

first

Local government

Local
Government
Association

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Mentally healthy childhoods for all

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E-learning platform for councillors

Do you know how GDPR impacts on your role as a councillor? Or do you want to find out more about your legal equality, diversity and inclusion obligations? As a councillor it is essential you stay on top of some topics.

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To find out more, register directly at
<https://lga.kallidus-suite.com/external>

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Living with COVID-19

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You can read about options for reforming council revenues (p20) and the benefits of providing industry placements for T Level students (p22). And I'm pleased to say the Local Government Challenge, our competition to find the best and brightest council officers, looks set to restart after a covid-induced hiatus (p19).

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For the latest LGA news, please follow us on social media @LGAcomms and @LGAnews, and for the latest pandemic updates visit our coronavirus hub, www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus

Cllr James Jamieson
is LGA Chairman



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Public health services at risk amid funding uncertainty

Continuing uncertainty around councils' public health funding risks exacerbating a growing crisis of demand for support services, including for drug and alcohol treatment, the LGA has warned.

As **first** was going to press, the Government had yet to publish the public health grant funding allocations that councils will receive from April.

Time is running out for councils to

make critical decisions on renewing contracts for vital public health services, including for health visiting, sexual and reproductive health, and suicide prevention – potentially leaving people without crucial help and support.

Drug and alcohol treatment, tackling obesity, and health visiting are among the vital frontline services at risk of being cut back or closing altogether, unless

public health funding for the next year is finally set out, the LGA has warned.

Directors of public health and their teams have continued to lead their communities through the pandemic, encouraging vaccine take-up, setting up contact tracing partnerships and tackling local outbreaks, said the LGA.

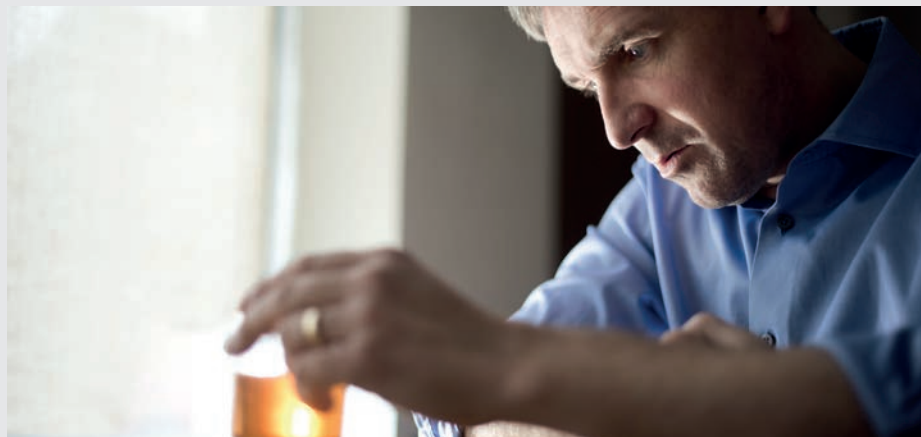
The public health grant also crucially pays for councils' health protection measures, such as in planning for and responding to incidents that present a threat to the public's health.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Demand for vital treatment for drug and alcohol misuse, obesity, mental health and children's health is rising and at risk of not being met, while we are still grappling with the impact of the Omicron surge.

"The unprecedented mental and physical health toll of the pandemic will mean we could be seeing many more people coming forward for support, in addition to an existing backlog that has built up over the past two years.

"It is wrong that we are still in the dark about how much there is to spend on this essential treatment and support, which will better protect our population from future pandemics.

"The Government should act now and publish councils' public health grant without further delay, so that we can get on with planning ahead for an anticipated post-COVID surge in requests for help."



Covid restrictions lifted as Omicron peak passes

Face coverings and covid passes are no longer legally required in England, after the relaxation of Plan B rules came into effect in late January.

The Government is no longer asking people to work from home if they can and, as **first** was going to press, restrictions on visitors to care homes in England were also due to be eased.

There will be no limit on the number of visitors allowed at care homes, self-isolation periods will be cut, and care homes will only have to follow outbreak management rules for 14 days, not 28. However, public health guidance urging people to wear a face covering in crowded and enclosed spaces will

remain. Masks will still be required in shops, hospitals and on public transport in Wales, although most other restrictions are being lifted.

The UK Government said the Plan B measures introduced in December had "helped to control the spread of COVID-19, bought time to assess the [Omicron] variant and allowed the NHS to rapidly expand the booster programme to strengthen defences". The return to Plan A in England was due to the success of the vaccination programme.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "As we look to the months beyond the immediate Omicron wave, we need to look ahead to how we support

the nation to live with COVID-19.

"The LGA is pushing for local government to be engaged in the early planning stages for key areas including future boosters, service

recovery, winter pressures and supporting communities to build back from the longer-term impact of the pandemic."

● See p10



Staff shortages forcing councils to reduce care

More than half of councils in England had to reduce the level of care and support they provided to vulnerable residents last month, because of growing numbers of social care staff on sick leave or isolating because of the Omicron variant.

A survey by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services found that, of the 94 councils that responded, 49 took at least one exceptional measure to prioritise care and assess risk for at least some of their area, for some of the time.

Measures taken included prioritising life-sustaining care, such as supporting someone to eat over supporting someone to get out of bed or complete other activities.

This also included being unable to undertake reviews of risk, or relying on the views of providers, family carers or people using services themselves to identify risks, and leaving people with dementia, learning disabilities or poor mental health

isolated or alone for longer periods than usual.

"Reducing care and support services is the last thing councils want to do," said Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board.

"No-one receiving services should have to go without, but pre-existing workforce shortages have been compounded by staff absences caused by Omicron, leaving some councils with no choice but to prioritise people in their care.

"These sobering findings reinforce what we have long said about the urgent need to address immediate pressures facing social care now, including on capacity, recruitment and retention, care worker pay, and on unmet and under-met need. A greater proportion of the new health and social care levy should go directly towards social care upfront, to reflect the urgency of the situation and help deal with these immediate pressures."

● See p10, p31 Letters

Bill 'needs safeguards for young carers'



Barnardo's has warned that the Government's Health and Care Bill may mean more sick and disabled adults are discharged from hospital into the sole care of children.

The children's charity says that, currently, the NHS must consult the patient's carer when discharging a patient. However, the bill in its current form removes this

safeguard for all carers, including young carers.

Research by the University of Nottingham, with the BBC, in 2018, found that there are more than 800,000 young carers in the UK.

Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Young carers do an amazing job, but it is vital that they are not asked to provide a level of support that is detrimental to their wellbeing, or is beyond their capability.

"If an adult is to be discharged from hospital into the care of a young person, it is important for everyone involved that an assessment takes place to ensure this is appropriate, and to check whether more formal support would be more suitable.

"Both adult and children's social care services are under significant pressure. If we are to make sure that young carers get the support they need and do not have to take on excessive responsibilities, councils must receive the funding they need to provide these vital services."

In brief UC sanctions

Universal Credit claimants will be given four weeks – down from three months – to find a job within their preferred sector or face sanctions, the Government has announced. The move is part of a new 'Way to Work' initiative to get 500,000 people into work by June and fill 1.2 million job vacancies nationally. Cllr Shaun Davies, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said councils were "uniquely placed" to deliver a coherent, local, joined-up offer to help people get back into work and training, if backed up by the right funding. "People need joined-up local support, including training and careers advice to go into long-term, satisfactory employment, and not just face sanctions," he said.

Energy costs

The LGA has called for improvements to local welfare support to help counter the impact of energy and other price rises on low-income households. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has warned that the expected rise in the energy price cap in April will result in low-income households spending 18 per cent of their income on energy bills, compared with 6-8 per cent for middle-income households, after accounting for housing costs. Cllr Shaun Davies, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "We are calling on the Government to properly recognise and adequately resource more sustainable local welfare support, which should enable councils to more sustainably support low-income households who are at risk of debt and financial hardship."

Alcohol-related hospital admissions

Rising numbers of people needed hospital treatment for alcohol dependency over the course of the pandemic, according to new NHS England statistics for 2020/21. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "These stark statistics should act as a wake-up call about the impact of COVID-19 on our general health, including for those with alcohol-related conditions. Increasing alcohol consumption creates further health problems later on, including increased hospital admissions and exacerbating existing health inequalities, with people in the most deprived areas being worst affected."

● See p4

In brief

Councillor census

Don't forget to complete the LGA's National Census of Councillors 2022 to be in with a chance to win £250 for a local charity of your choice. There will be a guaranteed winner from each of the LGA's four political groups (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, and Independent). The census provides important information about councillors in England, which the LGA uses to improve its support to them and to shape its work on behalf of local government. The deadline for responses is 11 February. Check your email for your personal link to the survey, which was sent out on 18 January, or use this one: <https://bit.ly/32EWw0m>. All responses will be treated in the strictest confidence. To find out more, email stephen.richards_cllcensus@local.gov.uk

Virtual meetings

Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Services Officers have launched a petition calling for the Government to bring in legislation allowing councils to meet remotely, if they wish. An LGA survey of councils on the impact of returning exclusively to in-person meetings, conducted before the emergence of Omicron, showed that 72 per cent of councils saw a drop in councillor attendance at statutory council meetings and 73 per cent reported public attendance had also fallen. As first was going to press, the petition had more than 9,000 signatures. To sign, please visit <https://bit.ly/32EWw0m>

Council finances

A report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests some councils' finances held up better during the first year of the pandemic than previously thought. The IFS estimated councils' net spending on non-education services increased by approximately £4 billion in 2020/21 – lower than previous estimates provided by councils. An LGA spokesperson said: "The pandemic has caused extraordinary financial costs to local government. The effects on council budgets and cost pressures have continued to be felt into 2021/22 and will be felt for some time to come. It is important that government continues to monitor the situation both in the short and long term, providing vital support to councils when needed."

Funding for expert advice on housing

Thirty projects are to receive up to £25,000 each to help 90 councils overcome housing challenges in their local areas.

The awards have been made by the LGA's Housing Advisers Programme 2021/22 (HAP), an innovative scheme that helps councils address the housing crisis and meet the housing needs of local communities.

HAP is a key part of the sector support programme, delivered by the LGA and funded by government, which delivers robust peer challenges and support to

help councils improve performance, become more efficient and effective in delivering for their local residents, and share good practice.

The HAP funding will pay for expert advice to drive forward locally led solutions to housing challenges identified by participating councils.

In the previous four years of the programme, the LGA has funded 126 projects across England, helping councils build homes, reduce homelessness and rough sleeping, plan for ageing populations, explore the potential of zero carbon housing, understand the student housing market, increase supply of modular housing, and more.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "The Housing Advisers Programme is an important part of the sector support programme, delivered by the LGA, working in partnership with central government to empower councils to meet their local challenges.

"HAP has delivered huge benefits to councils since it was first launched, helping local areas address the challenges of the housing crisis.

"It has proven an excellent source of knowledge and expertise for councils, sharing innovative ideas and ways to improve, whether it's building new homes, tackling homelessness or planning thriving and flourishing places and economies."



Private tenants face rise in homelessness

More than 4,000 households living in the private sector were threatened with homelessness between July and September last year – an increase of almost 60 per cent from the same quarter the previous year.

The number of households accepted as owed a 'main homelessness duty' by their councils has also risen, reflecting an increase in households with children owed a relief duty.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "Every instance of homelessness is a tragedy and councils work hard to prevent it from happening in the first place, as well as support those affected.

"The end to the eviction ban brought in to protect tenants during the pandemic has undoubtedly contributed to this rise in

households threatened with homelessness from the private sector, and councils are eager to work with government on a plan to safeguard tenants.

"The Government should also bring forward its pledge to end 'no fault' evictions in their entirety.

"The rise in families who are owed a main duty by their councils puts even more pressure on social housing waiting lists, which further supports our call for giving councils the powers and resources to build 100,000 social homes for rent a year.

"We also want to work with government on the urgent implementation of a cross-government homelessness prevention strategy, associated with the multi-year homelessness funding for councils that has been announced."



Developers 'must pay' cladding bills

Developers were warned last month by the Government that they must pay to fix the cladding crisis.

Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary Michael Gove's threat to use the legal system to ensure developers meet their responsibilities to leaseholders was a "positive step in the right direction", the LGA said – but it called for similar action on other fire safety defects in social housing.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "No leaseholder should have to pay the costs of making their homes safe... However, leaseholders are not the only innocent victims of the construction industry's failure to build safe homes.

"The construction industry must also be made to fix the fire safety defects it has built into blocks owned by councils and housing associations.

"Unless the Government forces the industry to act – or provides taxpayer funding – we are concerned that the costs of fixing social housing blocks will fall on council housing revenue accounts and housing associations.

"This will reduce the funding available to meet the Government's ambitions for improvements to social housing, net zero, and the provision of new social housing, leaving tenants and those on the waiting list to suffer the consequences of decades of industry failure and poor regulation.

"Like leaseholders, council tenants and those on the waiting list are innocent victims, and the Government needs to help them too."

● See p9. For LGA leadership training on building safety, please visit www.local.gov.uk and search for 'leadership essentials'

Lords report calls for action on housing crisis

The Lords Built Environment Committee has called on the Government to address barriers to building much-needed new homes.

In a report, 'Meeting housing demand', it said too many people are living in expensive, unsuitable, and poor-quality homes.

To tackle the housing crisis, the cross-party committee said skills shortages needed to be addressed and planning departments given more resources, and that money spent on housing benefit should be invested in increasing the social housing stock over time.

It also said the country needed more specialist and mainstream housing suitable for older people.

Cllr David Renard, LGA Housing Spokesperson, said: "We fully support the committee's call for more investment in increasing social housing stock if we are to tackle the housing crisis.

"By giving councils the powers and resources to build 100,000 much-needed social homes a year, we can help the Government meet its annual target of 300,000 new homes.

"This should include further reform of Right to Buy.

"While planning is not the barrier to house building, with nine in 10 planning applications approved by councils, the committee is right to highlight the need for planning authorities to be adequately resourced.

"Developers also need to be incentivised to build housing more quickly, with more than one million homes given planning permission in the past decade not yet built, while an additional one million homes allocated in local plans are waiting to be brought forward by developers for planning permission."

Tax loophole on second homes closed

Owners of second homes who abuse a tax loophole by claiming their often-empty properties are holiday lets will be forced to pay, under tough new measures announced by the Government.

Currently, second home-owners are able to avoid paying council tax and access small business rates relief by declaring an intention to let the property out to holidaymakers.

Concerns have been raised, including by the LGA, that many never actually let their homes, and leave them empty.

Under the new rules, holiday lets must be rented out for a minimum of 70 days a year to qualify for business rates relief.

Cllr Shaun Davies, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "Genuine small businesses – including holiday lets – should be entitled to benefit from small business rates relief, but we have warned that the current criteria are open to abuse.

"We are pleased government has listened to councils and is taking action to prevent owners of properties that are not genuine businesses exploiting the rules.

"We want to work with the Government on the further measures needed to tackle other forms of business rates avoidance, which continue to cost councils and central government more than £250 million each year."



In brief

Funding for bus services

Local bus services are facing a funding gap as the Government's bus recovery grant (BRG), which provided support during the pandemic, draws to a close at the end of March. The LGA has written to Transport Secretary Grant Shapps and Chancellor Rishi Sunak to highlight the potential threat to local bus services. It has called on the Government to commit early to keeping the BRG going beyond March so that vital routes are not lost – possibly for good – and people can continue to keep faith in their local bus services.

Care leavers survey

Oxford has published the results of its survey on care leavers' views of preparing to leave local authority care. For many, leaving the care system can be a challenging and anxious time and the survey found that more than a third of care leavers felt they left care too early, and often without essential skills, such as how to cook or manage money. Many care leavers also reported feeling alone or isolated when they left care, and more than a quarter of care leavers did not meet their personal adviser until they were 18 or older – despite statutory guidance that this should happen from age 16.

Councillor abuse

The LGA has received almost 400 responses in the first two months of a call for evidence of abuse and intimidation of councillors. The call was launched late last year, in response to growing concerns about the impact an increasing level of public intimidation and toxicity of debate is having on democratic processes, particularly at a local level. It is an ongoing part of the LGA's Civility in Public Life programme, and is providing invaluable insights into the experiences of councillors, the impact of abuse and intimidation on councillors and council decision-making, and emerging trends around abuse and intimidation from the public. To contribute to the call for evidence, please visit www.local.gov.uk/civility-public-life

'Slow pace' on superfast broadband rollout

A report by the cross-party Public Accounts Committee has criticised the slow pace of the Government's 'Project Gigabit', designed to accelerate the speed of the superfast gigabit broadband rollout across the country.

The report warned MPs were "still not convinced" the Government would meet its 2025 target for superfast broadband because of "little tangible" progress being made so far.

The report also criticised the Government's over-reliance on the private sector to get to hard-to-reach communities.

The Government aims to deliver gigabit-capable broadband, with speeds of at least 1,000Mbps, to at least 85 per cent of the UK by 2025.

CLlr Mark Hawthorne, the LGA's Digital Connectivity Spokesperson, said: "Councils have a vital role to play in helping to improve local communities' connectivity.

"To help the Government reach its 2025

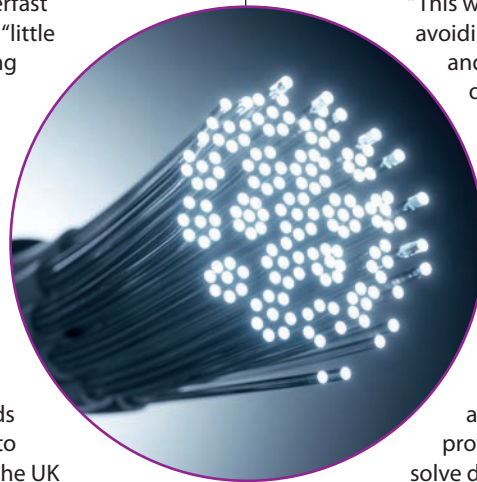
target, councils need more funding to support telecommunication providers to deliver improvements on the ground.

"The Government should empower councils to place a digital champion in every local area to help facilitate delivery and support providers to install gigabit-capable broadband as quickly as possible.

"This will be essential to avoiding local bottlenecks and the slowing down of delivery. We are concerned there is no detailed plan in place to ensure those in the very hardest to reach areas are not left behind.

"A local digital champion would be a central contact point for government and broadband providers to help problem solve deployment issues in the local area."

He added: "Tackling the digital divide will be important to levelling up in every community, ensuring everyone has the connectivity and digital skills they need to thrive."



Support for duty to protect public spaces

Stronger measures to help protect public places from the threat of attack look set go ahead, following a government consultation.

The majority of 2,755 responses to the consultation on a new Protect Duty supported the Government's proposals, which include a legal requirement for some public places to ensure preparedness for, and protection from, terrorist attacks.

There is currently no requirement for security measures at most public spaces. The consultation was launched in response to the Manchester Arena bombing in May 2017 and more recent lower-level terror attacks.

CLlr Nesil Caliskan, Chair of the LGA's

Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "Local authorities take threats from terrorism extremely seriously and work hard to keep their communities safe.

"Introducing a new Protect Duty will require significant resource and capacity to ensure that those within its scope are aware of their responsibilities, and comply.

"This must be supported by full funding and time to allow for communication, preparation, guidance and training, and recruitment of specialised staff before implementation can begin. It is also vital that measures to increase security sit alongside continued investment in prevention programmes that stop people being drawn into terrorism.

"The new duty will also need to take a risk-based approach to introducing new measures that does not allow terrorism to disrupt normal life and inhibit our freedoms to enjoy the places and spaces that are a critical and much-loved part of local communities."

PARLIAMENT

Improving building safety

Leaseholders will have more protection from costly remediation bills

The Building Safety Bill – the Government’s legislative response to Dame Judith Hackitt’s Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety – hit the headlines in January, following critical government interventions ahead of its report stage in the Commons.

The bill underwent changes, long called for by the LGA and councils, that will now protect leaseholders to some degree from costly remediation bills.

This commitment was further strengthened by a threat from Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary

Michael Gove to use the legal system to force developers, rather than residents, to pay for fire safety failures.

Given that the bill impacts councils as duty holders and regulators, and has implications for the fire and rescue service, the LGA has been working continually to ensure the national voice of local government is heard when it comes to this important piece of legislation.

When the bill reached its Commons’ committee stage in 2021, the LGA submitted written evidence to the MPs responsible for its scrutiny. Cllr David Renard, Chair of the LGA’s Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board,

also appeared before the committee to give evidence.

Since this initial engagement, the LGA has secured a steady drumbeat of parliamentary interventions through briefings for debates taking place in both Houses of Parliament on subjects such as leaseholder protections, fire safety in retirement communities, fire risk in high-rise social housing, and more.

Most significantly, we worked with LGA Vice-President Daisy Cooper MP to table amendments to the bill at report stage that would protect councils from additional burdens resulting from a new levy, further reduce the ability of developers to appoint their own regulator, and bring new-build blocks less than 18 metres high within the scope of the bill.

While critical wins for councils have already been achieved, the LGA continues to take action in a number of vital areas.

First, we are calling for council building control and the fire service to be funded properly, to ensure the necessary increase in skills and capacity to deliver the new requirements of the bill.

Second, we are maintaining our calls for the Government to redress the two-tier system created by the bill, where the new building safety regulator has oversight of new-builds over 18 metres, but developers choose their own regulators for buildings under 18 metres.

Finally, the LGA is continuing to press the Government to exempt councils from the developer levy.

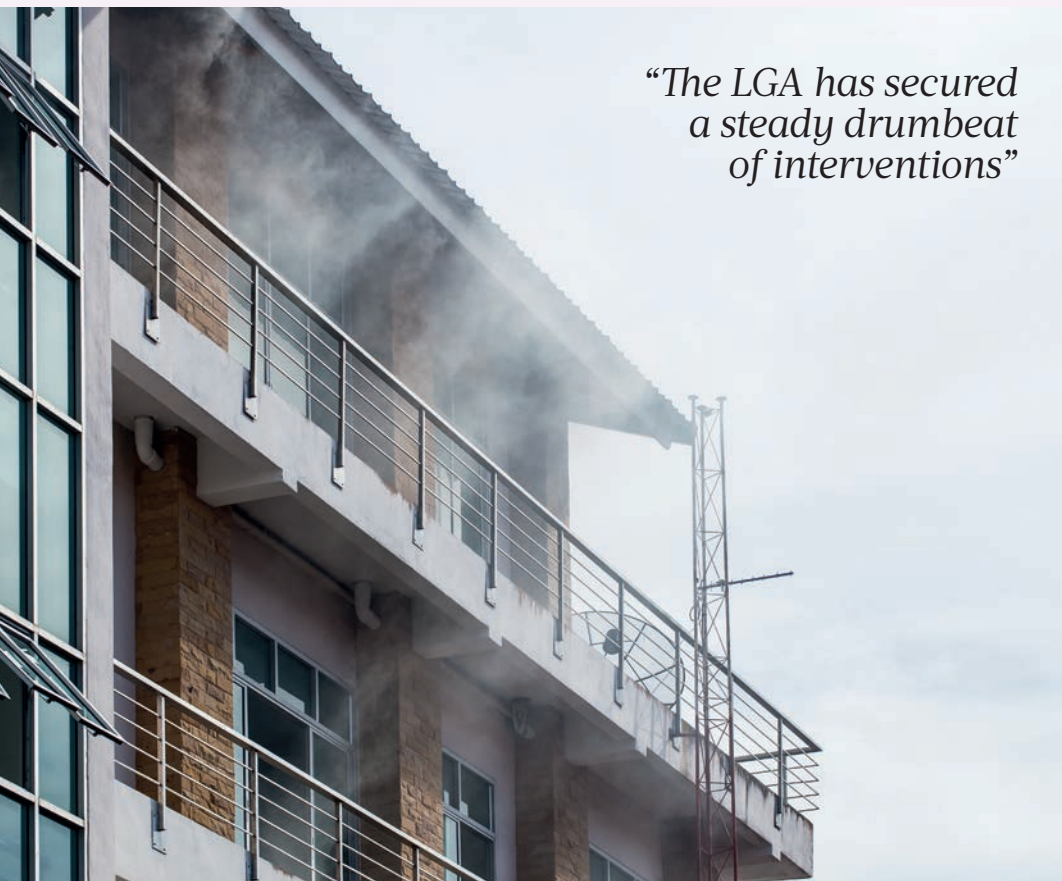
So, what is next for the Building Safety Bill?

It has completed its passage through the House of Commons and now makes its way through the Lords, where the second reading was due to take place on 2 February, as **first** was going to press.

This will be the first opportunity for Peers to properly engage with the bill. Working shoulder to shoulder with our cross-party vice-presidents, as well as Peers who have an interest in local government, the LGA will continue to use every resource available to strengthen the bill for councils and for the residents they represent.



To find out more about the LGA’s parliamentary work, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament. Visit bills.parliament.uk/bills/3021 to follow the Building Safety Bill’s progress through Parliament



“The LGA has secured a steady drumbeat of interventions”



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

Return to Plan A

Planning ahead for better health and care

As **first** was going to press, a raft of covid-related restrictions had been, or were being, lifted in response to the Omicron wave passing its peak in England.

The Government has ended its 'work from home' recommendation, face coverings are no longer required by law in any setting (including schools), and you don't need to have a covid passport (mandatory certification) to go to nightclubs and mass events – although venues can still use them on a voluntary basis.

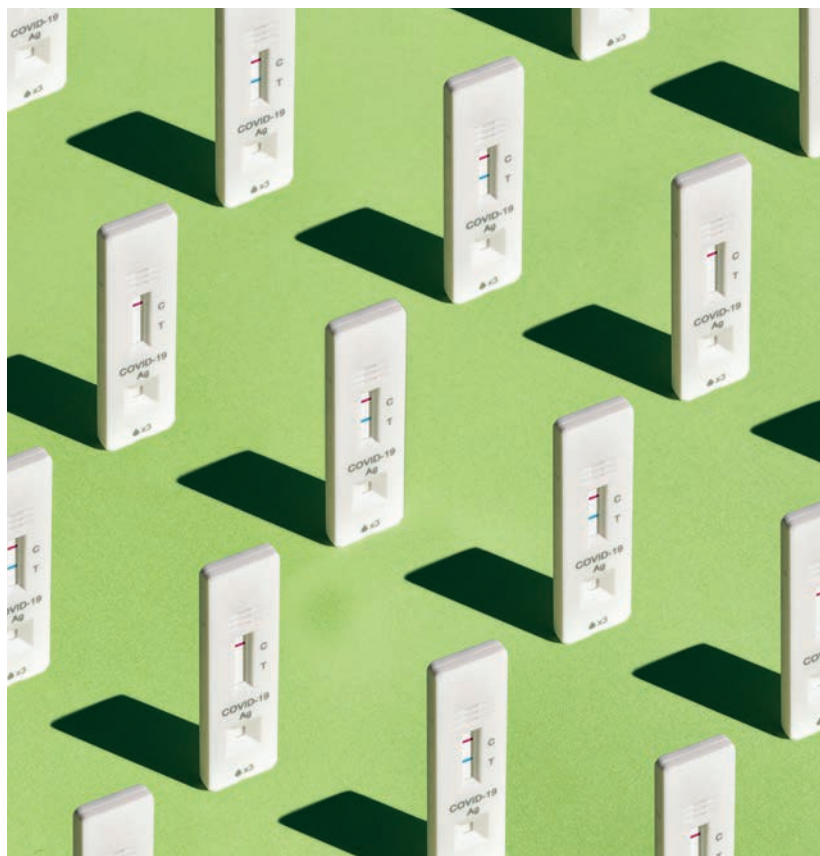
People must continue to self-isolate if they are infected, but this is now for just five days, subject to two negative test results. Public health guidance also remains in place, suggesting individuals should continue to wear a face covering in crowded and enclosed spaces.

The transition from Plan B is down to the effectiveness of booster jabs, compliance with measures, and the fact that scientists believe the Omicron wave has peaked nationally.

Vaccinations remain a priority and our best defence against coronavirus. Councils have worked hard to support the vaccination and booster programme, and I know you will continue to encourage all residents to get jabbed.

As we look to the months beyond the immediate Omicron wave, we need to look ahead to how we support the nation to live with COVID-19.

The LGA is pushing for local government to be engaged in the early



planning stages for key areas, including future boosters, service recovery, winter pressures, and supporting communities to build back from the longer-term impact of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the focus is narrowing on how best to tackle the NHS backlog caused by the pandemic, as well as the long-term problems in health and social care.

The LGA is clear that the best way of tackling the backlog is to invest in prevention and early intervention. That means investing in local community care, mental health services and support for social care.

We have had constructive conversations with the Government about plans for even better health and care integration, during which we made the case for investment in our outstanding social care workforce and the wide-ranging role local government plays in people's health and wellbeing.

It is not just the NHS and social care services facing challenges. Public health services are also at risk amid funding uncertainty and Omicron pressures.

Without financial certainty, drug and alcohol treatment, tackling obesity,

*“Without financial certainty **vital frontline services** are at risk”*

and health visiting are among the vital frontline services at risk of being cut back or closing altogether.

This is why we have been calling on the Government to urgently publish the public health grant funding allocations, which councils will receive from April.

Meanwhile, the LGA has been running a series of webinars on how COVID-19 has exacerbated health inequalities, and as part of this work, we have uploaded new case studies to our Health Inequalities Hub showing how councils are supporting their residents (see www.local.gov.uk/health-inequalities-hub).

Our next webinar, on 15 February, will focus on how the pandemic has impacted people's mental health – see www.local.gov.uk/events to find out more and book a place, and see our p12 feature on children's mental health.

I hope that, as restrictions lift, you and your teams remain safe. As ever, do let us know if there is anything further that we can do to support your council, by contacting your LGA principal adviser.



See www.local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-principal-advisers for contact details for the LGA's principal advisers. For our latest updates on the pandemic, please visit www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus

Renewing our high streets

New guidance offers tailored recommendations for supporting town centres



Rebecca Munro is a Consultant with Pragmatix Advisory

High streets and town centres were changing long before covid. The pandemic supercharged many pre-existing trends, creating both new challenges and opportunities.

The role of high streets has evolved in recent decades, from predominantly retail and functional activities – such as accessing banking and postal services – to being a locus for socialising and enjoyable experiences (see graphic, below).

Meanwhile, the growth of out-of-town shopping parks and telephone-based and online services has meant regular trips to the local shopping centre are no longer essential.

Nowadays, shopping centres need to compete not just with each other, but also with cyberspace to attract footfall. Local authorities need to understand and respond constructively to these trends to foster renewed and resilient high streets.

Consultants Pragmatix Advisory and futures experts Trajectory have undertaken research for the LGA that outlines steps councils can take to do this. Through a series of in-depth interviews with council officers, experts, and businesses, and a review of existing evidence, the project has produced a collection of practical, easy-to-access guidance documents and videos.

Covid has reinforced the demand for useable, attractive outdoor spaces, and work is already under way to make town centres more appealing. Whether it is improving the visuals in shop windows, such as the Hope and Light Community Christmas project in East Lindsey, or the removal of redundant buildings to create a greener centre in Scarborough, councils

are working hard to make the high street a place that people want to be.

Footfall is being boosted by programmes of cultural events, such as the Stockton International Riverside Festival, which draw visitors into town centres. But no two high streets are the same, and the challenges they face – and the responses to them – need to be different too.

The guidance (see information, below) supports councils, with tailored recommendations based on the type of town centres and the communities they serve.

There have been covid winners and losers, with one of the big differentiators being changing commuter behaviour. The shift in working patterns has offered village and dormitory town centres the opportunity to develop a daytime economy, as remote workers demand products and services that they would previously have sought in the urban centres where they worked.

The loss of those same commuters has resulted in metropolitan high streets developing their night-time economy, in response to lower daytime footfall.

Consumers' climate awareness and demand for more sustainable products appears to benefit high streets with proportionately more independent shops and producers, and whether a town centre has a high- or low-density catchment area has implications for green transport provision.

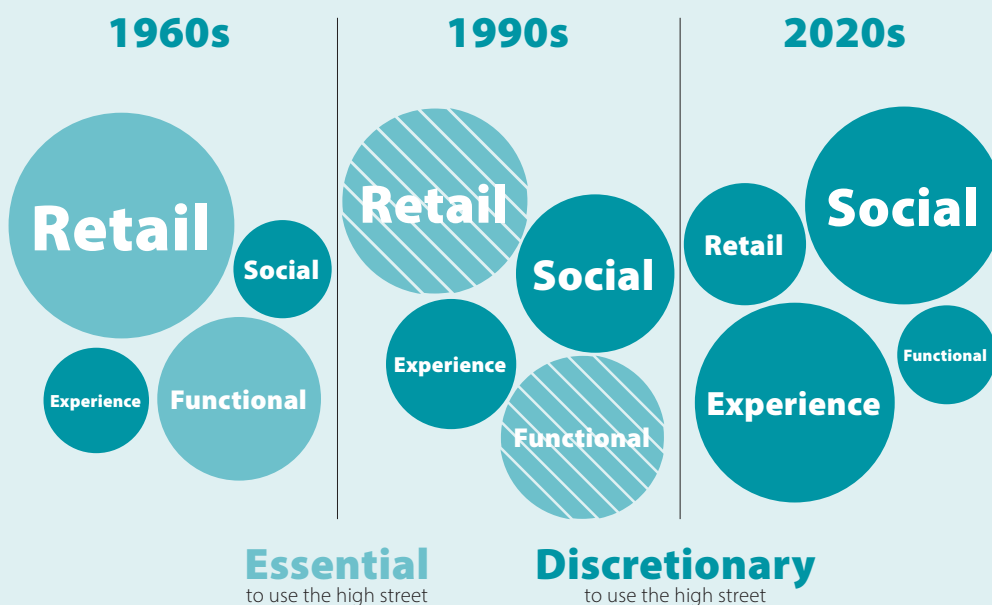
Trajectory has identified 35 trends likely to impact the high street and councils' thinking about them. Strategies around climate change are already in place in many locations, but the speed of technological change remains a perennial challenge for those planning the futures of our town centres.

How will the rollout of 5G and the Internet of Things impact on how consumers use these areas, and what opportunities do they provide? To what extent does the 'metaverse' and the '4th place', where humans live within a digital entertainment environment, represent competition to high streets' social and experiential offering – or are they complementary?

A detailed information pack outlining the trends is available online to help councils shape plans for more resilient and revitalised high streets.

Source: Pragmatix Advisory, 2021

Stylisation of the changing role of the high street



See www.local.gov.uk/publications for 'Creating resilient and revitalised high streets in the "new normal"'



Growing together

More needs to be done to ensure all children enjoy good mental health



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

Councils have a vital role to play in supporting children to have mentally healthy childhoods, and the LGA has long called for greater investment in the services that help them do this.

Supporting children early on means more can receive help when they need it, rather than waiting until they are unwell, and it reduces pressure on services.

Evidence from the Children's

Commissioner for England's 'Big Ask' survey shows how important mental health is to children and young people. Among nine to 17-year-olds, just more than half (52 per cent) said that having good mental health was one of their most important future aspirations.

The theme of this year's Children's Mental Health Week (7-13 February) is 'growing together', encouraging children (and adults) to consider how

i For more information about the LGA's work on children and young people, including mental health, please visit www.local.gov.uk/topics/children-and-young-people. See also www.childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk



they have grown, and how they can help others to grow.

Public services, professionals and the community need to grow alongside young people to ensure they can thrive and get access to the right support when they need it.

For example, in my own council of Hackney, as part of Hackney Black History Season, we ran a project with an artist displaying portraits of black boys smiling on billboards, which aimed to challenge the negative portrayal of young black boys through positive representation.

The project also addressed the lack of mental health provision available for young black people. It is vital we continue this conversation around mental health and wellbeing for young black boys in Hackney and around the country, and offer new ways for them to express themselves, to explore a sense of identity and manage their own happiness. →



60 seconds on... young people's mental health

Ella Reilly, 18, is a Deputy Member of the Youth Parliament from Portsmouth. She leads on Portsmouth's Youth Parliament team's mental health and wellbeing work, with a background in mental health co-production projects in the city.

Q What can policy-makers do to better support young people's mental health?

A Work alongside education settings more. Young people spend a large amount of their time at school or college, and the academic workload can be a contributing factor to students struggling with their mental wellbeing. By supporting schools and colleges to help young people, students would be more likely to receive help before their struggles escalate.

Q Is there anything that has improved your mental health for the better?

A Learning to set aside time for myself has helped me maintain more positive mental wellbeing. I've often tried to have productive downtime, and it doesn't really work for me. It's something I found tough while studying, and I'm slowly learning that I find it much more effective to have designated work and rest time. I try to find little hobbies and tasks that I can fit around my workload to give me a little boost during the week.

Q How has the pandemic affected the mental health of young people?

A Unequally. Different education settings have supported students differently. The inequalities of access to technology have been highlighted, and individuals already struggling with their mental health have been faced with new challenges.

The main contributing factors have been adjusting to learning away from the classroom and experiencing a large amount of uncertainty around exams. I expected to sit my A Levels in 2021, but with the constant

changing of advice and varying assessment approaches between subjects and colleges, it was certainly not a stress-free year, even by typical exam standards.

Q What's one lesson that you'd like to be able to tell your younger self?

A Learning to say 'no' is super-important! I am guilty of agreeing to help with things or getting involved in projects because they're things I'm passionate about, and then realising I'm going to have to sacrifice some of my much-valued downtime to commit to them. I'd like to share this with other young people who like to say 'yes' to everything just because they think they should. It is OK to say no, and very much OK to take time to re-evaluate your workload.

Q What would you like to say to people who shape policy around youth mental health services?

A Co-production is the only way to create a system that works for everyone. I've seen that current service users will also be more than happy to offer open, honest feedback, and this is often the best way to get started in the change-making process. Empower young people and improve services at the same time!

Leave the jargon at the door. Help young people to feel actively involved in the services they use. Service users have previously mentioned that the methods for gaining help are already complex, and often don't seem very user-friendly. Combining this with a minefield of clinical terms makes it hard for young people to understand. Human approaches are crucial.

→ Continued from previous page.

Reflecting Children's Mental Health Week's 'growing together' theme, we know the value in councils supporting each other – as we found during the LGA's children and young people's mental health peer-learning programme (see bit.ly/3KqXLbf).

This showcased great examples of young people supporting each other – for instance, the work of the Birmingham Education Partnership and its NewStart project, which supports secondary schools to embed a whole-school approach to children's mental health.

The LGA has called on the Government to invest in children's health and wellbeing services.

There has been positive progress with the faster rollout of mental health support teams in schools, and funding for parent and infant mental health services in last year's Spending Review. However, we need to go further to

"It is undeniable how important the early years are to ensuring good emotional wellbeing over our lives"

ensure that children and young people, and their families, can thrive.

At the other end of the age range, it is undeniable how important the early years are to ensuring good emotional wellbeing over our lives.

Research shows a strong connection between exposure to stress in pregnancy, and in a child's early years, and their later mental health. This is not to say a child's future is determined at such an early age, but the opportunity that we have to act early cannot be ignored.

I am delighted that colleagues from Sefton have shared the work they are doing to give children the best start in life (see below).



Building bonds and **breaking cycles**



Dr Lisa Marsland-Hall (l) is Consultant Clinical Psychologist and BABS Service Lead, and **Majella Maguire** is Locality Manager – Early Help at Sefton Council



parent-infant therapeutic interventions and support, to help struggling parents bond and form secure, loving relationships with their babies during pregnancy and in the post-natal period.

Sefton Council and Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust have developed a parent-infant mental health service – but why did we need to take action?

Sefton is one of the most deprived councils in the UK, and around 20 per cent of new parents suffer with mental health issues.

We were seeing a rise in demands on services, with increases in the number of looked-after children, and the number of babies removed at birth doubling in the past 10 years.

There is a wealth of evidence that shows serious, persistent difficulties in early relationships – if not addressed – can have effects on babies' brain development and lifelong physical and mental health.

We had seen groundbreaking specialist therapeutic work happening in Knowsley, and the life-changing impact and outcomes that this had on vulnerable and at-risk parents and infants. This has happened by offering 'easy to engage', community-based,

So, what are we doing?

In 2018, the 'early help' structure in Sefton had changed, and we knew we needed one of the rare jewels that is a specialist parent-infant mental health service (PIMHS).

In 2020, we were able to set up a 12-month pilot for a Sefton 'BABS' (Building Attachment and Bonds Service), to go live in January 2022.

We established a mobilisation steering group and started the development of the PIMH workforce – ensuring all multidisciplinary staff received specialist PIMH training and setting the parameters for the pilot.

From January 2022, Sefton BABS will be delivered 'grassroots up' in the community from family hubs. It will provide support to families that are vulnerable or at risk.

Our ambition is that it will prevent infants being taken into care, improve parents' and infants' mental health, and ensure positive results for the lives of families, while providing some cost efficiency.

BABS will be a trailblazing 'integrated care system' (ICS) model for this 12-month pilot for a therapeutic PIMHS, funded by the council.

It is offering a PIMH partnership model of support (health, mental health, early help, children's social care, third sector), supporting vulnerable and at-risk parents and infants to build secure bonds and relationships, and break negative life-cycles in those first, critical, 1,001 days.

During the pilot, we will collect data that will assess the adverse childhood experiences of parents, parental mental health, parent-infant bonding and attachment, and the infants' social and emotional development/wellbeing.

In addition, we will be collecting feedback from parents on their experience of the service. We will also be carrying out cost-benefit analyses.

At the end of the pilot, we would like to prove the BABS concept of the specialist PIMHS model by showcasing it to our Sefton ICS commissioners.

This will include the clinical outcomes, impact and cost savings offered to Sefton families by the delivery of the BABS service, and how PIMHS is an integral and essential offer.



For more information, please visit bit.ly/3qKQncc



Councillor **Judi Billing** is Lead Member for Leadership on the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board

Representative of our communities

The LGA has commissioned new research to help inform its Be a Councillor campaign

Many councils undertake activity focused on local democracy and increasing democratic engagement. Promoting the role of councillor and encouraging more people to consider standing for election can form an important part of this work.

Having undertaken aspects of this activity for many years, locally, regionally and nationally, I'm more than aware that it is fantastically hard work. Sometimes, the forces of negativity about our roles make it seem like a distressingly uphill battle, lacking in the joy and humour that such campaigns also need!

To help, the LGA's Be a Councillor campaign supports councils to run their own local activities and campaigns, with a toolkit and bespoke support.

Its purpose is to move people from being unaware of the role of a councillor through several stages towards taking action – for example, considering standing for election or recommending the role to others.

The LGA recently commissioned The Young Foundation to capture the views and experiences of under-represented groups to help inform the development of Be a Councillor.

The research showed that there is a low level of awareness of every aspect of being a local councillor. This translates into low levels of people

exploring the possibility of becoming one, let alone going on to actively consider the role, stand for election or encourage others to do so.

To improve diversity in representation, the pool of prospective councillors needs to be increased and diversified at every stage of the ladder – from awareness to action.

A key perception about the role of a councillor and their work was that it's primarily associated with the provision, maintenance and management of services at a highly local level.

There was less clarity on how councillors could influence bigger societal issues affecting their local communities and areas.

It was also widely believed that councillors should represent, advocate for, and make decisions on behalf of local people. Community liaison activities were often mentioned, with some perceiving the role as a 'bridge' between the council and the public.

The first barrier that must be overcome for many is the lack of understanding about local democracy.

The research provided a clear steer on the types of information and communication channels believed to be necessary when encouraging a more diverse group of people to consider becoming local councillors. This includes amplifying stories about the impact of being a councillor,

going where the people are, and using community channels to engage with residents.

To support this, councils can use the following tools to help raise awareness of the councillor role among everyone in the community, all of which are contained in the LGA's Be a Councillor toolkit:

- explain the role in detail using the FAQs, job description, and case-study template documents
- highlight, with the standard text available in the toolkit, the councillor as a community activist, where councillors work hard and give back to their local community
- demonstrate the local and wider impacts councillors can have, and share your achievements for your communities.

So, let's all move through 2022 feeling optimistic, hopeful and determined to do whatever we can to improve community representation among those standing for election.

Let's engage with communities in ways that make sense to them, and do everything we can to uphold and improve the reputation of local government among those we serve.



'To find out more about Be a Councillor and access the council toolkit for planning your local campaign, visit www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor. **The Young Foundation** is a not-for-profit organisation for community research and social innovation, see www.youngfoundation.org

Pride in local politics

At the heart of local government is the need to ensure everyone in our communities is treated equally, with dignity, and has fair access to resources and opportunities.

This is also true of our local government workplaces and council chambers.

The LGA provides a range of resources to support councils' external and internal work on

equalities, diversity and inclusion (EDI) – including our EDI hub, Be a Councillor campaign (see p15), and workforce resources (see below).

With many councils and schools marking LGBT+ History Month in February, **first** has been hearing from LGBT+ councillors about their experiences, hopes and plans – see below, right, and over the page.

LGBT+ History Month, an annual initiative by the charity Schools OUT UK, provides an opportunity

to celebrate and recognise LGBT+ people and culture. This year's theme is 'politics in art' – see lgbtplushistorymonth.co.uk to find out more.

i You can access the LGA's EDI hub at www.local.gov.uk/our-support/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-hub. See www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-workforce for a range of support and resources on workforce EDI priorities

The importance of role models



Councillor **Joe Porter** (Con) is Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity at Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

The UK has made huge strides with LGBT+ equality, particularly since 2000, but we've got an awful lot to do. For example, health services need to be more inclusive for LGBT+ residents.

I'm not the biggest fan of Tony Blair, but he did lots of great things – enabling gay people to adopt, allowing civil partnerships, and legalising entry to the military.

Under David Cameron we got marriage

equality, under Theresa May we got the world's first ever LGBT+ Action Plan and tackled workplace discrimination, and Boris Johnson has committed to banning conversion therapy – something really important in respect of the mental health of LGBT+ people.

I came out in October 2016, and it was the party that gave me the confidence to be my true and authentic self.

I regret and disagree with Section 28, but the Conservative Party now stands for equality of opportunity, regardless of background, and that's so important.

Role models are absolutely vital. Justine Greening really inspired me (and she knows, because I told her!) as the first openly gay woman in a Conservative cabinet. She was a fantastic equalities minister. I'm also a massive fan of [actor and musician] Olly Alexander, who starred in 'It's a Sin', which was

such an important TV series for people understanding the LGBT+ community.

Role models are essential in every sector, and I hope I can inspire other young people, and especially LGBT+ young people, to get involved in politics. (I'm 25 and have wanted to be a councillor since I was 12 years old.)

Councils and political groups need to do better on reaching out to young people, particularly LGBT+ young people, who have a lot to offer in terms of public service and changing things for the better.

We need to have open, frank conversations about how we work. A lot of councils are geared towards older and retired people, with meetings during the day. If you haven't got a job with a boss prepared to offer you maximum flexibility, then you will struggle to do what's required as a local councillor to serve your local community.

Making people's lives better



Councillor **Helen Belcher** (Lib Dem) was elected to Wiltshire Council in May 2021

From the excitement of campaigning and the election count (which was drawn out over two days because of the pandemic), I've now had a number of months to get to grips with being a unitary authority councillor.

Good grief – the amount of reading! Those first two weeks of induction training were intense.

As a fairly prominent trans woman, who sticks her oar into some trans issues, it's a relief, frankly, to be working on things that affect the day-to-day lives of everybody – bins,

roads and planning. Helping someone vulnerable to get appropriate housing after they had been made homeless was something I was particularly pleased to achieve.

But being a fairly prominent trans woman means I do get a level of attention that can be problematic. Not that I'm claiming councillors should be above scrutiny – I think the exact opposite; rather that it seems to have opened me up to a level of personal abuse on local social media that I've never seen before.

Sadly, given the disgusting nature of some of the comments, I've now got to the point where I'm having to consider legal action – something that surely has to be the last resort for any elected official.

When abuse is doled out by someone living relatively close to you,

it becomes frightening. More than that, it's a distraction from what I want to do, which is make peoples' lives in my neighbourhood better.

So, it is pleasing to see many local residents leap, unasked, to my defence.

Having said that, it's a relief that other councillors, as well as officers, treat me as a normal human being – albeit maybe a slightly annoying human being given the number of questions and problems I have passed to officers over the past few months.

Despite the noises off, it remains a privilege and a pleasure to be in a position to make a difference to the lives of all my neighbours, and that is what I will continue to do for the remainder of my term. None of us would do any different.

Equal rights all year round



Councillor **Jason Zadrozny** (Ind) is Leader of Ashfield District Council

As an openly gay council leader, I have experienced my fair share of homophobia over the years. Whether it be from opposition politicians or the odd resident – for me, it's water off a duck's back.

For others, that's not the case. It's not the case for many people who don't put their head above the parapet. This has got worse since the Brexit referendum, which polarised debate.

Reports of hate crime linked to sexuality more than doubled in this country from 2016 to 2021 – from 8,569 complaints to 17,135. That's enough to fill Field Mill, home of my nearest football club, Mansfield Town, nearly twice. Transgender hate crimes more than doubled in this time.

When I became Leader of Ashfield District Council, I stated that I didn't want the council to just put the flags up for LGBT+ History Month, the International Day of

Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia and Transphobia, or Pride – I wanted the council to represent the views of everybody who works for us and our residents all the time.

At Ashfield, we champion equal rights all year round. Our ethos is one of an 'Open Ashfield', where residents and staff can be confident about being open about their sexuality.

Our whistle-blowing policy allows staff to report concerns about homophobia, transphobia, biphobia and acephobia confidentially. They can be confident their concerns will be listened to and acted on.

One of our most popular members of staff is Richard Townsley, of our Community Protection Team, who is the link between staff and management on LGBT+ issues. He ensures our rights are weaved throughout everything we do, that LGBT+ staff are supported, and that training is given to help staff understand the issues facing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans people, and those questioning their gender identity.

We will, of course, proudly raise the flags this month – but if we slip from our equalities' agenda, Richard will be straight on the phone.



Still much to do on LGBT+ equality



Councillor **Rishi Madlani** (Lab) is Camden's LGBT+ Champion and Chair of its Pension Committee

Just over two years ago I was delighted to be appointed the Camden LGBT+ Champion by Cllr Georgia Gould, our council leader. This was both exciting but also a terrifying responsibility.

Camden has a long and rich LGBT+ history. For instance, my ward, Bloomsbury, is home to Gay's the Word – the UK's oldest LGBT+ bookstore, where Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners once met.

We are now lucky to be home to charities such as forum+, celebrating its 20th birthday, which works across Camden and Islington to promote equality for LGBT+ people as well as providing services to support victims of hate crimes.

We were also delighted to hear recently that campaign group Queer Britain had been successful in finding a site in the borough for the UK's first national LGBT+ museum.

For much of my adult life I've been an LGBT+ activist, from co-chairing Pride in Football to being a trustee of Opening Doors, the LGBT+ charity for older people – I've always got involved in campaigns to challenge all forms of LGBT-phobia.

"We need to continue to innovate and drive LGBT+ equality"

That being said, it still took me time to understand how to bring my lived experiences as an LGBT+ person of colour and campaigner to support the work of the council.

In my role, though restricted by the pandemic, I've been delighted to help support a programme of work across the council's activities.

From raising LGBT+ visibility through our rainbow and trans flag crossings to increasing awareness of the issues facing our trans siblings through training and through working closely with our council staff LGBT+ network, we are already making an impact.

The last Labour government reversed numerous discriminatory policies, from the pernicious Section 28 to bans on LGBT+ people serving in the military, and brought progress through the Gender Recognition Act and the Equality Act.

Though some further progress has been made on LGBT+ rights nationally, discrimination and inequalities remain.

We need to continue to innovate and drive LGBT+ equality through all our work in local government – especially in healthcare and education. There is still much to do.



LGA/ADPH Annual Public Health Conference 2022

On **23–24 March**, the LGA will be hosting its tenth public health conference in partnership with the Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH). Over the past decade the conference has been an invaluable opportunity for councillors, chief executives and directors to reflect on how councils can best support the health of their communities.

The virtual conference will be opened by **Professor Chris Whitty**, Chief Medical Officer for England, who will be joined by leading public health experts in a range of sessions over two days exploring the very latest thinking on national policy issues, as well as offering insights from those delivering on the ground.

After an extremely challenging year in which local government continues to be at the heart of responding to the pandemic, this flagship public health conference is more important than ever.

To book your place visit www.local.gov.uk/events



Leadership talent

LG Challenge winner
Rob Comber with
Lady Bruce-Lockhart



The LGA's Local Government Challenge is looking for the council superstars of the future

The Local Government Challenge is an annual competition that tests the leadership skills of the next generation of top executives and celebrates the amazing talent in the sector.

Over six months, 10 local government officers undertake five real-life challenges at councils, culminating in the final at the LGA's annual conference in June. There, four finalists will pitch their project proposals to delegates and a judging panel. The winner takes away the prestigious Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship, worth up to £10,000.

Our 2020 cohort began the competition at the start of that year, completing two of the five challenges.

At Surrey County Council, the contestants developed a business case to help mitigate the effects of climate change through land use and consumer habits, as part of Surrey's ambition to be carbon neutral by 2050.

At Pembrokeshire County Council, meanwhile, they produced a plan to support post-16 learners to ensure that 'every learner achieves more than

they thought possible'. In light of the pandemic, however, we had to pause the programme with the score tied at 1-1 between the two teams, Trailblazers and Resilience.

As national restrictions continue to ease, we will be restarting the programme shortly, and are delighted to provide an update from our reigning champion, Rob Comber (see right).

Looking ahead, applications for the next 10 contestants and five host councils will open this summer.

It's not just officers who get something out of the Local Government Challenge. Our host councils receive valuable consultancy by developing a challenge specific to a real-life local issue, drawing on the expertise of 10 council officers, who will work together on innovative solutions and offer fresh perspectives.

i To host a challenge, apply or nominate a colleague, please visit www.local.gov.uk/lg-challenge-2020-21 or email lgchallenge@local.gov.uk.

Summer slide



Rob Comber won the 2019 Local Government Challenge. Together with Kent County Council's transformation and innovation team, he implemented his winning project, Summer Slide, in 2020

Cast your mind back to summer 2020. If you worked in a school, your pupils had suffered the most turbulent academic year in post-war memory, and you were exhausted.

While some schools were looking forward to the summer break, others knew there were families in their community for whom those six weeks presented a daunting prospect.

We developed Summer Slide to support students at a greater disadvantage. Originally, the concept focused on summer learning loss, but as the pandemic progressed, it became clear that the priorities for any summer programme would be for social interaction and mental wellbeing.

Two schools in Dover piloted a two-week summer school, with a lead facilitator running activities for the most vulnerable children, ranging from cricket coaching, nature walks and mental health workshops to creating an art installation and even a juggling workshop!

Year 11 pupils in both schools were employed to act as mentors and help with the activities, and children were fed a balanced, nutritionally beneficial diet every day. Students described their summer school experience as "amazing". They felt their social skills and confidence had improved, and they realised the importance of spending time with their friends and family, away from technology and their phones.

While the long-term outcomes are still being measured, in the short term, there were reports of greater emotional regulation and confidence among children who had pushed their boundaries and bonded with their peers, as well as improved presentation and leadership skills for the Year 11 mentors.

● This is an edited version of an article that first appeared in the MJ.

Reforming revenues

The LGA has published a review of options for the future financing of local government



Councillor **Shaun Davies** is Chair of the LGA's Resources Board

The Budget and Spending Review in October 2021 provided an increase in grant funding for councils, and outlined some changes to local government revenue financing, including some to business rates.

The £4.8 billion in grant funding allocated for local government over the next three years will help to pay for some – but not all – of the increasing service demand pressures that councils face.

In addition, business rates reforms included measures designed to support high streets and incentivise net-zero investment, with the possibility of an online sales tax that could be used to fund further reductions in business rates.

Despite these announcements and reforms, significant issues remain over the future of local government revenue financing.

LGA analysis has suggested that, even after taking the increased grant funding into account, councils will face at least a \$1 billion shortfall in their ability to keep services at 2019/20 levels, in terms of quality and access, by 2024/25.

This future funding gap is set against the background of council revenues that have been squeezed significantly in recent years, with £15 billion of cuts to central government funding for councils between 2010 and 2019.

From 2016 to 2019, increases in 'core spending power' – the Government's assessment of the revenue resources available to local

government through the annual finance settlement – were down to increases in council tax rather than funding from central government.

The LGA has long argued that council tax is not the solution to paying for the growing costs of services, particularly social care, as it raises different amounts in different areas unrelated to need.

While local sources of income – including council tax, but also business rates, sales, fees and charges – have also become increasingly important to councils (see graphic), the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on these, with losses of around £9.7 billion, albeit central government provided some compensation for these losses in 2020/21.

Given this context, we think now is the time for a more fundamental look at how councils are funded, to ensure they are financially sustainable in the longer term.

Consequently, the LGA commissioned WPI Economics to carry out an objective review of current and alternative sources of revenue finance, and an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses.

Its report, 'Reforming revenues', identifies four significant issues with local government revenue financing that remain unresolved:

- adequately funding councils to deliver services of an acceptable standard
- making the UK taxation system fairer for those who pay taxes
- giving councils more tools to encourage local growth
- enabling councils to deliver policies that have a wider societal benefit (such as reaching net zero).



While all of these issues are interlinked to some degree, the first is arguably the most pressing. For example, councils are going to be on the frontline in delivering wide-ranging social care reforms, and credible analysis suggests that current funding plans may not allow the reforms to succeed.

The report analyses the options for reforming local government revenue financing under three headings:

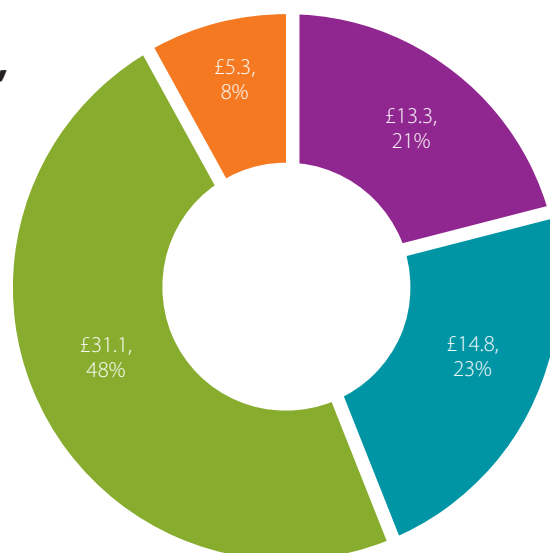
- the current system and reforming it – looking at council tax, business rates and smaller revenue sources (sales, fees and charges, road-user charges, and workplace parking levies)
- making national taxes local – looking at how some, or all, revenue from existing national taxes could be assigned or devolved to council areas
- introducing new local taxes – looking at how entirely new revenue sources could be implemented by councils, such as a tourist levy or a proportional property tax.

Options for reform under each of the above headings were assessed against a set of principles that the LGA argues should guide the design of local government revenue financing – sufficiency, buoyancy, fairness, efficiency of collection, predictability, transparency, and incentive.

'Reforming revenues' draws three main conclusions. First, reform of the current system would go some way

Local government core spending power, England, 2021/22 (£billion, % of total)

- Sales, fees and charges
- Settlement Funding Assessment (business rates and Revenue Support Grant)
- Council tax
- Government grants and incentives (excluding Revenue Support Grant, including New Home Bonus and Better Care Fund etc)



Source: MHCLG, February 2021, core spending power

to addressing the problems with local government revenues.

A reformed council tax and business rates system would help to address issues of sufficiency, unfairness, and supporting local economies. In respect of assigned and devolved national taxes, income tax is the revenue source that meets most of the LGA's principles for reform.

Second, being clear on what local government is 'for' will guide which reforms are most necessary.

If councils are just to be delivery arms of central government, then issues around sufficiency and fairness are more important than incentivising local economic growth or enabling better societal outcomes.

If councils are to be free to have significant autonomy in local areas, then the incentivising principle becomes more important.

Finally, there are some options for local revenue reform that should be discarded, as they don't meet enough of the principles for good revenue reform and do not address any of the problems with revenue financing. Localising inheritance tax and vehicle excise duty fit into this category.

There are other options that would only be pursued if an overhaul of the system were to be considered.

There are many merits, for instance, in replacing council tax with a proportional property tax or single

property tax, but large transition costs to implementing them.

The LGA does not necessarily endorse any of the suggested finance reforms – the reason for assessing them in this way was to produce, as far as possible, an objective comparison of the options.

The overarching purpose of the report is to contribute to the debate on a sustainable local government finance system, particularly following the funding announcements and reforms announced in the 2021 Budget and Spending Review.

While the focus of the report is revenue funding, capital funding is also very important and there are clear links between the two.

It is also clear that sources of funding, individually or together, would have to provide income for authorities in all tiers of local government, regardless of their ability to generate this income, otherwise services that support residents would be under threat in many areas.

Therefore, with any new income sources, or combination of sources, there will need to be some redistribution between authorities.

Councils have ambitions for their communities – economically, socially and environmentally. Any sustainable finance system and sources of funding should work to support local government to achieve these aims.

Only with adequate long-term resources, certainty and freedoms, can councils deliver world-class local services for our communities, tackle the climate emergency, and level up all parts of the country.

"The LGA has long argued that council tax is not the solution to paying for the growing costs of services"



'Reforming revenues: options for the future financing of local government' can be downloaded in full at www.local.gov.uk/publications

The benefits of T Levels for councils

Hosting industry placements can help attract young talent

Last year, the Government launched two-year technical qualifications for 16 to 19-year-olds, called T Levels. T Levels are designed in collaboration with employers, and offer a combination of classroom learning and work experience through an industry placement, which runs for a minimum of 45 days.

Each T Level is equivalent to three A Levels, and they aim to equip young people with the key skills and knowledge required within industries such as digital and IT, construction, business and administration, education and

childcare, and legal, finance and accounting, to name a few.

T Levels also provide a progression route into apprenticeships, higher education, or entry-level employment.

These new qualifications are an important way of training the next generation and can help boost opportunities for talented young people. They also provide councils with an opportunity to engage with young people and promote their workplace as an attractive destination to work in the future.

The LGA is working closely with the Department for Education and the Gatsby Foundation to support local authorities looking to host industry placements and help them reap the

short- and long-term benefits of T Levels.

Taking on a T Level industry placement offers councils access to a pool of highly skilled and academic young people, and allows them to contribute directly to the skills, knowledge and opportunities of young people in their area, helping them to establish a future working in public services.

This in turn increases awareness and understanding of local government, and provides a diverse pool of work-ready young people to fill future vacancies.

Several councils have already taken on T Level industry placements. One of them is Oldham, which recently took on a number of students studying a digital T Level.

Aki Khan, the council's Learning and Development Commissioner, said line managers were initially "a bit hesitant" about hosting placements.

"But it became quickly apparent that these guys are clearly self-motivated," he added.

"A lot of the work that we gave them, they led independent research on... It really changed perceptions and increased the skills of mentors and line managers as well. It was quite easy to nurture them and support them... because they were really eager to learn."

As well as helping to shape the workforce of the future, T Level industry placements can increase capacity within teams, and offer development for potential line managers and mentors.

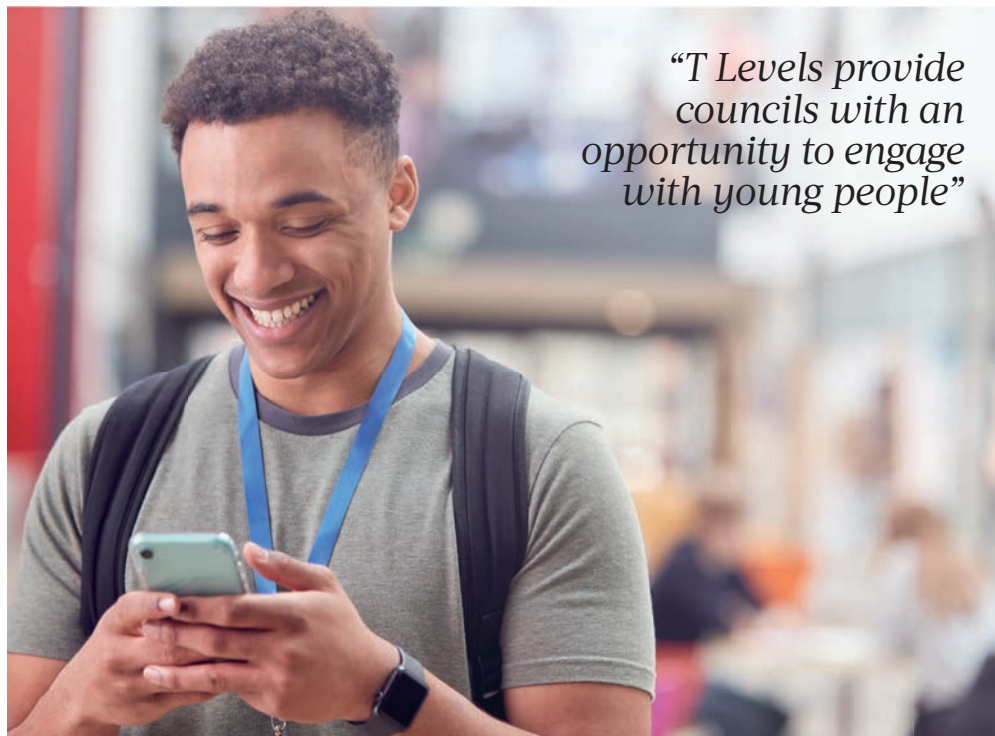
The LGA's T Level Support Programme aims to ensure councils have the capacity to engage, plan and deliver high-quality industry placements, and will add efficiency to the process while ensuring placements are effective for both the council and the young person.

The LGA is offering direct help to councils, with up to five days of flexible support throughout the two-year programme, and will work with each council closely to ensure best use of the support available. This can include finding a T Level provider, line management and mentor training, and help with the recruitment process.

As well as this one-to-one support, councils – by signing up to the LGA's programme – will have access to the T Level toolkit, which includes a wealth of resources designed to help them deliver high-quality industry placements.

i Applications for the LGA's T Level Support Programme are open now. For more information, please visit www.local.gov.uk/t-levels

"T Levels provide councils with an opportunity to engage with young people"



Support for special guardians



Dr Krish Kandiah is Chair of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board

Twins Kai and Danilo* are infectiously funny, brilliantly sassy, and fabulously stylish.

They were born with complex physical and learning challenges to a mother already struggling with addiction, debt and being a single parent to two older boys – and, sadly, all four children ended up in care.

Kai and Danilo's aunt fought for months until it was agreed she could take care of the twins. Love and commitment were in rich supply, but money was tight, and it took five years for the family of seven to be offered appropriate adapted accommodation.

I have had the privilege of seeing first hand how Kai and Danilo have thrived against all odds. The stability of a loving family, consistent round-the-clock care, and the fierce protection of a devoted aunt have made all the difference.

Without doubt, special guardians are some of the hidden heroes of the care system.

Since I became chair of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board last year, special guardians across the country have consistently raised with me their struggle to get financial support.

For those who did not expect to be bringing up children in their older age, or who had to give up work to care for children who have experienced the trauma of neglect and abuse, there is a serious financial cost that can push people into poverty.

In a survey by the charity Kinship, 74 per cent of kinship carers whose child was subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) felt that the allowance they received did not allow them to meet the needs of the child they cared for.

Working closely with the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and Kinship, we have collated a report

(available at www.kinship.org.uk from 4 February) that offers insights into three local authorities that are being particularly ambitious in tackling the financial pressure on special guardians.

The headline findings show significant benefits to local authorities, families and, most importantly, to children when special guardians receive a non-means tested financial allowance.

These benefits include: fewer special guardianship families living in poverty; less stress on special guardians, allowing them to focus on meeting the often complex needs of the children in their care; and a reduced likelihood of special guardianship family breakdown.

More children were leaving care and moving to SGOs, with more family members likely to come forward in emergencies, thereby preventing children from entering the care system unnecessarily.

There was less cost, bureaucracy and social worker time involved in means testing and reviewing the financial circumstances of families, and more trust built between special guardians and councils – leading to more cooperation, more transparency, earlier support requests, and a reduction in the need for crisis interventions.

Finally, practitioners felt more job satisfaction and were proud of the support they offered special guardians.

Making sure every child in care gets the loving, permanent home they need to flourish requires us to be creative and courageous.

I very much look forward to the positive impact this report will have, not only on the special guardianship system as a whole, but on the lives of children such as Kai and Danilo around the country.

**Not their real names*



To find out more about the work of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board, please visit coram-i.org.uk/asglb. See kinship.org.uk/financial-survey for Kinship's 'Survey of financial allowances received by kinship carers in England and Wales'



It's time to trust local government with more powers



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

One of the cornerstones of democracy is that the public can trust those that they have elected to govern, whether at a national or local level, and that those who make the rules will follow them.

That's why, as scandal after scandal emerges from Downing Street, every elected councillor in the country is damaged by Boris Johnson's actions.

The revelations of Boris Johnson's parties throughout lockdown – and, perhaps more importantly, his repeated denials being exposed as lies – are undermining trust in government, which is now hitting rock bottom.

And who can blame the public? If they

can't trust the Government to follow rules designed to keep us all safe, how can they trust them to act in their best interest at all?

Public trust in local government, however, remains high for now. While the Government was partying, those in local government stepped up to care for their communities.

In December, the Association for Public Service Excellence found that three times as many people trust councils over central government when it comes to service delivery; just 12 per cent trust ministers in Whitehall to make decisions about their local areas.

Feelings of local unity have remained high throughout the pandemic, and local and hyper-local responses have been vital to delivering the support that local people so desperately need.

The impact of 'partygate' will continue to be felt long after Mr Johnson has finally gone.

People rely on government to act in

their best interest, and they trust local government to do that more than national governments.

Putting more power and responsibility in the hands of councils – accountable, transparent, trusted and democratic – offers one way to repair the damage that the Prime Minister has caused.

The long-awaited levelling up white paper should include a genuine deepening of the roles and responsibilities of local government, as well as a plan to provide the long-term investment into struggling regions that can make a lasting change.

If that happens, it might actually be worth throwing a party to celebrate.

"People trust local government to act in their best interest more than national governments"



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

Sharing our good ideas

For the first time in three years, we will be hosting the LGA's annual conference in person – in Harrogate, from 28-30 June.

While the LGA has continued to run an exciting, comprehensive and phenomenally well attended series of online webinars and events throughout the pandemic, I'm sure that you, like me, can't wait for us to finally meet again in the real world.

As ever, we'll be discussing the latest issues affecting local government, and will have top speakers from central and local government, the wider public sector and key stakeholders.

What I am also looking forward to is hearing from you about the incredible work you have been doing over the past two years of the pandemic.

We know councils have done, and continue to do, remarkable work to address COVID-19 and its many impacts



on our communities, responding to new problems and coming up with creative solutions, including to recovery and renewal.

We want you to share these innovations – and your ideas for how we move forward and help our residents build back from what has been an unprecedented period of upheaval – at the annual conference's Innovation Zone. This is our vibrant, interactive and creative space, where we showcase the innovations and approaches of local councils and their partners.

Highlights of previous Innovation Zones have ranged from Pepper the humanoid robot helping people with

dementia and autism, to the use of behavioural insights and 'nudge' theory to reduce accidental house fires.

The theme for this year's zone is 'Resilience and renewal'.

We are particularly keen to showcase presentations spanning the key areas of empowering communities, economic recovery and renewal, boosting living standards, place leadership, responses to climate change, and equalities, diversity and inclusion.

To find out more and to apply, by 4 March, please visit www.local.gov.uk/lga-annual-conference-2022-innovation-zone. I look forward to seeing you all in Harrogate!



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

An end in sight to Omicron

I am writing this comment piece in the week that the Government has announced the ending of all restrictions that were introduced to combat the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

I strongly welcome this development, which will hopefully signal a return to a more normal way of living, and I would like to thank all those – including councillors and councils across the country – who played their part in the successful vaccination drive that got us to this point.

While it is impossible to predict the future direction of the pandemic with any certainty, it is the case that the UK is the most boosted of any large country, and the most tested in Europe, while also having the most antiviral drugs in Europe.

Within this context, the Government will hopefully be able to focus increasingly on the various other pressing issues facing the country, many of which are of interest to us in local government.

We have already had important announcements from Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary Michael Gove in relation to cladding and building safety. Following the publication of the adult social care reform white paper, we are expecting other white papers and announcements over the coming months, across a range of areas, including: levelling up; special educational needs and disabilities; planning; waste collection; and fire governance.

“Hopefully the Government will be able to focus increasingly on the various other pressing issues facing the country”

Indeed, it is anticipated that the levelling up white paper will be published shortly, and – assuming that is the case – I look forward to reviewing its proposals in the next edition of **first**.



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

A celebration of council housing

While out canvassing for a local by-election in my patch, I stumbled across the first council housing that was built in Gloucestershire, in the village of Mickleton.

It got me thinking that, this July, it will be 103 years since the 1919 Addison Act gained Royal Assent. Piloted by Liberal minister Dr Christopher Addison, it kick-started the building of council housing.

So, I want to celebrate the work of councils in delivering new council housing, or doing so in partnership with housing associations or other partners.

“We are working... to deliver truly affordable housing to meet local need”

Across the country, Liberal Democrat colleagues have been working hard to directly deliver new homes. These include Portsmouth – which has also bought back nearly 400 properties that were sold under Right to Buy since 2016 – plus new council homes from Lewes and Eastbourne to St Albans and up to York, where the city council is building Passivhaus homes.

Cheltenham is also building new carbon-neutral council housing, while South Lakeland District Council is working with registered social landlords to build new housing for rent.

My own authority of Cotswold is another example of where we have been working with a housing association to provide new homes on brownfield sites across the district.

In our rural areas, we are working alongside community land trusts and other community-led housing groups to identify opportunities to deliver truly affordable housing to meet local need, offering grants to kick-start the process.

More than a century later, councils are continuing the work that was started by Dr Addison. Let's all work together to build truly affordable housing.



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

Gearing up for the May elections

While we are still waiting for announcements on contentious levelling up and planning changes, covid restrictions have been lifted.

According to the Prime Minister, it's back to the office, regardless of ongoing spikes in schools and nurseries, health service pressures, and staff shortages in many sectors.

The booster rollout, covering two-thirds of the adult population, has been one of the few upsides for a party mired in controversy.

The 'partygate' report on government parties held during the lockdowns is bound to be damning, along with a criminal police investigation into law-breaking.

This is a government that is undermining its own policies. It will be down to voters in May's local elections to send a strong message that this behaviour in ministers is not tolerated.

Across London, Wales and many of our regions, our members are gearing up for elections, demonstrating how Independents are focused on the issues that matter to our residents – not party politics or a party whip.

“Independents are focused on the issues that matter to our residents – not party politics”

As we continue to rebuild from the pandemic, it will be our group members who offer a true alternative to Westminster politics – local, responsive and trusted.

Our 'Be a Councillor' work is helping members grow their groups, and our Candidate School is providing those who are standing with new and refreshed skills to be the best we can be on the doorstep, in our leaflets, and in social media.

If you are standing or supporting others this May, please contact the office and see how we're able to help (email independent.group@lga.gov.uk).



Suzanne Jacob OBE
is Chief Executive of
SafeLives

Empowering girls to stop abuse



Domestic abuse is an epidemic – one that young people experience disproportionately, despite a common misconception that it only affects adults who live together.

Relationships that are often dismissed as intense but short-lived teen romances can also be characterised by violence and control at the same severity as the abuse adult victims face.

Rather than reaching out to a professional or service, it's young people's friends who are their first recourse for help. There's much more we can do to make that a safe and effective thing to do.

In 2021, hundreds of girls, young women and non-binary people spoke to us as part of the 'Your Best Friend' project. Most (71 per cent) have worried about behaviours in a friend's relationship. Nine in 10 then actively spoke to their friend to try to help.

Young people said toxic, coercive and controlling behaviours are so common that they are considered normal, and are confused with socially accepted ideas of love, care and protection.

Dating someone older brings status but comes with an increased risk of coercion, especially in first relationships.

Young people, across all age groups, reported commonly receiving disclosures

from their friends, but without feeling empowered or informed enough to manage them. Fear of damaging the friendship (83 per cent), self-doubt (45 per cent) and not finding suitable information (60 per cent) would stop them talking to their friend about a toxic relationship.

We're on a mission to upskill young people so they know what's not OK and how to escalate it. This is the time to do it – young women victimised in adolescent relationships are significantly more likely to experience domestic abuse in adulthood. If we reach enough girls now, we can stop this cycle.

Councillors and local authorities can help young people in their area by supporting the #FriendsCanTell campaign, launching in February. Through films, podcasts and social media – a campaign designed by young people – we will start a conversation, helping them feel more certain about what's not OK and what to do about it.



SafeLives is a UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, see www.safelives.org.uk. See also www.yourbestfriend.org.uk

Timely audit opinions



Steve Freer is Chair
of Public Sector
Audit Appointments
(PSAA)

Delayed audit opinions are a major blight on local government's assurance framework, and it is no surprise they have attracted the strongly expressed concerns of the Public Accounts Committee.

At the start of 2022, 60 per cent of the sector's 2020/21 opinions were still outstanding, and fewer than 30 of the new 'value for money' commentaries had been issued.

Many commentators, including PSAA, have stated that there is no easy, instant solution, and that turning this around may take a number of years.

Progress will require a coordinated effort across the system, and it was

encouraging to see the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) issue a package of measures to tackle this challenge in December.

This included £15 million a year for the next three years for increased audit fees – a welcome recognition of the ongoing impact of audit reforms on the work needed to satisfy regulatory requirements.

The measures include actions for the DLUHC, professional bodies, the LGA, HM Treasury and the Financial Reporting Council, and covers matters such as the accounts and audit scope, new routes to becoming a 'key audit partner', sector-specific training, refreshed guidance for audit committees, and an audit workforce strategy.

DLUHC also referenced how PSAA is gearing its upcoming procurement to the current challenges, including doing all we can to encourage new entrants to the market.

We are grateful to the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and

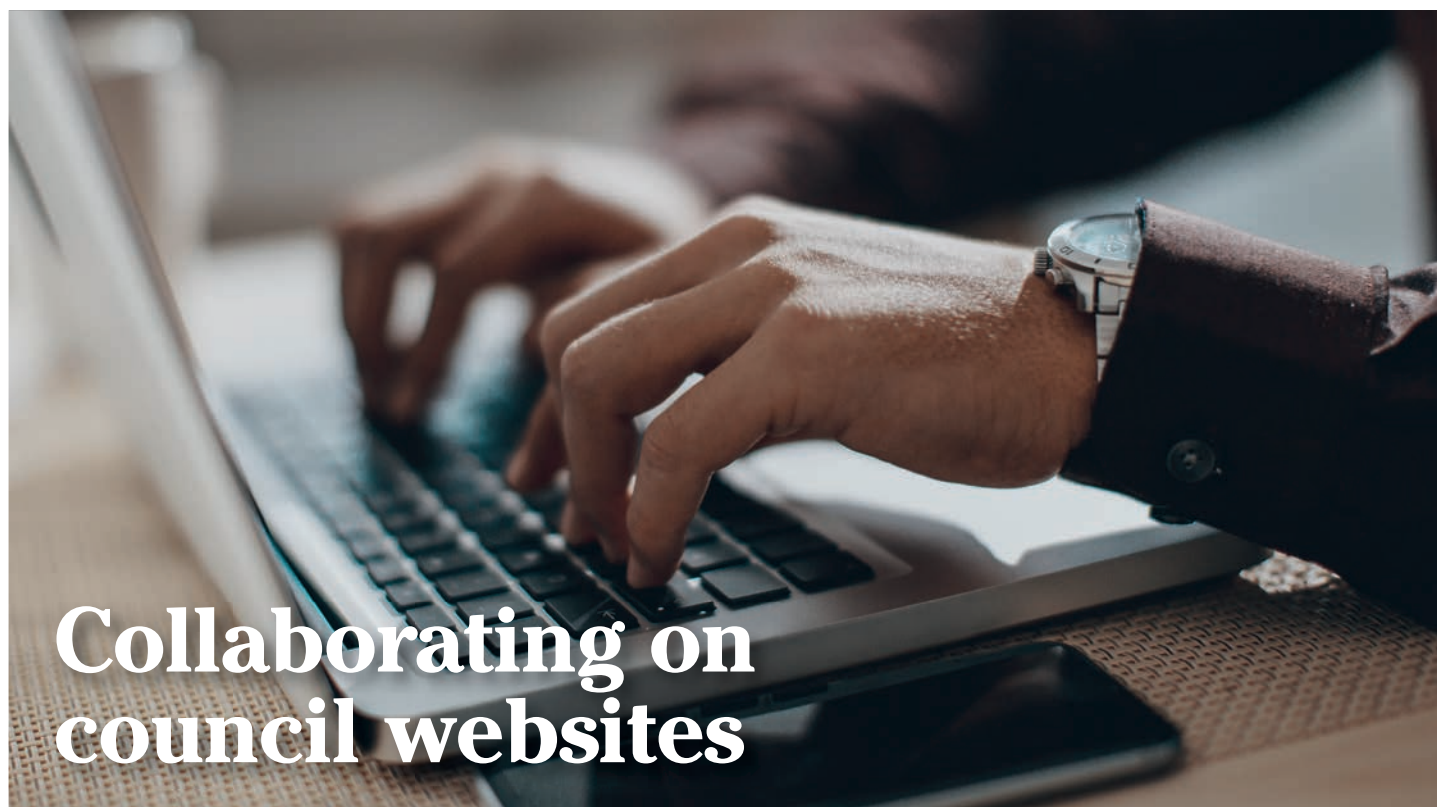
Wales for helping to facilitate potential new suppliers engaging with the opportunity. We also welcome the support of the LGA and others in encouraging as many eligible bodies as possible to opt in to our national scheme.

They recognise that the best chance of securing enough audit supply capacity is to act together in a coordinated, collaborative effort. The deadline for opting in is 11 March.

PSAA is committed to doing everything we can to help the system recover and make positive progress. We hope that as many bodies as possible will join us on that journey.



PSAA is owned by the LGA and is an appointing person for local government audit, see www.psaa.co.uk. See also www.gov.uk/guidance/measures-to-improve-local-audit-delays



Collaborating on council websites



Will Callaghan is Product and Project Lead at LocalGov Drupal

It was like Groundhog Day.

At each of the councils where I was working, we were effectively rebuilding the same website over and over again. The same user needs, the same functionality, the same high costs. There had to be a better way!

This crippling inefficiency was the inspiration for LocalGov Drupal.

LocalGov Drupal is a web platform built by councils, for councils. Our unique, collaborative, open-source model helps councils create fully customisable and accessible websites at a fraction of the cost they might expect to pay.

Now, rather than starting from scratch every time, our 24 member councils build on the shoulders of those who have gone before. They collaborate to improve and refine our distribution with each new site build or feature enhancement.

I started thinking about councils sharing code while working at the Government Digital Service. The team built a platform that all government departments could use, and are still using to this day. This was, of course, www.gov.uk. I wondered whether this approach could also be applied to local

government. Could a platform of shared components be created that all UK councils could use?

Drupal developer and agency owner Alick Mighall was also thinking about councils sharing code. He recalls mowing grass for another council. If one council can mow another's grass, he thought, surely they could build their website too?

In 2018, I was product manager for Brighton & Hove City Council and Alick's company was building the council a new site. We decided to make the code open source – and the rest is history.

When I moved to Croydon a year later, the opportunity arose to use the same code. Senior officers in Croydon and Brighton met and decided that Croydon would use the code. In return, they would share anything new that they built. That is where LocalGov Drupal was born.

The Local Digital Declaration – a shared ambition for the future of local public services, written by a collective of local authorities, sector bodies and government departments – and the accompanying Local Digital Fund (LDF) allowed us to grow.

From January 2020 to October 2021, we applied for and won additional funding, with which we could refactor all of the

code so it was suitably generic for any council to pick up and use.

We could also develop as an organisation, work on our internal governance, and scale up to help more councils.

We're still growing today, and the more councils that come on board the better our product.

We build new features through working groups, where interested councils can chip in time and work together. The councils decide on their aims, when they are going to meet and who will be involved, and then get on with it.

*“Build on **the shoulders** of those who have gone before”*

It sounds straightforward, and that's because it's designed to be. We share user research, insights and experience to make richer and more user-friendly functionality than we ever could as individual councils.

Our latest funding success (£400,000 continuation funding from LDF) will allow us to create more working groups (currently microsites and directories, with others on the way) and a new cooperative legal structure to help ensure our sustainability.

We look forward to welcoming many new councils into the project this year, so please get in touch if you're interested in using the distribution or finding out more.



Visit www.localgovdrupal.org or email hello@localgovdrupal.org.

For more about the **Local Digital Declaration**, see www.localdigital.gov.uk



David Pierpoint is
Chief Executive of the
Retrofit Academy
Community Interest
Company

Capturing the housing retrofit dividend

The UK has the oldest and coldest housing stock in the world.

Coupled with soaring energy prices and concerns about the climate emergency, that means insulating homes to reduce energy demand is vital.

The Chancellor recognised this in 2020 with the £3 billion Green Homes Grant, which offered grants for installing insulation and low carbon heating measures, such as ground source heat pumps, in people's homes.

Sadly, the lack of supply chain capacity led to the scheme being unsuccessful, an issue repeated with the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery scheme being under-subscribed.

“Insulate homes to reduce energy demand”

With the UK Government's 2050 net zero deadline looming and more than 27 million homes to retrofit, we should be aiming to deliver two retrofitted houses every minute.

But consider your own construction supply chain, direct labour organisation, or even your own tradespeople. Are they short of work? No – especially the good ones.

Do they understand how to decarbonise a building? With some notable exceptions, usually not.

It will be down to new entrants to deliver retrofit – today's school leavers and those workers transitioning into a new sector post-pandemic.

Moving into what will become one of the fastest-growing sectors within a few years, local authorities should be planning now to capture this retrofit dividend.

Currently, colleges are training far more gas fitters than air source heat pump engineers; architects and engineers are not trained on how to retrofit properties, preparing learners for yesterday, not tomorrow; and the further and higher

education sectors need support to help bridge the strategic gap.

The Retrofit Academy Community Interest Company has created a package of regulated qualifications that can be used to train a coherent retrofit workforce, based around the requirements of the key British Standard (BSI PAS 2035).

These include a Level 2 award in understanding domestic retrofit, a Level 3 certificate in retrofit advice, Level 4 award in retrofit assessment, and Level 5 diploma in retrofit coordination and risk management.

They have been delivered to more than 2,000 learners from the existing energy efficiency industry. However, we recognise this must be massively scaled up to meet future need.

To help with this, we have set up the UK Retrofit Training Network, using an infrastructure-level approach.

We are creating a licensing model that will support colleges, universities and private training providers to deliver a national curriculum of quality-assured retrofit training for the local market.

And we are building a network of key

cities and regions across the UK to create a skills vision for retrofit. Liverpool City Region, Devon and Essex County Councils and Belfast City Council have signed up and we are actively seeking new partners.

Funding totalling £1.75 million through the Community Renewal Fund has enabled the Retrofit Academy to bring together demand and supply for retrofit labour, creating jobs for trainees through a family of employer sponsors in Devon and Essex.

These pathfinder projects create a template that local authorities can work from for future funding, such as the Social Prosperity Fund or Department for Education Digital Bootcamps.

We believe our approach will help areas to build the infrastructure and networks required for long-term job creation and sector competency, and to deliver warmer homes.

i To find out more about scaling up training to unlock the potential of decarbonising housing stock, please email david@retrofitacademy.org and visit www.retrofitacademy.org





Alex Farrow is Head of Networks and Influencing at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

Councils and charities: improving partnerships

Throughout the pandemic, local government, charities and volunteers have coordinated more than ever before.

Charities tell us that these improved relationships and partnerships have ultimately meant we can all better support communities, with everything from speedy vaccine rollouts to providing much-needed cheer and social connection for vulnerable or isolated groups.

In the 'Road Ahead 2022', the NCVO's annual analysis of the operating environment and trends affecting our sector, we look at what this year has in store for charities and volunteering.

There are three things that we think local government and the voluntary sector should be thinking about – levelling up, new types of partnerships, and council finances.

The Government's flagship levelling up agenda may be inspired by changing electoral geography, but if tackling inequality is the ultimate aim then charities and volunteers should be front and centre. Localism is at the heart of the voluntary sector, with 70 per cent of charities being small groups of local citizens coming together to change where they live.

So far, funding committed to levelling up has been for bricks and mortar, 'hard' infrastructure projects. But many areas receiving that investment also have a disproportionate lack of social connectivity and engagement. We're pushing for social infrastructure – the spaces, places and opportunities that bring people together – to be included in the Government's plans.

When it comes to partnerships, we predict that the voluntary sector will increasingly have a role in taking over



"Localism is at the heart of the voluntary sector"

community assets at risk of closure, including pubs, post offices, museums, and sports and leisure facilities.

Co-operatives UK's Community Shares Unit and the Government's Community Ownership Fund are already facilitating this – as would the Liverpool City Region Land Commission's recommendation of more powers to shift public and private land into community ownership, and community organisations being given first refusal to purchase publicly-owned land.

Other examples of new types of partnership between the voluntary sector and government include new hybrid models of adult social care delivery – examples of which are in place in Newham, Wigan, Knowsley and Colne Valley – as well as Preston Council's innovative work on food-buying cooperatives.

Though many of us might yearn for

stability rather than more change, there's a unique opportunity to build on our newly strengthened relationships and reimagine new ways of delivering services to empower communities and citizens. Cross-sector, joined-up thinking could have a transformative impact.

Finally, money's too tight not to mention. We know that local government finances are going to be hard hit. Even with additional money from central government, it's not going to be enough to provide pre-pandemic levels of service.

We hope we don't see councils declaring bankruptcy. But we must be honest and transparent with each other about the potential need to make difficult choices in pursuit of our joint goals. Charities deliver a range of services on behalf of local government. Charities don't have an inherent right to survive or to win contracts, but communities do have a right to the services they deliver.

Even if it feels similar, the start of 2022 is not the same as 2021. We're better prepared than at any point to face the challenges of the pandemic, and both our sectors have agency and choices to make.

And we both have a very special ability to provide dignity, purpose and hope to so many, even in the most testing circumstances.



To find out more and to read the 'Road Ahead 2022', please visit www.ncvo.org.uk

ELECTIONS

Looking ahead to May



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



Conservative share of the total vote since 2012.

In the London boroughs, Labour really rewrote the history books with the party's best local-level showing in the capital for almost 50 years.

The Conservatives, by contrast, posted their lowest ever vote share, but did win a marginally greater share of seats than at a previous debacle in 1994.

That context is crucial this year. While the consensus is that London is now a Labour city, the successes of last time must be priced into expectations of further advance in boroughs such as Barnet, Wandsworth and Westminster. On

It would be wise not to read too much into the results of the small number of contests held during the Christmas holiday period.

Most voters will have had their minds elsewhere, and campaigning is likely to have been patchy too.

Similarly, the summary statistics for all local by-elections since polling resumed in May 2021 (March in Wales) may give a misleading impression of the current narrative in British politics. Across the more than 400 elections, the Conservatives made a net gain of 50 seats, whereas Labour fell back by 26. The gains and losses for the Liberal Democrats effectively balanced each other out.

However, with 'partygate' now seriously eating into support for the Prime Minister personally and the Conservatives in general, this year's annual local elections have taken on a significance unimaginable a few weeks ago. On 5 May, more than 5,500 seats will be contested in 168 councils in England and Wales. Labour will be defending about half of these vacancies, nearly twice as many as the Conservatives and five times the number for the Liberal Democrats.

Most contests in England reprise elections last held in 2018. That year resulted in Labour's strongest local election performance, and the biggest combined Labour and



CORRECTION

In last month's elections feature (first 667), we incorrectly recorded a Liberal Democrat gain over Conservative in a Horsham by-election as in Roffey North. This result was in fact in Roffey South. Our apologies for the error and for any confusion caused.

the other hand, the crisis-hit Labour-run council in Croydon could experience a voter backlash.

In the metropolitan boroughs and other parts of urban England, 2018 was the year before Labour's 'red wall' problems really became evident. The party must at least replicate its results then to show that it has bounced back from the dismal outcomes of 2019 and 2021.

In Barnsley, for example, a 58 per cent share of the vote in 2018 slumped to 37 per cent in 2019 and 41 per cent last year. In Sunderland, 47 per cent became 33 per cent and 39 per cent respectively.

In Wales, by contrast, it is the Conservatives who defend something of a high-water mark. The benchmark here is 2017, when Theresa May seemed to be carrying all before her, only to stumble at the General Election just five weeks later.

The party made 80 gains, taking control of Monmouthshire and becoming the largest group on Denbighshire County Council and Vale of Glamorgan Council. With new boundaries and every seat at stake, that position could now be under threat.

i For more about these and other recent by-elections, please visit www.local.gov.uk/first

Local by-elections

Charnwood, Loughborough Shelthorpe

TWO LAB HELD
28% over Con Turnout 18.7%

East Lindsey, Chapel St Leonards

CON HELD
24% over Ind Turnout 17.9%

Gedling, Cavendish

LIB DEM GAIN FROM LAB
4.2% over Lab Turnout 23.3%

New Forest, Bransgore and Burley

IND GAIN FROM CON
11.3% over Green Turnout 31.1%

Selby, Byram and Brotherton

CON GAIN FROM YORKSHIRE PARTY
1.8% over Lab Turnout 19.4%

Wychavon, The Littletons

GREEN GAIN FROM CON
2.3% over Con Turnout 32%

LETTERS

Valuing care workers

Once again, Hertfordshire County Council is proposing to use the adult social care council tax precept to increase pay for those working in care in the county.

The social care sector has faced unimaginable pressures over the past two years because of the pandemic, and time and again staff have gone above and beyond to care for those who need support.

We are always looking for ways to acknowledge our valued care staff, to show people working in the sector just how much we value their passion and expertise.

The £18 million funding would be paid to care providers commissioned by the council, to increase care workers' minimum hourly rates to £10.30 – at least 80p above the national living wage of £9.50 per hour – from April 2022.

This proposed funding is the latest

investment in our care workforce, having used extra funding generated from the social care precept to increase wages locally since 2016. In addition, last November we announced a £13 million bonus retention scheme for frontline care staff who remain in service until this February.

We believe we were the first local authority in the country to do this, in partnership with our local NHS and central government.

The care workforce plays a vital role in ensuring everyone has the support they need to live healthy, safe, and fulfilling lives. The proposed investment demonstrates the value and importance of this work and our continued commitment to ensuring staff have pay and recognition that reflects this.

Cllr Richard Roberts (Con), Leader, Hertfordshire County Council

North and south

I was pleased to see my colleague Sam Raby's win for the Liberal Democrats in Horsham mentioned in **first** 667. However, Roffey North already had its full quota of two Liberal Democrat councillors and Sam's win was a gain in Roffey South.

Cllr Tony Bevis (Lib Dem), Roffey North, Horsham District Council

Editor's note: Apologies for the error in **first** 667 and congratulations to Cllr Raby



If you have a letter, please email karen.thornton@local.gov.uk. Letters may be edited and published online



LGA Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition

15-16 March 2022, Hilton Hotel
Newcastle Gateshead

The Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition is a key event in the calendar for senior officers and members of fire and rescue authorities.

The fire and rescue sector has played a critical role in the ongoing pandemic response whilst continuing to deliver the core functions that keep our communities safe. The 2022 LGA Fire Conference provides an opportunity to consider key strategic and practical developments that can be expected to impact the fire and rescue sector over the next year.

To book your place visit: www.local.gov.uk/events



A graphic element for the LGA22 logo, featuring a stylized 'L' composed of geometric shapes: a blue semi-circle with diagonal lines, a yellow triangle, a red triangle, and a purple dotted triangle.

LGA22

Annual Conference
and Exhibition
28-30 June, Harrogate

www.local.gov.uk/conference
#LGAConf22