservative Party conference

Manchester
3-6 October

- **LGA Conservative Group evening reception**
Monday 4 October, 6.00pm to 7.30pm
Petersfield Suite, Midland Hotel, Manchester
- Speakers include:** Cllr Izzi Seccombe OBE, Leader of the LGA’s Conservative Group
- **LGA debate**
‘Build back local: how do we harness the power of local government to level up across the country?’
Sunday 3 October, 6.00pm to 7.30pm
- Speakers include:** Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman (Chair); Cllr Izzi Seccombe OBE, Leader of the LGA’s Conservative Group; Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (invited); Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, LGA President; Jonathan Werran, Chief Executive of Localis.



Councillor **Joe Harris**
is Leader of the
LGA's Liberal Democrat
Group

Wake-up call

Planning reform and action on climate change will be among the issues highlighted at next month's Liberal Democrat party conference

A beachside conference eludes the Liberal Democrats for another year, with the party hosting our autumn conference online again, from 17-20 September.

While I'm sure all regular Lib Dem conference attendees are beginning to miss the atmosphere of the conference hall and the buzz of the stalls, there are undeniable merits to a digital platform.

Attendance alone is a huge advantage, with many people finding an online conference much more accessible in terms of cost and time.

There will be one big difference between this conference and the last – our fantastic new MP Sarah Green, who pulled off a stunning by-election victory in Chesham and Amersham.

Sarah was a brilliant candidate, and the team ran a near-perfect campaign; there was a real sense of anger towards the Government on the doorstep, particularly over its planning reform proposals.

This shock win should serve as a wake-up call to the Government, that local people demand a say in what

happens in their local communities.

We cannot be negligent and expect a change of heart from the Government, so the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group will be running a fringe on the planning reforms, and what the impact will be on housing, environmental standards and local democracy. With a line-up of fantastic speakers, it's certainly an event not to be missed!

This year's Liberal Democrat conference may well be the first in recent memory that is not the most important conference of the year.

With the UK hosting the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in November, the eyes of the world will be watching as world leaders gather to (hopefully) agree on a range of measures.

The Liberal Democrats have an outstanding record of climate action and were the only party in the 2019 General Election with a credible plan to achieve our net-zero carbon target. Climate change is a global issue that can only be tackled by all levels of government, from international to local, working together.

Therefore, the party conference Q&A with Climate Change Spokesperson Wera Hobhouse MP will be particularly significant: as a party, we have much to be proud of, but as a country and a species, we have so much work to do,

and the Liberal Democrats have a part to play.

Over the conference weekend, we will also have the opportunity to speak with key spokespeople, including Alistair Carmichael MP (home affairs and political reform), Christine Jardine MP (Treasury and business), and Sarah Olney MP (energy and industrial strategy).

There are some fantastic fringe events, too, many discussing topics right at the top of local government priorities, from the skills agenda and levelling up to tackling poverty, a green recovery, and rethinking the high street.

It wouldn't be a Liberal Democrat conference without an abundance of training events, with sessions for newbies and seasoned members alike, many of which are facilitated by the fantastic team at the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors.

The 'Boris bubble' is bursting, the 'vaccine bounce' is dropping, and the 'blue wall' is crumbling.

This conference may well mark the beginning of a strong Liberal Democrat revival at all levels of government and the continuing collapse of Conservative support in their former heartlands.

We look forward to working with our fantastic leadership team to make this a reality.



Liberal Democrat
leader Sir Ed Davey MP

i See www.libdems.org.uk/conference
**See next month's first for more
about the Labour and Conservative
party conferences**



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

Local plans

We must build back local to find the right solution for each place

England is a great, diverse, and varied country, which is partly what makes it so special. So why is it that governments have historically so often sought to have a one-size-fits-all approach?

If we are truly to have levelling up and devolution, it needs to be focused on local decision-making, yet all too often the default setting of government is to seek to have more centralised powers and a focus on prescriptive processes.

Planning is yet another example of this.

For as long as I have been in local government, the central theme has been one of removing local powers and discretion, with a national system. Yet the housing and regeneration issues we face are vastly different across the country.

If we are going to be successful, we need to find solutions that are right for each village, town and city across the country, and we must build back local. This cannot be done through a nationalised system.

The Planning Bill provides us with

a once-in-a-generation opportunity to secure reforms that will deliver safe, prosperous and healthy places for generations to come, as well as the homes we need.

All too often planning reforms, while they have had the best of intentions, have not been tested in delivery and have made the system worse. We cannot afford to make that mistake again.

*“It is vital that **planning** is founded on democracy”*

We all know that some of the current planning rules simply do not work at the frontline; however, it is vital that reforms are carefully considered, with input from all those who participate in good, effective planning.

We need a localised planning system that is focused on delivering quality housing and improving the communities we all live in. This means infrastructure upfront, making sure housing addresses local needs, and

having local jobs and sustainability.

As recent LGA polling has shown (**first** 662), eight in 10 residents want to be able to have their say on all new homes built in their local community. It is therefore vital that planning is founded on democracy.

We must also get away from the notion that councils are blockers to housing growth. They are not. Councils have been approving nine in 10 planning applications.

There are also more than 1.1 million homes that have been given planning permission over the past decade which are still yet to be built, and, in addition, one million homes allocated in local plans that have not yet been brought forward for planning.

The issue is getting the homes built: we need the tools to make landowners and developers build.

If homes are to gain local support, they need to: meet local needs; be well integrated with, and improve, local communities; have the right infrastructure – not just roads, but schools, green infrastructure, parks, and health services; and be sustainable.

All too often, poor developments, lack of infrastructure and inappropriate permitted developments have undermined public support for much-needed homes. We need a reset, and councils are keen to work with government to get these critical reforms right.



For the LGA's work on planning, see www.local.gov.uk/topics/housing-and-planning. See www.local.gov.uk/build-back-local for the LGA's Build back local campaign

The case for change

The LGA has responded to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England



Councillor **Anntoinette Bramble** is Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board

Keeping children safe and helping those in our care to enjoy their lives and fulfil their potential are some of the most important roles councils play.

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to ensure that the system to help them do this is set up, resourced and operating in the best possible way.

The review published its 'Case for change' in June, summarising evidence

around what needs to improve and highlighting a range of issues that councils have been raising for some years.

In our response, we welcomed the work that has been carried out so far and put forward areas where we felt the review could go further.

The UK ranks among the top countries in the world for children's health, education and protection in Save the Children's Global Childhood Report 2021, while many children in care have very good experiences – so while challenge is vital, we must take care to retain and build



For more information about the LGA's work on children and young people, please visit www.local.gov.uk/topics/children-and-young-people

on our strengths too. With that in mind, we urged the review to consider how to elevate the status of children's social workers, who are too often undervalued and lack the public recognition that their partners in health, the police and education receive.

They keep thousands of children safe every day, and should be recognised, supported and empowered.

In suggesting that social work is too risk averse and investigates too many cases, the review fails to acknowledge the role of the inspectorate or the impact of high-profile cases, such as those of Victoria Climbié or Peter Connelly.

The devastating nature of these cases led to long-lasting impacts on social care and on public awareness of, and expectations around, children's safety and wellbeing. This cannot be ignored.

'The case for change' asked whether a system that undertakes support for families and child protection can perform both roles well. We are confident it can and does, with many examples of excellent practice around the country.

Splitting services and creating siloes is unlikely to have the same impact as ensuring families are able to access the services they need – from mental health support to financial safety nets – when they need them.

We called on the review to consider further those factors that make teenagers vulnerable and how schools can be more inclusive. We know exclusion from school is a risk factor for young people, yet schools are still not accountable for the outcomes of children they exclude. We also called for clear links between this review and the ongoing Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Review.

The report makes welcome reference to the financial challenges facing children's social care. This needs also to recognise that short-term funding allocations, cuts to the early intervention grant and bidding for small pots of money all impact on councils' ability to build services around the needs of local children and families.

Bringing budgets together and allowing for longer-term planning will make a huge difference to communities.

While this is a review of children's social care, we also noted that one department alone cannot improve outcomes for children and families.

Children's lives are complex, and so too are the systems children's social care operates in. Improving outcomes will need a whole-system coordinated approach – we encourage the review to embrace that challenge.

"One department alone cannot improve outcomes for children"



Violence against women and girls

The Government has promised more support for victims and survivors



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

Following the tragic murder of Sarah Everard in March 2021, and the subsequent public conversation about the safety of women and girls, the Government reopened its consultation on the Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) 2021-24 Strategy – and received an overwhelming 180,000 responses to help shape the strategy.

In July, the Government published its updated strategy, setting out an ambition to prevent violence against women and girls, increase support for victims and survivors, and ensure perpetrators are brought to justice.

It is right that the strategy focuses on all forms of violence against women and girls, including rape and sexual offences, stalking, domestic abuse, 'honour-based' abuse – including female genital mutilation, forced marriage and 'honour' killings – 'revenge porn' and 'upskirting'. These are acts of violence that have a disproportionate effect on women and girls.

The LGA welcomes the Government's immediate and strategic response to improve safety for women and girls.

There will be a new national policing lead on violence against women and girls, who will report to the National Policing

Board, chaired by the Home Secretary. The new policing lead will also be the point of contact for every police force, to ensure best practice is shared and that progress on improving the response to these crimes is being monitored.

There will also be two new VAWG transport champions, to help promote positive change and tackle problems faced by female passengers on public transport, as well as a national communications campaign that focuses on raising awareness and creating behaviour change.

It was also encouraging to note the intention to provide better support for teachers to deliver the relationship, sex and health education curriculum.

Councils have commended the Government for acknowledging the need to do more to address women and girls' safety through the Safety of Women at Night Fund, but we are disappointed that currently only £5 million has been allocated for this purpose.

We hope more funding will become available to help ensure our residents can enjoy public spaces and venues at night as we see a return to a vibrant night-time economy.

It is clear that if society is to truly achieve significant reductions in violence against women and girls, as well as

support victims, long-term funding for tackling domestic abuse is key.

That is why the LGA continues to urge the Government to revisit this area as a matter of urgency.

There needs to be an equal focus on, and funding for, prevention and early intervention measures that aim to prevent abuse from happening in the first place. Furthermore, in the LGA's response to the VAWG strategy consultation, we highlighted the importance of aligning this work with current and upcoming legislation and guidance.

There must be a coordinated, holistic approach to tackling violence against women and girls that is embedded across all government departments and relevant agencies. Local authorities stand ready and would welcome the opportunity to work with government to ensure that all future guidance and strategies seeking to address violence against women and girls are developed consistently.

This approach must be underpinned by a commitment to provide the appropriate long-term funding and support required to give us the best possible chance of making real progress in our efforts to keep women and girls safe in our communities.



See www.gov.uk/government/news/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy launched **for the Government's VAWG strategy**.

See www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses **for LGA briefings on domestic abuse, knife crime, VAWG, and online abuse of women elected representatives**

It might be the best graduate scheme out there

Councillor **Darryl Smalley** (Liberal Democrat) is Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Communities at City of York Council

Being a councillor is the greatest privilege. Every day is different; you get to meet so many amazing people and, ultimately, shape the world around you.

I was made a cabinet member of a unitary council aged 20 – and I haven't had one day yet where I've regretted getting involved.

I'm also a member of my two local parish councils. I've been interviewed by Ofsted, had lunch with asylum seekers, climbed the scaffolding of a library redevelopment, and experienced so many other strange and wonderful things.

Being a local councillor might be the best 'graduate scheme' out there. I love being thrown in at the deep end. In my second week as a councillor, I was chairing Armed Forces Covenant meetings.

"I love being thrown in at the deep end"

The training and personal development is fantastic, particularly that run by the LGA. Meeting and making friends with councillors of all parties helped ground me; whatever issue you are facing, someone has been through it before.

We're building a new library in the community – that's probably the biggest win so far. Each week there is something to be proud about; ensuring hedges are trimmed seems minor, but to the resident in the mobility scooter who can't get to the shops, it's life-changing.

Working across my portfolio, you can have a day when you start by meeting hoteliers, visit a museum, and finish at a LGBTQIA+ forum in the evening.

I love meeting new faces, solving issues for people locally, and building on the legacy of those who served my community before me.



Youth opportunities

Young people's voices need to be heard in councils

On 12 August, International Youth Day highlighted the vital participation of young people in global issues.

It is important that young people's voices are heard, not only so they may advocate for themselves and the issues that matter to them, but also to inform councils' work for the future and build

their pioneering solutions into action.

However, in 2018, the average age of councillors in England was 59, with only 15 per cent aged under 45, compared with 45 per cent who were retired, according to the most recent 'National census of local authority councillors' (see www.local.gov.uk/publications/national-census-local-authority-councillors-2018).

As part of the LGA's government-funded sector support programme, the Be a Councillor campaign gives councils bespoke support and works to attract councillor candidates who are as diverse as



Contact becouncillor@local.gov.uk to find out how the LGA can support your local Be a Councillor campaign and visit www.local.gov.uk/becouncillor for free resources.



I wanted to do my bit

Councillor **Hannah Clare** (Green) is Deputy Leader of Brighton & Hove City Council

I was first elected as a councillor in 2019, but started in local government when I was elected to my local youth council when I was 13.

From this experience, I saw the real impact local government can have, and how important it is to ensure that the voice of young people is heard in it.

I felt that the age profile of councillors meant the majority of councillors were really distant from what young people want and need, and I wanted to do my bit to increase diversity.

Being a councillor in my 20s is a challenge. A year after being elected, my

Cllr Darryl Smalley



Being a councillor is demanding, but rewarding

Councillor **Lewis Chinchon** (Conservative) is a member of Sheffield City Council

I have always taken a strong interest in community affairs, so standing for election and campaigning on local issues was a natural step to take.

Since being elected as a councillor, I have strengthened my connections with the local community by participating in litter picks, visiting residents to discuss road safety issues, meeting the neighbourhood policing team, and engaging with local businesses. Forming these connections has helped me make a positive impact.

In full council, I have had the opportunity to articulate a vision for the future of Sheffield city centre.

Being a councillor is demanding; however, if you care greatly about improving communities, the role is extremely rewarding.

Assisting residents on a one-to-one level provides a personal dimension to the role, whether that is in ensuring repairs are carried out to their council property or dealing with a council tax enquiry.

Much of this side to being a councillor is reactive; however, the choice is yours about how proactive you wish to be. I believe proactively engaging with the community is a key part of being a councillor.

If you are enthusiastic about engaging with communities and helping to improve the local area, then being a councillor is the means to achieving that.

Many of the people I spoke to during my campaign expressed the need for a more diverse range of voices on the council, including younger ones. Being young is not – and should not be – a barrier.

the communities they will serve.

Be a Councillor can help support local campaigns to attract younger candidates to stand for election, and represents a key way of engaging with local communities.

Here, we hear from four young councillors on the work they are doing in their communities, and the experience of becoming an elected representative at a young age.

BE A COUNCILLOR

party came into administration and this presented a whole new range of challenges.

I became the youngest ever deputy leader of Brighton & Hove City Council and the chair of the Children, Young People and Skills Committee really unexpectedly. But this has given me an amazing opportunity to deliver on the priorities that my party and I saw as important, and the ones that young people had raised with me.

Right now, we're working on a range of things – from anti-racist schools to acting on the climate crisis.

We are also supporting youth services with increased funding and tackling disadvantage in our city, and we have just opened a youth employment hub to help young people find work.

With everything I've achieved, I'm really proud that I can say I've changed the lives of young people in Brighton & Hove.

Young people can make a difference



Councillor **Tina Bhartwas** is Labour's Spokesperson for the Environment at Hertfordshire County Council

I became a councillor for many reasons, but mainly because, growing up, I had some very difficult experiences, and felt my community had been left behind.

Before being elected, I coordinated the youth wings of climate groups and worked closely with young people in the climate movement, which highlighted to me the lack of voice young people have in local government.

During the pandemic, I set up Hertfordshire Against Holiday Hunger, and petitioned the county council to extend free school meals to support children and families.

Balancing my councillor duties with my personal life and studying at Queen Mary University of London requires determination, independence, and good time management.

"It is important to me to be approachable"

It is a massive commitment, but I feel well supported by my group, cross-party councillors, and my friends.

As a young, Asian, working-class woman, I struggle with imposter syndrome, and life in the public eye can be difficult.

It is important to me to be the kind of councillor who is approachable, reliable and visible. I have no doubt that, as a young councillor, I have a different set of experiences, outlook, and way of working to achieve this.

Young people can make a difference in their communities by getting involved – in a political party, a community or voluntary group, or by becoming a trustee: aged 18, I became the youngest trustee on the board of the North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Centre for Voluntary Service.

We need more young people at all levels of government.

Towards a low-carbon future: how to be part of the solution

Councils' finance teams play a crucial role in meeting the challenge of net zero

With the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) due to take place in Glasgow in November, the UK's plan for net zero by 2050 will be under intense focus, and local councils have a big role to play. But net zero comes with a hefty price tag. According to recent data from the Office for Budget Responsibility, it could add around £470 billion to public sector net debt.

So how can councils be part of the solution with limited funds at their disposal?

Review existing investments

Making sure existing investments are aligned with ESG – environment, social needs and good governance – is one way to ensure that the council's funds are supporting companies that build healthier and greener futures.

Warrington Borough Council and Glasgow City Council have policies that ensure investment and treasury funds are looked after by investment managers with high ESG credentials. Glasgow City Council's pension fund was even rated A+ by the Principles for Responsible Investment, the UN-supported investor network for ethical investment.

As an investment manager for both councils, CCLA was an early member of the Principles for Responsible Investment and has taken the lead on engaging with companies to lobby them to improve their environmental practices. But getting listed companies to improve their environmental credentials is just one part of the equation. Investment into unlisted companies that are developing and providing the solutions to help reach net zero, and counter the risks posed by climate change, is also important.

James Corah, Head of Ethical and Responsible Investment for CCLA, explains: "We have taken material steps to incorporate climate resilience into our clients' investment portfolios and, as part of this, we have dedicated more than £250 million to investments that solely focus on the transition to a net-zero future."

One such investment was the seeding of the Clean Growth Fund, alongside the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, to which Strathclyde Pension Fund – the pension fund for Glasgow City Council and 11 other local authorities in the West of Scotland and various other public sector

bodies – has also since committed capital. The venture capital fund's remit is to accelerate the commercialisation of clean technologies, create new employment opportunities across the UK, and contribute to the UK's efforts to deliver net zero emissions by 2050, all by investing into the most promising early-stage UK clean-tech businesses.

"Our investment in the Clean Growth Fund is about trying to find new ways to invest in technologies that can help reduce carbon emissions," explains Ian Jamison, of Strathclyde Pension Fund.

"So much of the technology needed to reach net zero hasn't been developed. Here was the perfect combination of a venture capital fund with great prospects to help mitigate climate change."

Drive innovation

Councils are not just investing in funds that support green innovation; they are also investing directly into greening their local economies.

After declaring a climate emergency in 2019, Warrington Borough Council drew up an action plan of how it would be carbon neutral by 2030. Alongside a range of initiatives related to the provision of green energy, Warrington set about building two solar farms, which now supply the council and other public sector organisations and businesses in Warrington with renewable energy.

"You don't really think of councils as driving innovation," says Danny Mather, Head of Corporate Finance for Warrington Borough Council. But the solar farms it built in York and Hull were incredibly advanced – the York solar farm is one of the first to have bifacial panels, which allow both sides of the panels to draw in light to create more energy.

"We are looking into planting special grass that reflects upwards so the panels can generate more electricity. Most people put



Warrington Borough Council's solar farm in York

One of Glasgow City Council's new hydrogen-powered vehicles



“Electric power is more difficult for bigger vehicles and hydrogen may be more suitable”

Top tips for councils designing a net-zero strategy

1. Integrate the Section 151 officer into climate plans
2. Update your procurement policy to make sure suppliers have green credentials
3. Review your investment and treasury management strategies to ensure they are pushing for a net-zero future
4. Undertake carbon literacy training so you know the biggest problem areas and where to focus
5. Seek out ways to be innovative and to use new technology
6. Leverage public-private partnerships to help drive the green economy

down chalk under the panels, but that's no good for biodiversity.”

Also aiming for net zero by 2030, Glasgow City Council developed an action plan after carbon literacy training, which helped it identify the main sources of its carbon emissions. High on the list was transportation, resulting in plans to convert the council's entire fleet of vehicles – including gritting and refuse lorries, which use diesel – to be electric or hydrogen-powered.

Martin Booth, Executive Director of Finance for Glasgow City Council, explains: “Glasgow is quite hilly. Electric power is more difficult for bigger vehicles and hydrogen may be more suitable. Glasgow is likely to be a regional hub for hydrogen so we are looking for a public-private partnership to provide us with hydrogen in the short term and produce hydrogen in the longer term.”

Courage to change

Danny Mather believes that councils need to

be “bold and ambitious”, and “embrace risk and change”. Importantly, there “needs to be a critical leadership role for the Section 151 officer” in the climate strategy, so that policy and finance can work together. He says councils cannot afford to sit on the fence when it comes to climate and that “national governments are not going to come to them with the solution”.

Martin Booth echoes this. “We have to take a holistic view; people have to be brave.” He says the council needs to “challenge the accepted way” of doing things, and “gather support to change hearts and minds, because every little bit we do helps”.

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

Net-zero innovation

An LGA programme has brought councils and universities together to collaborate on climate change



Councillor **Liz Green** is Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board's Climate Change Working Group

Across the UK, more than 200 local authorities have declared a climate emergency. They are leading action at a local level to reduce carbon emissions, increase biodiversity, transition to net zero and, ultimately, improve the quality of life of their residents and the local environment.

The LGA's recently launched 'Pass the planet' campaign (www.local.gov.uk/pass-the-planet) provides examples of councils undertaking this work, from Swale's electric vehicle fleet to Sutton's climate emergency response plan and Colchester's eCargo bike library.

In April 2020, the LGA launched a pilot 'net-zero innovation' programme, in collaboration with University College London (UCL), to help councils come together with universities to achieve their climate commitments.

By bringing these two partners together, a network of innovative ideas was brought about.

A number of blog posts (see www.local.gov.uk/net-zero-innovation).

programme) reflect on the April 2020 pilot, including how to catalyse and develop partnerships.

For example, a pilot workshop helped consolidate relationships built up over six years between Durham Energy Institute, part of Durham University, and Durham County Council, and supported their joint work on renewable heat.

We then went on to work with 12 partnerships, delivering on a variety of projects, including developing a procurement carbon calculator, skills for housing retrofit, and council carbon decision-making training.

"Sharing experiences and the challenges has been inspiring"

Our podcast series, 'Together towards net zero' (bit.ly/3jhlMGK), tracks the progress of our 2020 programme. It reflects on stories from our partnerships and helps to shine a light on how councils and universities can work together to co-create solutions to meet councils' climate commitments.

During the programme's delivery phase, the partnerships have been very successful in facing and overcoming challenges. A huge benefit of running the programme as a network has been allowing the partnerships to work together and use the time allocated to reflect and discuss with one another.

In our podcast episode 'The benefits of working in a cohort' (www.local.gov.uk/net-zero-innovation).

gov.uk/together-towards-net-zero-benefits-working-cohort), partners from Worcestershire and Essex note that it can be "quite a solitary endeavour working on sustainability... so the ethos of sharing experiences and the challenges has been really inspiring".

The LGA manages a LinkedIn network for university and council staff working on climate change. Anyone is free to join, and we hope this space will be a place to share research and experience, and start a dialogue between council and university partners.

It also allows for the benefits of the programme to be sustainable, as the current cohort members are a part of it. You can request to join the network by emailing climate@local.gov.uk.

Looking to the future, both the LGA and UCL are committed to developing the Net Zero Innovation Programme. In the coming months, the LGA will be advertising the opportunity to take part in the 2021/22 programme (see below for more information).

Reflecting on the programme up until now, a key message we have heard from our partnerships has been that collaboration is hard work, but, if you persevere, it can bring endless opportunities.

On the journey to tackling our climate challenges, it seems only right that we work together to make the biggest impact. Why don't you and your council see which local partners could help you on the journey to net zero?



For more information about the LGA's Net Zero Innovation Programme, please visit www.local.gov.uk/net-zero-innovation

Leading the charge



Jo Wall is Strategic Director for Energy at Local Partnerships

Councils have a role to play in providing infrastructure for the transition to electric vehicles

With the end of sales of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030, there is significant work to do to ensure that the UK keeps moving.

Providing enough charge points, in the right places, is a challenge that is likely to involve local government.

National government has come

under increasing pressure in recent months over the speed of the rollout of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure, with the Competitions and Markets Authority concluding that it's a postcode lottery as to whether charge points will appear in your area.

As part of wider transport and decarbonisation strategies, most local authorities have become involved in the delivery of at least some EV charge points. The real question is what role they will play in the future rollout.

Various types of EV charging infrastructure will be needed, including home/workplace chargers, rapid chargers on key transport routes, taxi charging infrastructure and destination chargers.

The overwhelming majority of this infrastructure is likely to be provided by individuals or businesses to support their own activities. Issues arise when either grid or land is not available – and this occurs particularly for households that own a vehicle, but do not have access to off-street parking.

Central government support to local authorities is focused on on-street charging infrastructure, through capital grant funding and access to support from the Energy Savings Trust. There is ongoing concern from

government, however, about the speed of deployment.

Our research with local authorities, commissioned by the LGA, revealed several issues that need to be addressed if they are to take a more proactive role in delivery of on-street charge points.

Overwhelmingly, councils felt that strategic direction was lacking at a national level, with no clear targets and no defined role for local authorities.

Significant concerns were also expressed in relation to the level of funding provided – in particular, the need for ongoing revenue funding – and resources to deliver the schemes.

Providers of commercial EV charging infrastructure are focusing on the most lucrative sites. These are largely the rapid chargers on major infrastructure routes.

In some areas, local authorities reported poor or low responses to tenders put out to market. Where concessions are being offered, the providers are pushing for long-term arrangements – and, in some instances, exclusivity.

In addition to these national issues, some areas are blighted by significant grid-connection costs, meaning it is expensive and difficult to deliver schemes, deterring private sector operators and making schemes increasingly difficult for local authorities to deliver.

Significant work needs to be done if the UK is to achieve its ambitious targets. In the provision of charging infrastructure, it is also crucial that we remember the need to travel fewer car miles, reduce overall travel and migrate to active travel and shared transport. In addition, vehicles need to be appropriately sized if we are not to see the existing trend of increasingly larger vehicles offsetting the benefits of energy efficiency.

Whether your authority is acting on this agenda or not, we need to be clear that electric cars are coming, and we should all be considering how – and how much – we travel, and how quickly we can transition to low-carbon alternatives. The time to act is now.

i For ‘**Scoping the role of local authorities in the provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure**’, see www.local.gov.uk/publications/scoping-role-local-authorities-EV
Local Partnerships is jointly owned by the LGA, HM Treasury and the Welsh Government, see www.localpartnerships.org.uk



“We should all be considering how, and how much, we travel”

Digital pathfinders

Funding is available to help councils develop digital solutions to local problems



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

Every day, councils make a difference to millions of lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the value of local leadership, as councils

have provided critical support to people, businesses and communities that has protected lives and livelihoods.

Councils' digital communications and services have never been so critical to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. From video conferencing and new data sharing to the digitisation of public meetings, the local government response to the pandemic demands continuous and accelerated digital innovation.

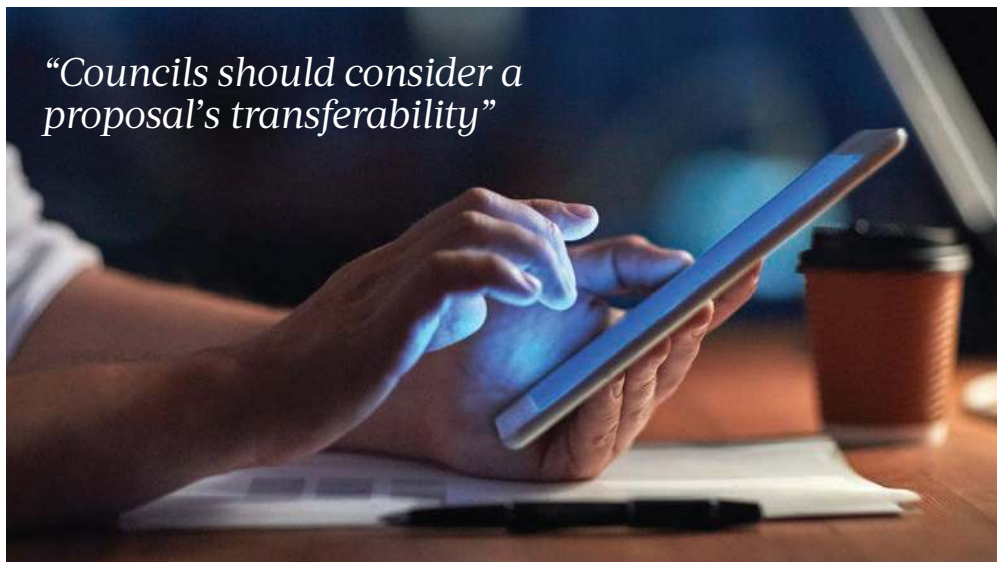
Through the LGA's government-funded sector support offer, we are providing councils with tools and resources to respond to the challenges of COVID-19 and its consequences, while working closely with the Government on priority issues.

We will continue to offer a helping hand to councils as they improve, innovate and seek to improve their resilience, now and into the future.

For example, our new Digital Pathfinders Programme provides up to £20,000 per council to fund truly innovative and emerging solutions across three 'challenge' areas of digital inclusion (people), digital connectivity (place) and cyber security.

The programme will prioritise working with councils whose projects offer a positive example

"Councils should consider a proposal's transferability"



to others in local government, through sustainable change programmes.

As such, councils are asked to consider not only how innovative the technical aspect of any proposal is, but also its scalability, sustainability, and transferability across multiple community/council settings within the sector.

Although the Digital Pathfinders Programme is the first of its kind to be offered by the LGA, various previous initiatives have focused on local authorities improving their digital inclusion and connectivity.

For example, Westminster City Council developed a digital connectivity toolkit that provides other councils with guidance to help identify connectivity 'not spots' in urban places, and best practice materials and resources.

A similar initiative was delivered by Shropshire Council. Its programme involved supporting residents aged over 65 to get online, by working with them to develop their skills and confidence, and to overcome motivational barriers. The council created a 'digital champion network' to support the project and coordinate activities with partners and the public, to help older people online.

The Digital Pathfinder Programme is a unique opportunity to enhance your council's knowledge and understanding of how digital transformation and

infrastructure can future-proof and build resilience within your organisation and its services, for the benefit of residents and local places.

Our ask is that your project: focuses on local need and involves local people and partners; demonstrates how it is innovative and emerging in one of the three challenge areas; uses and creates evidence about what works well to address local need; is scalable to other councils; and delivers a sustainable impact beyond the period of the funding.

In return, we will provide one-to-one support, with lead programme advisers helping coordinate and oversee projects and integrating their findings into our wider sector support offer.

As place shapers at the centre of their communities, councils have a fundamental role to play in enhancing and improving the digital connectivity of their local areas.

We want this important programme to help with these efforts, as well as accelerate digital inclusion and keep services and residents safe from the threats surrounding cyber security.

i The deadline for expressions of interest in the Digital Pathfinder Programme is 10 September – see www.local.gov.uk/digital-pathfinders-programme-live-offer for more information or email productivity@local.gov.uk with any queries.

A better life

For the first time, children and young people are included in the Government's national autism strategy



Councillor **David Fothergill** is Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board and Councillor **Anntoinette Bramble** is Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board



Ministers want life to be “fundamentally better” for autistic children, adults and their families by 2026.

The Government's new ‘National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults’ is the first of its kind to cover children and young people as well as adults, and rightly focuses on supporting autistic people to live their lives in their communities – widening the focus beyond social care and health services.

This new strategy sets out the Government's vision for what autistic people's and their families' lives will be like in five years' time across six priority areas.

The six areas are: improving understanding and acceptance of

autism within society; improving autistic children and young people's access to education and supporting positive transitions into adulthood; supporting more autistic people into employment; tackling health and care inequalities; building the right support in the community; and improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems.

The strategy details the steps national and local government, the NHS and others will take towards this vision.

The priorities in the first year of the implementation plan (2021-22) include improving research, innovation and examples of best practice, improving data collection and reporting, and strengthening governance, leadership and accountability. These ‘enablers’ are required to deliver on the strategy and demonstrate progress on actions.

At the local level, the expectation is that local authorities and the NHS will work together, and with relevant local partners, to take forward the strategy's key priorities. This should be done in accordance with their existing legal duties.

Statutory guidance on the Adult Autism Strategy (2015), which sets out local authorities' and NHS

organisations' duties to support autistic adults, remains in force – so, local areas must continue to deliver on existing requirements, including having autism partnership boards.

For children, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (2015) continues to place duties on local authorities, NHS organisations and schools in respect of autistic children and young people.

Funding of £74.88 million has been

“It acknowledges there is ‘much more to do’”

announced for the first year of the strategy, mostly funnelled through the NHS. It includes £600,000 to fund training for staff in early years settings, schools and colleges – to improve the experience of autistic children in the education system and prepare them for adulthood – and £600,000 for the extension of an early identification programme developed in Bradford.

The strategy sets out progress since the groundbreaking Autism Act 2009 and the first two national strategies (2010 and 2014) – for example, on increasing awareness of autism in society and ensuring the availability of autism diagnostic services across the country.

But it acknowledges there is “still much more to do” to ensure that autistic people have equal opportunities to the rest of society, access to the services they need to have good health and wellbeing, and can participate fully in their communities.

People with autism and their experiences deserve to be at the heart of this strategy, and councils are doing what they can to support them locally.

Councils stand ready to help achieve the Government's ambitions for autistic people, and the upcoming Spending Review is an opportunity for ministers to fully fund support in the long term.

i See bit.ly/3yR0n5g for LGA resources and support on autism, including a briefing on the national strategy.



COMMENT



Councillor **Carl Les**
(Con) is Leader of
North Yorkshire
County Council

Delivering a rural powerhouse

North Yorkshire is preparing to become a single unitary council for the future delivery of local public services, following the recent decision by Secretary of State Robert Jenrick MP.

We will now work closely with district council colleagues, combining all our best endeavours to create an outstanding single unitary authority that will replace all eight councils (seven districts and a county) on the current North Yorkshire footprint.

Districts and the county council will also work hard together to maintain the quality of services during the transition phase.

A new single council to unite the whole county and work in close partnership with City of York Council will now go forward and deliver all services to every household from April 2023.

We believe this will provide a stable foundation to deliver a rural powerhouse that drives economic recovery and growth at pace, alongside radical transformation and further devolution to a mayoral combined authority with City of York Council.

A strong devolution deal for York and North Yorkshire has never been more important, and we have never been closer to getting it. The decision to remove the current, duplicative two-tier local government system here is the first critical step.

We hear a lot about metropolitan areas and the economic success they are enjoying courtesy of elected mayors, but how much do we hear about rural powerhouses?

North Yorkshire is a county like no other because of its size (geographically the largest in England), its rurality, and sparse populations – 85 per cent of North Yorkshire is super-sparsely populated, among expansive countryside and two national parks.

While devolution deals have been secured for the most populous, most urban areas of Yorkshire, it can be argued that it is the most sparsely populated areas of Yorkshire that now need the most attention.

We face huge challenges post-pandemic in terms of connectivity, transportation, and the need to retain and attract a younger population. But I also believe we have before us the opportunity of a lifetime to shape a new exemplar council fit for the future, and to drive green and lasting economic recovery – delivering a better connected, even more vibrant county, which plays to its strengths and protects and enhances its landscapes and communities.

This huge change programme will be

truly collaborative – not only through the joining together of the eight councils currently delivering services, but also through a commitment to giving communities a greater say on local priorities, and to working with partners to deliver a better quality of life for everyone.

A strong localism agenda will drive decision making from the bottom up, with a stronger voice and more powers – if they want them – for our town and parish councils, community groups, grassroots sports organisations, charities, health services, emergency service partners and local businesses. This is more than an ambition.

But alongside this localism agenda, devolution is critical to ensure North Yorkshire can be the rural powerhouse we know it can be.

Indeed, the requirement for devolution was highlighted as being 'a matter of urgency' in the recently published independent report by North Yorkshire's Rural Commission (see panel, right).

The commission, which we set up to examine the pressing issues facing the



To find out more about the new North Yorkshire Council, please visit www.northyorks.gov.uk/stronger-together

Rural commissioners at the Great Yorkshire Show after the launch of their report



county's rural communities and to produce a series of actions, stated that devolution must be the number one priority for the region.

With that in mind – and with the commission's Chair, Dean John Dobson – we have seized the moment and sent its report directly to Number 10 to demonstrate the evidence base and urgent need to move forward at pace with devolved powers and the funds that go with it.

The York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership is revisiting the £2.4 billion 'asks' we have submitted to government. It is important to ensure they remain relevant following the Prime Minister's 'levelling up' address and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We need to see rural areas empowered to drive their own priorities, and deliver on our major infrastructure projects.

We believe it is this empowerment that will stimulate lasting economic recovery and growth, and create new and exciting opportunities for our workforce, rebalancing our environment and economy as we move forward beyond the pandemic.

“Our vision is for a county that confidently embraces the future”



Commissioner Sir William Worsley Bt DL speaking at the launch on rural housing

The challenges facing rural communities



The Very Reverend John Dobson DL is Dean of Ripon Cathedral and Chair of the North Yorkshire Rural Commission

When I was asked to chair the North Yorkshire Rural Commission – the first of its kind in the country – myself and my fellow commissioners were only too familiar with the long-standing challenges facing rural communities, especially those across the sparsely-populated expanse of our county.

The presenting issues of isolation, poor digital connectivity, threatened farm businesses, poor public transport provision, tiny schools, and a lack of affordable houses, not to mention the challenges and opportunities of climate change and the UK's departure from the EU, were obvious to everyone before we began our work.

North Yorkshire County Council must be commended for setting up the commission as an independent body, and for having the courage to accept that its findings would be challenging.

Our vision, and one we have shared with stakeholders including government, is for a county that safeguards its undeniable beauty, secures adequate connectivity, and confidently embraces the future.

A key challenge is to revitalise rural areas so they become attractive to the missing generations of young people who do not live and work in the region.

This missing generation relates to all of the themes examined by the commission: unaffordability of housing for this age group; school closures because of lack of demand; the people to drive a forward-looking green economy; depleting services because of a declining population; and a

skewed older age group. We are clear: devolution is a priority to achieving effective levelling up for rural and remote North Yorkshire. We need those additional powers and funding from central government so the devolved authority has real capacity within the region for decision making and control of significant funding.

Our report, 'Rural North Yorkshire: the way forward', came from many hours of active listening to people who live and work in our rural communities – to experts in the seven topics we explored – from visits and from submitted written evidence.

The report explores seven key themes – rural economy, energy transition, digital connectivity, farming and land management, rural housing, rural transport, and rural schools, education and training.

The commission firmly supports the region's ambition to become a 'green lung', and to lead on training and employment in the green economy and a revolutionary energy transition.

We now commend our report to those at national, regional and local levels who must respond to its vision and recommendations, and we have asked for a task force to be set up to take this vision and these recommendations forward.

There is much at stake for the future of our region. Our report is timely as we emerge from the pandemic and re-examine our priorities, and as North Yorkshire moves on into unitary forms of government, with all the possibilities for innovation and strong leadership that this affords.

i For more information about the North Yorkshire Rural Commission, please visit www.northyorks.gov.uk/north-yorkshire-rural-commission

A spectacular summer of sport



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

I hope that **first** readers were able to enjoy a well-earned break from council duties over the summer and spend some time with friends and family.

Like many of you, I thoroughly enjoyed a spectacular summer of sport, with the England football team's achievement of getting to the final of a major tournament for the first time in 55 years swiftly followed by the Olympics in Tokyo.

The achievements of Gareth Southgate's men and Team GB, who came fourth in the medals table with a total of 65 medals, including 20 golds, provided a real boost to our collective

morale after 18 months of COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

At the time of writing, the Paralympic Games has not yet started, but I am sure that it too will bring many more memorable moments and medal successes for Team GB.

These sporting successes, combined with the removal of pandemic restrictions, are likely to result in increased numbers of visitors to leisure centres, sports pitches, swimming pools and cycle tracks, as people are enthused to try new sports.

Among them will be aspiring footballers and potential competitors at future Olympics, but the majority will just want to participate for the fun of it, or to get a bit more active.

The challenge for all of us is to ensure that this enthusiasm is sustained in the years ahead, not just to produce the next generation of elite athletes, but

also to help tackle obesity and improve the nation's health.

Councils, of course, have a key role to play in encouraging people to get involved in sport, both competitively and for leisure, and I know that colleagues across the country are seeking to capitalise on the enthusiasm that has resulted from our successes in the Euros and at the Olympic Games.

I hope that over the coming months we can work together to foster the spirit of a great summer of sport, and encourage participation in sport and physical activity across all sectors of society.

"Gareth Southgate's men and Team GB provided a real boost to our collective morale after 18 months of restrictions"



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

From climate change to community support

Last month, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued a stark reminder of the impact of climate change.

The group of leading climate experts called for global action, warning that climate change is already affecting every region across the globe. Without urgent action to limit warming, heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts, and loss of Arctic sea ice, snow cover and permafrost will all increase, they said.

Nine out of 10 councils have declared a climate emergency, and councils are working hard to support local action, particularly in the run-up to the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow in November.

Ahead of COP26, the LGA continues to stress that net zero can only be achieved if decarbonisation happens in every place, community and household. Providing councils with long-term funding would mean they can plan activity that meets the needs of their local communities.

Through our 'Pass the planet' campaign (www.local.gov.uk/pass-the-planet), we are promoting good practice and sharing innovative solutions that councils can scale up or replicate. Please continue to send case studies of your work to climate@local.gov.uk.

Meanwhile, we are all saddened to see the tragic scenes from Afghanistan. Councils have a proud history of supporting efforts to protect and support refugees, and stand ready to work with government to design any new resettlement scheme, to ensure new arrivals get the support they need and that ongoing pressures from existing schemes are considered.

My thoughts are also with everyone affected following the tragic incident in Keyham, Plymouth. As the initial emergency response winds down, it will be the council team and councillors at Plymouth City Council helping the community to recover from this shocking event.

Finally, you may have heard of the shocking stabbing of a Haringey social worker last month, while carrying out a welfare check on children.

These incidents, although they are thankfully rare, remind us of the many dangers that council staff face on a daily basis, and the important role councils play in communities across the country.





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

Offering sanctuary to those in need

Like everyone, I have been horrified at the scenes from Afghanistan in recent weeks and months.

There is strong feeling across the political spectrum that Afghan nationals who provided support to UK forces and civilian programmes should be able to come to the UK safely and be able to live here without fear.

Many are calling on the Government to speed up efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the many thousands of men, women and children who have been displaced.

"I know councils will work with our voluntary sector and national government partners to ensure Afghan refugees get the support they need"

The UK Government should quickly provide safe and legal routes for Afghan refugees fleeing dangerous and chaotic circumstances triggered by the withdrawal of military support from Afghanistan.

Councils have a proud history of offering sanctuary to those in need. More than 1,600 Afghan locally employed staff who have worked for British military forces and the British embassy have already started arriving with their families through the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy, and a growing number of councils have committed to welcoming and supporting them.

I know councils will work with our voluntary sector and national government partners to ensure Afghan refugees get the support they need to recover and rebuild their lives.

But new schemes must be fully funded, so that councils that take the right decision to offer local places can do so with confidence they won't need to divert funds from other important areas of work.



Councillor **Joe Harris**
is Leader of the LGA's
Liberal Democrat Group

Actions speak louder than words

Passing a motion and declaring a climate emergency is one thing; doing something practical that makes a difference to the communities we serve is something else.

I am disappointed to see the lip service paid by some councils to this subject: their commitment isn't worth the paper it is written on; we can see on our TVs the terrible effect that global warming is causing.

I am delighted that the LGA has launched its #PassThePlanet campaign, promoting local government good practice and innovative solutions for others to scale up or replicate.

One of my pledges on becoming group leader was to shout from the highest mountain about the great work Liberal Democrat councils and councillors do.

Tackling climate change is at the top of many of our agendas – from the pioneering work at Cheltenham in reducing the energy consumption of its leisure estate, to my own council, Cotswold, in producing a net-zero toolkit for new housing developments.

Three Rivers, St Albans, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse are among the best five recyclers in the country, while Portsmouth is installing more solar panels than any other council.

"Tackling climate change is at the top of many of our agendas"

Then there are Bath & North East Somerset's and Chelmsford's pioneering tree-planting programmes; Watford's massive expansion of cycling infrastructure; Waverley's new net-zero homes; and York's plans for the country's first net-zero neighbourhood and a massive social house building programme, to name a few.

Action speaks louder than words on climate action. It's time for those not taking action to wake up.



Councillor **Marianne Overton** MBE is
Leader of the LGA's
Independent Group

Voluntary sector support keeps us safe

It has been a summer break we needed, but in the shadow of dreadful disasters in Haiti and Greece, and terror and sadness in Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan chapter of the war, which started 20 years ago with 9/11, ends for us. Can a new, gentler regime be formed where women and children take their place as citizens in a land wracked with hurt, hate, weapons and poverty?

"Local government will contribute and shape the outcomes to secure a better future"

This week I met an English Red Cross woman working with Taliban women for years and hoping to continue. The voluntary sector is vital, giving support that also helps keep us safe.

Councils will be assisting where we can, searching for accommodation and essential support for refugee families of those who have worked with the British troops.

Looking forward, there is important and far-reaching legislation going through Parliament this autumn, including the very contentious planning proposals. You can join the conversations developing policy and influencing our vice-presidents in Parliament through our think tanks.

I hope to see you at our hybrid group conference on 29 October. It is just before the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in November in Glasgow, and will be where local government will contribute and shape the outcomes to secure a better future.

Finally, on behalf of the Independent Group executive, our thoughts go to the family, friends and colleagues of two of our group councillors who passed away recently – Cllr Robert Foote, of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, and Councillor John Clark, Chair of Ryedale District Council's Policy and Resources Committee.

A unified voice



Councillors **Gary Porter**, **Craig Leyland** and **Paul Skinner** are the Leaders (Con) of South Holland District Council, East Lindsey District Council and Boston Borough Council respectively

Boston Borough, East Lindsey and South Holland District Councils have formally signed off on plans to create an ambitious new partnership – the largest such partnership of councils in the country.

While each council will continue to be politically independent and accountable to the communities they serve, the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership

will enable us to work collectively, supported by a shared management team and workforce, to deliver on our aspirations for our communities and to tackle common challenges.

The total population of the three council areas is 304,000, covering a geography of 1,112 square miles.

The partnership builds on the existing alliance between Boston and East Lindsey, as well as the experience of shared working arrangements that South Holland has gathered from its previous partnership with Breckland District Council.

It will provide our three councils with the opportunity to share a stronger voice at a local, regional and national level, and will

enable savings of up to £42 million to be achieved over the next 10 years.

With a shared management team and workforce of almost 1,000 officers, the partnership will look at providing improved services to local communities with greater efficiency, while also working to identify and secure investment for growth and regeneration in strategic infrastructure across the partnership area.

The South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership is extremely good news, and none more so than for residents, as we will be in a much stronger position to deliver on local needs because of the capacity and resilience this new partnership will bring.

This is a really exciting opportunity for our three areas, and by sharing our collective knowledge, and collaborating more closely than ever before, we'll be able to deliver services for our residents and businesses with greater efficiency and innovation.

A more unified, shared voice presents us with the chance to have a greater say on the debates that will shape our area in years to come, and help us to realise ambitions that may otherwise have been missed out on.



A good business city



Cllr **Keith Aspden** (Lib Dem) is Leader of City of York Council

York has become the first city in the UK to sign up to the Good Business Charter – a pioneering initiative that puts fairness, representation, diversity and a shared commitment to our environmental responsibilities at the heart of our economic strategy.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, City of York Council has had a clear focus on working closely with the business community, supporting small and micro businesses, and promoting our unique approach to economic development – the 'York Way'.

Recently, an independent evaluation of the council's £1.14 million micro-grant scheme revealed that, since its introduction in March 2020, 294 local businesses were saved from closure, and more than 500 families and employees from falling into personal and financial hardship.

The Good Business Charter, developed in partnership with the Confederation of British Industry, Trades Union Congress and Federation of Small Businesses, and spearheaded by entrepreneur Julian Richer, seeks to promote responsible business behaviour through 10 key components: real living wage; fairer hours and contracts; employee wellbeing; employee representation; diversity and inclusion; environmental responsibility; pay fair tax; commitment to

customers; ethical sourcing; and fair payment to suppliers.

As a historic city, with a Liberal Democrat-led council, we are rightly proud of our vibrant culture and heritage, but we also want to lead the way to deliver fair conditions and pay, as well as support businesses that put sustainability at their core.

Some of the city's most prominent employers have already joined us in signing up to the initiative, including the University of York, Aviva, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

Local authorities are in a great position to take the lead to encourage businesses to adopt a holistic approach to their social, environmental and economic impacts.



Cllr Keith Aspden (left) with colleagues at the launch of York as the first Good Business Charter city



For more information about the Good Business Charter, visit www.goodbusinesscharter.com, or email jherrera@goodbusinesscharter.com or Cllr.kaspden@york.gov.uk



Lord **Steve Bassam** is Place Director at Business in the Community

Business and place-based regeneration



Business in the Community (BITC) is the UK's largest and longest established business-led membership organisation dedicated to responsible business.

Its Place Taskforce has recently launched an enquiry into how to get the best from business in place-based regeneration.

As Chair of the Place Taskforce, I am keen to get the views and voice of UK local government heard by the business community in this work. We are delighted that LGA board members Cllr Abi Brown and Cllr Simon Henig have agreed to join the group, and that the LGA will be submitting evidence.

The taskforce has a high-powered membership, which includes leading figures from the world of business, academia, the public sector and civil society, and has appointed Ian Taylor, from Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government, to lead on researching and writing the report.

Over the next few months, the taskforce will take evidence from businesses, councils, government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), charities, not-for-profit organisations, universities, regional devolved levels of government, and those organisations with an interest in the levelling up agenda.

The aim of the taskforce is to provide a blueprint and route map for businesses wanting to engage in place-based regeneration, which will be published in a report in 2022. With the communities that were 'left behind' before the pandemic set to be hardest hit by COVID-19 pressures, it

is a timely moment to build on the momentum of the community self-organisation and cross-sector collaboration that we saw during the pandemic, to capture learnings, accelerate the pace of change, and positively impact communities across the UK.

Business in the Community is a firm believer in the role that businesses can play, particularly when working collaboratively with civic institutions.

"It is a timely moment to build on cross-sector collaboration"

Business, when it works best, can be a convener, provide leadership and independence, cut through complex problems to drive action, and advocate for a place. The Government's Town Deals programme, with its focus on business leadership, has demonstrated what can be done.

The taskforce will look at best practice examples and case studies as part of developing a better understanding of

the impact business can have. Other themes to be explored include the value of devolution, the impact that better regulation plays, and the role of community champions.

It will also look at the impact of COVID-19, the role of different businesses dependent on their size and sector, the areas where business can have the greatest impact, and principles of cross-sector collaboration.

The call for evidence will be backed up with several evidence sessions, visits to places where business and civic interventions have worked well, and to communities where challenges remain.

A number of institutions have offered to host roundtable events where discussions can take place about what does and doesn't work, so we can learn together.

A few years ago, the UK's universities took a long hard look at their role as civic institutions and the contribution they could make in 'places'.

The Civic University Commission and its report has led to a much-improved understanding of where these powerful learning and research bodies sit, and what they can contribute to national wellbeing and social progress.

Now, universities see their civic role much more clearly. Their work during COVID-19 has been a great exemplar of this – and something from which the Place Taskforce can take much inspiration and heart.

i Business in the Community (BITC) is a business-led membership organisation dedicated to responsible business, founded by HRH The Prince of Wales 40 years ago. For more information on the taskforce and how to submit evidence, please visit www.bitc.org.uk/place-taskforce

COUNCILLOR

Delivering devolution

The Prime Minister's announcement that devolution deals will be extended to county areas is a welcome step forward (see first 662).

This is an exciting opportunity for councils, which have been calling for greater devolution, but also uncharted territory for many.

The LGA has developed a new 'Devolution deal to delivery' guide to support councils considering devolution deals. It offers insight into the existing combined authorities, and lessons learned from the deals to date.

For those councils considering devolution deals, the prospect of greater powers is an attractive one.

Greater devolution means decisions being made closer to the people they affect, and local leaders being empowered to deliver the change their community needs.

But the process of securing a devolution deal is not always straightforward – and nor is putting it into practice.

"A combined authority is not the only route to devolution"

The LGA's research shows that, as time has passed, the process of negotiating devolution deals has become more formulaic. Early deals were a process of genuine devolution; the recent ones more resemble a menu from which local areas can choose options.

This provides little opportunity for genuine innovation. The arrival of new county deals hopefully signals a return to more bespoke arrangements.

Drawing on interviews and research, the guide sets out lessons that can be learned from the nine existing mayoral combined authorities.

One key lesson is the importance of collaboration – between councils, local businesses and other local partners – which requires sustained effort. There are no quick fixes.

Another lesson is the value of metro



mayors: their soft power, their role as conveners, and their ability to raise the profile of a place can help combined authorities achieve their goals.

Some of those interviewed for the guide questioned the quality of engagement between mayors and ministers from different political parties. Others see the relationship as being an important one, regardless of party politics.

In all cases, it is clear from this research that mayoral combined authorities are widely perceived to have had a positive impact.

However, the guide recognises that forming a combined authority is not the only route to a devolution deal. It poses questions that councils that are thinking about becoming a combined authority should consider.

These include asking what they are trying to achieve, what mechanisms would

help them achieve these goals, and – if the answer is not a combined authority – what are the alternatives?

The Secretary of State for Local Government has indicated that greater flexibility will be available for county deals, so questions about the best structure for a devolution deal are more relevant than ever to councils.

This guide may also be of use to existing combined authorities.

One key feature the research highlights is the diversity of combined authorities. This takes many forms – from geography and the history of collaboration, to the political culture of the combined authority – and means there is much that combined authorities can learn from each other.

With devolution firmly back on the agenda, the LGA's new 'Devolution deal to delivery' guide will be a valuable resource for councils.



This guide and other resources, such as a one-minute video to help explain devolution to residents, can be found on the LGA's Devolution Hub, see www.local.gov.uk/devo?first

ELECTIONS



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



Personalities and parties

As if to emphasise that local elections are about personalities as much as parties, former councillors played a notable role in three recent contests.

Bassetlaw Labour councillor Helen Richards resigned in June as a protest against housing development plans in her own ward.

Standing as an Independent in the consequent by-election, she fell just five votes short of victory, but split the

former Labour vote sufficiently to allow the Conservatives to win East Retford South for the first time since 2008.

In South Tyneside, Independent John Robertson – twice sanctioned by the council's standards committee – submitted his resignation and then failed in an attempt to rescind it. He, too, stood in the by-election in the Fellgate and Hedworth ward, but came a distant second to the victorious Labour candidate.

The successful Aspire candidate in the Weavers ward of Tower Hamlets, Kabir Ahmed, had been elected as a Labour councillor in 2010. He narrowly lost his seat in 2014 having defected to Tower Hamlets First. His victory now is a reminder that politics in the borough continues to be intense and volatile.

Elsewhere, there were by-elections in two authorities that are likely to cease to exist soon.

The Liberal Democrats easily retained the Grange ward in their South Lakeland stronghold: a council on which they have enjoyed an overall majority since 2006. They may find the going more testing if and when South Lakeland joins Barrow-in-Furness and Eden in a new East Cumbria unitary in 2023.

In Harrogate, the Liberal Democrats gained the marginal Knaresborough Scriven Park ward from the Conservatives. The party controlled the district council for several years in the 1990s, but the proposed unitary North Yorkshire will be less fertile territory.

A similar county-wide unitary authority is also in prospect in Somerset. The Liberal Democrats currently control two of the county's four districts, so may feel that reorganisation could be less damaging to their prospects here.

If these changes are enacted, the number of district councils across England will shrink by 17 to 164, with four 'county' unitaries replacing three extant county councils. The precise impact on overall councillor numbers remains unclear, but it is likely that more than 600 elected posts will be cut.

In 1973 there were more than 21,000 councillors in England; in 2023, there may be scarcely 16,000 – a reduction of almost a quarter.

Local by-elections

Basildon, Pitsea North West

Con gain from Lab
25.9% over Lab Turnout 15%

Bassetlaw, East Retford South

Con gain from Lab
0.4% over Ind Turnout 32.1%

Camden, Fortune Green

Lib Dem held
13.6% over Lab Turnout 29.8%

Dover, Alkham and Capel-Le-Ferne

Con held
21.9% over Lib Dem Turnout 24.7%

East Suffolk, Orwell Villages

Con held
3.8% over Lib Dem Turnout 24.7%

Harrogate, Knaresborough Scriven Park

Lib Dem gain from Con
22.4% over Con Turnout 31.1%

Leicester, Humberstone and Hamilton

Con gain from Lab
11.4% over Lab Turnout 16.7%

Norfolk, Gaywood South

Lib Dem gain from Con
5.3% over Lab Turnout 17.3%

North Somerset, Congresbury and Puxton

Green gain from Lib Dem
35.2% over Con Turnout 28.6%

Rhondda Cynon Taf, Tyn-y-Nant

Lab held
70.4% over Con Turnout 26.2%

South Lakeland, Grange

Lib Dem held
39.4% over Con Turnout 42.9%

South Tyneside, Fellgate and Hedworth

Lab gain from Ind
17% over Ind Turnout 30.6%

Spelthorne, Staines

Green held
11.1% over Con Turnout 23%

Thanet, Cliftonville East

Con held
52.7% over Lab Turnout 18.9%

Tower Hamlets, Weavers

Aspire gain from Lab
17.8% over Lab Turnout 27.9%

Wirral, Liscard

Lab Held
26.1% over Con Turnout 19%



For more details of these and other recent by-election results, please visit www.local.gov.uk/first

CALLING ALL FUTURE THINKERS



The notanotherapp open parking payment platform delivers a future ready system that empowers you to initiate effective change.

Delivering multi-vendor cashless providers as well as multi-channel analysis of:

- Pay & Display and Pay On Foot data
- Cashless App & Pre-Booking data
- SMS and Carrier Billing data
- Permit data
- Enforcement data

Plus integration with EV charging, kerbside/bay management and travel management systems.

Evolution is happening, will you be a part of it?