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# LGA22

Annual Conference  
and Exhibition  
28-30 June, Harrogate

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**Kriss Akabusi MBE**  
Olympian, Media Personality and  
Businessman

**Polly Billington**  
Chief Executive, UK 100

**Sir Ed Davey MP**  
Leader, Liberal Democrats

**Nicole Jacobs**  
Domestic Abuse Commissioner

**Professor Susan Michie**  
Professor of Health Psychology, UCL

**Lisa Nandy MP**  
Shadow Secretary of State for  
Communities and Local Government

**Ben Page**  
Chief Executive Officer, Ipsos

**Professor Lord Kamlesh Patel OBE**  
Chairman, Yorkshire County Cricket  
Club

**Professor Tony Travers**  
LSE

**Jackie Weaver**  
Chief Officer, Cheshire Association  
of Local Councils and Ambassador,  
Compassion in Politics



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## Local elections

**W**ith less than a week to go to the 5 May council elections, **first's** very own poll pundits, Professors Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, set out their predictions for England's and Wales' election results in this month's magazine (p30).

Thank you to everyone who is standing, and to those who are standing down, for your important local public service.

Elsewhere, we have some updates on support for Ukrainians fleeing the war with Russia (p5, p10), but for the most up-to-date information, please visit our information hub at [www.local.gov.uk/ukraine](http://www.local.gov.uk/ukraine).

You can also find out how our work in Parliament and the media has contributed to updated government guidance for councils on the Homes for Ukraine scheme (p9).

And Cllr Doug Pullen, Leader of Lichfield District Council, reports from the Ukraine-Poland border, where he has been helping transport refugees to safety (p26).

We have the LGA's responses to the schools White Paper (p12) and the special educational needs and disabilities Green Paper (p13); take a look at embedding health services in our high streets (p16); and hear from the Rural Services Network as to whether the levelling up White Paper will deliver for rural areas (p23).

**Cllr James Jamieson**  
is LGA Chairman



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## £2.6bn for local growth and skills

**The Government has published local allocations for its long-awaited UK Shared Prosperity Fund and new 'Multiply' fund.**

It is allocating £2.6 billion to local authorities to spend on infrastructure improvements, investment in new local facilities, skills and employment programmes and support for local high streets.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) replaces previous EU funding that local areas received, such as the European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund.

The funding also includes a new £559 million adult numeracy programme for the whole UK, called 'Multiply', which will support people with no or low-level maths

skills to get back into work. The scheme will offer free personal tutoring, digital training and flexible courses to improve adults' confidence and numeracy skills.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said: "Councils are uniquely placed to plan ahead for the post-pandemic challenges we face and to invest in their areas, which these programmes provide certainty for. It is therefore good that councils have been put at the heart of delivering the UKSPF and Multiply, something which we have long been calling for.

"This will build on work already under way to level up opportunities and spread prosperity, including to ensure Multiply

helps more people gain skills to enter and progress in work and that UKSPF creates jobs, supports small and medium-sized businesses, develops rural economies, invests in critical infrastructure and boosts inclusive growth.

"Local areas need maximum flexibility to design investment plans that target local priorities. In the longer term, council leaders want to work with government to ensure greater stability and continuing support for this funding stream to ensure it provides the longevity and quantum of the European funding it has replaced.

"By making the most of every pound of investment, we can achieve our shared ambition of giving every part of the country the chance to flourish."

● See <https://bit.ly/3EzzCWG> for the LGA's UKSPF hub, for more details on the funding changes and to share council best practice.



## Better guidance needed on Ukrainian arrivals

The LGA has welcomed updated government guidance for councils on the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and continues to work proactively with ministers to address councils' concerns about support for new arrivals.

LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson and council leaders met late in April with Communities Secretary Michael Gove and Refugees Minister Lord Harrington to discuss the issues councils are

experiencing in delivering the Ukrainian resettlement schemes.

They highlighted the strong wish of councils for a clear re-matching process for those whose sponsorship arrangements fail and for those arriving via the family visa scheme but unable to stay with family members, to avoid homelessness.

Cllr Jamieson said: "While it is pleasing that the Government has listened to a number of

our concerns and continues to update guidance for councils on the Homes for Ukraine scheme, as well as improving the data flow between councils and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, we stressed that there are still a number of issues that need to be addressed.

"Councils are keen to have urgent confirmation of how lone children, including those

who arrive with family members without parental responsibility, should be supported, given the steer by the Ukrainian government that children should not be taken into care.

"We also stressed the need for greater clarity on the expectations of councils in relation to accommodation and safeguarding checks.

"While it is clear councils wish to move quickly and take a pragmatic approach, we pushed for councils to receive assurances and further guidance on their legal duties."

● See [www.local.gov.uk/ukraine](http://www.local.gov.uk/ukraine) and p9, p10-11, p24, p26-27

# Builders to fix unsafe homes

More than 35 of the UK's biggest house builders have pledged to fix all of the unsafe buildings above 11 metres in height that they have built.

They have signed contracts with government to fix buildings as quickly as possible, regularly report to leaseholders and government on progress, and refund money already received from the taxpayer

through the Building Safety Fund and other funds to fix aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding.

This will apply to issues that have arisen from design, construction, or refurbishment in all properties where they played a role in the developing or refurbishing in the 30 years prior to 5 April 2022.

The Government is also introducing new powers that could be enforced on a developer should they breach the agreement, as well as on any remaining companies who fail to sign up.

These new powers would allow the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to block those

who refuse to sign from building and selling new homes.

Responding to the announcement, Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "We are pleased that the Government has listened to calls the LGA has been making for several years to protect leaseholders from the costs of two decades of industry failure.

"However, we call on the Government to provide the same protection to council tenants and council tax payers as it has afforded home owners, by exempting councils from the developer levy and funding the remediation of social housing on the same basis as private housing."

# Health and safety concerns for private renters

**Councils increasingly do not have the capacity and capability to provide 'appropriate and consistent protection for private renters', according to a new report from the Public Accounts Committee.**

The report, on the regulation of private renting, found that despite record rent increases, 13 per cent of rented homes

'pose a serious threat to the health and safety of renters' – costing the NHS an estimated £340 million a year.

It is too difficult for tenants to ensure their legal right to a safe and secure home, and local authorities are constrained by a lack of support from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and its approach to licensing landlords.

The report says the DLUHC should assess the resources needed for local authorities to regulate the sector and consider whether councils would benefit from an easier system to set up local landlord licensing schemes.

The LGA gave evidence to the committee, outlining its long-standing calls that the best way to increase housing security is to address the unaffordability of housing – by empowering councils to build more affordable homes, reforming Right to Buy, and addressing issues in the welfare system, including inappropriate local housing allowance rates.

An LGA spokesperson said: "The LGA recognises the need for measures to improve housing security for tenants.

"Everyone deserves a safe, secure, and affordable place to live; this is critical for health and wellbeing in all our communities."

# Councils warn of new scams

The LGA has warned that criminals are cold calling residents asking for their bank details so they can receive the Government's £150 energy rebate.

This latest deception follows a sharp increase in scams during the pandemic, which included promises of a payment from HMRC to support individuals during the lockdown or offers of a vaccination booking – for a fee.

The LGA is highlighting these new scams to remind residents that their local authority will not ask for bank details over the phone.

Instead, households which pay their council tax by direct debit will receive the energy rebate directly into their bank account. Anyone who does not will be sent a letter with details of how to claim.

Anyone who unexpectedly receives a text, email or phone call seeking information or payment should not give out personal information, click any links or respond until they are certain it is genuine.

Cllr Mohan Iyengar, Vice-Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "Criminals are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their attempts to take advantage of the financial worries people are facing and, as a result, many of these scams look legitimate on first impression.

"Anyone can fall victim to a scam, and we urge people of all ages to brush up on the tell-tale signs, and the support available to those who need it."

Suspicious messages should be forwarded to 7726, a free reporting service provided by phone operators. Scams should also be reported to Action Fraud ([www.actionfraud.police.uk/](http://www.actionfraud.police.uk/)).





## In brief

### Children in care Ofsted study

Ofsted has published the findings of its study into the experiences of 113 children in care. 'Why do children go into children's homes?' also draws on discussions between inspectors and children's home staff. Although a children's home placement had not been the original care plan for just under half of children taking part in the study, around three-quarters of these were found to be well matched to their home. Ofsted is calling for a national audit of children's needs to be carried out to provide better understanding of the experiences of children in care, and of the complexities of sufficiency in children's social care.

### School governance

The sixth edition of guidance designed to help improve the effectiveness of school governance has been published by the LGA, in collaboration with the National Governance Association, the Association of School and College Leaders, the National Association of Head Teachers, and the Institute of School Business Leaders. 'What governing boards and headteachers should expect from each other' is aimed at those leading and governing in a single school, academy or local authority-maintained school federation (see <https://bit.ly/385GjU4>). Many councillors sit as trustees or governors on school boards and should find this an invaluable guide to building and sustaining effective school leadership.

### School nurses

The LGA has produced a new publication highlighting and defining the role of a school nurse, who they are commissioned by, and how they contribute to the vital health and wellbeing of children aged five to 19 years old (see [www.local.gov.uk/publications](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications)). 'What is the role of a school nurse?' explores the full range of interventions that school nurses can offer and their impact on key local and national government priorities, such as reducing child health inequalities, emotional wellbeing and mental health, encouraging healthy weight and childhood immunisations.

## New vision for SEND

The Government has set out its vision for a single, national, special educational needs and disability (SEND) and alternative provision system that 'sets clear standards' for the support given to children.

The 'SEND review: right support, right place, right time' Green Paper proposes simplifying education, health and care plans; a new legal requirement for councils to introduce local inclusion plans; and a focus on ensuring mainstream education is more inclusive and better at identifying and supporting needs.

The Green Paper is now subject to a public consultation, which closes on 1 July (see <https://bit.ly/3uYmkjq>, and p13 for the LGA's response).

Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, Deputy Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Councils share the Government's ambition of making sure every child with SEND gets the high-quality support that meets their needs.

"Despite the best of intentions, the current system is not working, and we are pleased government has set out reforms to address this.

"They will only succeed if parents and carers have confidence in the system.

"It is good to see measures to increase mainstream inclusion and ensure financial sustainability for councils.

"It is also positive that councils, as convenors of local SEND systems, will be able to bring education and health partners



to the table where everyone is accountable for SEND provision.

"Having a collective responsibility will be crucial in delivering a system that works for children and their families.

"We will now be looking to work closely with Government, partners as well as parents and carers, to develop these proposals in further detail.

"These reforms will take time to be implemented and in the meantime we would urge Government to move quickly and work with councils to eliminate high needs deficits."

## MAT powers for councils

**Councils will be given powers to set up their own multi-academy trusts, following many years of campaigning by the LGA.**

The plans form part of the Government's schools White Paper, 'Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child'.

The White Paper outlines the Government's ambition for a school system that helps every child in England to fulfil their potential.

It also looks to define the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the school system, including councils, and sets out how ministers plan to ensure councils have the right powers to deliver in their role at the heart of the new system.

Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, Deputy Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said:

"We are pleased government has acted on our call for councils to be allowed to set up their own multi-academy trusts (MATs).

"Councils have an excellent track record in providing a high-quality education for pupils, with 92 per cent of maintained schools rated by Ofsted as outstanding or good – a higher proportion than any other type of school.

"The Government should go further and allow councils to support 'orphan' schools where regional school commissioners are struggling to find a strong MAT to take them on.

"We now look forward to working with the Department for Education to make sure we provide an education system that is inclusive and works for all children, including those with special educational needs."

● See p12

# Weight management funding 'reallocated'

**Government funding for council-commissioned weight management services will not be renewed in the current financial year, councils have been told.**

In a letter to council chief executives and directors of public health, Jonathan Marron, Director of the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities, has said that funding for weight management services would not be available in 2022/23 because government was 'reallocating resources to maintain defences against COVID-19'.

The letter asserted that the Government remained 'committed to supporting people to achieve and maintain a healthy weight', and recognised that some councils may be able to continue to commission services using existing funding streams.

However, there are concerns that the move will mean a number of councils will have to scrap weight management programmes for the next year, because of the lack of long-term funding certainty.

Cllr Louise Gittins, Vice-Chair of the LGA's

Community Wellbeing Board, said: "More than two-thirds of adults in England are currently overweight or obese and council-commissioned weight management services have been a vital way of tackling this growing issue in local communities.

"It is therefore extremely regrettable that funding for these services has not been extended for 2022/23.

"This decision will result in the closure of some existing weight management programmes, restricting the ability councils have to improve health outcomes in their local areas and increasing the pressure on the health and care system further down the line.

"The pandemic has widened health inequalities and people with obesity are much more likely to become seriously ill with COVID-19 and other illnesses.

"It is only by working together between national and local government that we can tackle this issue and improve the life chances of people in our local communities."

## More cash to tackle violence



The Government has announced an additional £64 million for violence reduction units, supporting the existing 18 units and enabling two new ones to be established.

Cllr Mohan Iyengar, Vice-Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "Violence reduction units are a valuable resource that are helping to reduce serious violence and crime, so it is extremely positive to see they will be extended to new areas and benefit from multi-year funding settlements.

"This will allow councils and partners to enhance the development of locally focused preventative strategies, something which the LGA has previously called for.

"We're also pleased to see the funding package will work in tandem with central and local efforts to tackle violence against women and girls."

The Government recently published its Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, which outlines its approach to tackling domestic abuse through prioritising prevention, supporting victims, pursuing perpetrators, and building a stronger system.

Cllr Iyengar added: "We are pleased that this plan recognises the need for an equal focus on prevention and early intervention measures through perpetrator programmes alongside continued funding commitments for victim support services, including dedicated provisions for children experiencing domestic abuse – something which the LGA has previously called for.

"Councils play an integral role in tackling domestic abuse and supporting the provision of services for victims, and the commitment to multi-year funding will help ensure these services are fully embedded within communities. Clarity on when and to whom the funding will be available will enable it to be distributed quickly."

# £300m for drug treatment and recovery services

The first allocations of more than £300 million over the next three years to strengthen drug treatment and recovery services in 50 local authority areas have been announced.

The funding is part of the Government's 10-year drug strategy, which aims to prevent nearly 1,000 drug-related deaths, deliver 54,500 new high-quality treatment places and prevent a quarter of a million crimes.

The additional funding will go towards improving access to drug and alcohol addiction treatment and increasing the capacity of services in local areas with higher levels of drug-related crime and greater pressure on local services.

Cllr Louise Gittins, Vice-Chair of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board said: "This

funding is an important step forward in helping to support councils in addressing drug dependency in their local communities and is something the LGA has long been calling for.

"People with drug and alcohol problems should be able to get the right support and treatment when they need it.

"For many problem users, their first experience of treatment is the catalyst for getting the help they need to address their physical and mental health problems.

"Councils want to see vulnerable people being given another chance to find work,

rebuild relationships and find safe and secure accommodation, and will work with partners to improve the life chances of those impacted by drug addiction."





## £500m for EV charge points

The Department for Transport will provide councils with £500 million to invest in installing electric vehicle public charging points, as part of its new Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy.

The strategy aims to increase the number of public charge points in the UK from 30,000 to 300,000 by 2030.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Transport Spokesperson, said: "Councils are determined to tackle climate change and drive down harmful transport-related emissions and are already supporting the transition to electric vehicles.

"This funding is a significant boost to those efforts which will help secure staffing and resources to better plan and invest in local charge point networks, in partnership with commercial operators.

"It will also help ensure that there is access where it is needed, in particular for those without access to off-street parking.

"Councils are best-placed to ensure charge points are delivered in the right places and avoid inappropriate or poor siting. All councils need to benefit and have full flexibility to maximise the impact of the funding.

"While funding is one barrier to progress, we await details as to how the Government intends to deal with other obstacles such as high costs of connection points to the electric grid, and access to expertise."

Around 28 per cent of councils have published electric vehicle transition plans, while a further 23 per cent are in the process of devising schemes for supporting the switch to electric motoring, according to responses to Freedom of Information requests by the FairCharge campaign.



Ending charges for disposing of DIY waste at household recycling centres will put unnecessary pressure on refuse departments and won't improve services, the LGA warns.

The Government is consulting on proposals to prevent councils from charging residents for DIY rubbish and tyres, in part to help reduce fly-tipping. It is also looking at the impact of booking systems at centres.

Research last year from the waste charity WRAP showed no correlation between local authorities which charge for DIY waste disposal and the rate of fly-tipping in any given area, and the LGA has previously called for increased fines to deter fly-tippers.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson, said councils were best placed to decide what works for their areas: "The disposal of non-household waste, such as DIY waste and tyres, is a non-statutory duty. As a result, some councils have had to introduce charges due to the rising costs

of providing the service and the financial pressure they are under.

"Money raised from charges goes back into services so councils can continue to offer disposal facilities for these materials to residents who would otherwise find them difficult to get rid of, and will ensure that the system is not abused by those seeking to dispose of trade waste for free.

"Manufacturers can improve recycling rates and deter fly-tipping by providing more take-back services so people can hand in old furniture and mattresses when they buy new ones."

During the pandemic, more councils introduced booking systems to ensure social distancing, and many have continued as it best suits the needs of their area, Cllr Renard noted.

He added: "Our own polling shows eight out of 10 people are happy with the way their local council collects their rubbish."

## 'Fair cost of care' fears

**The LGA has reiterated its concerns about inadequate funding for adult social care reforms, in response to the latest government guidance.**

The guidance is on the ringfenced £1.36 billion Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund, which is designed to support local authorities to move towards paying social care providers a 'fair cost of care'.

The guidance states that councils will need to use the funding to carry out 'cost of care' exercises, including assessing the various costs care providers face and identifying and increasing rates where a fairer cost of care is needed.

However, the LGA remains concerned that the funding allocated for the Government's social care reforms "falls far short of needs and will not fully resource

councils and providers in delivering the Government's objectives".

Specifically in respect of the 'fair cost of care' guidance, it notes a lack of longer-term certainty over funding, and that having to provide detailed market sustainability plans will place additional burdens on already overstretched staff.

An LGA spokesperson added: "Adult social care is facing a funding gap for current services, increasing each year due to inflation and other costs even with these reforms fully funded.

"Without adequate funding, some councils will face a battle to balance budgets, worsening existing pressures and running the serious risk of impacts on the ability to deliver timely and quality care to those who draw on it."



# PARLIAMENT

## Putting on the pressure

### The LGA has been engaging with MPs to improve support for Ukrainian arrivals

**The scenes from Ukraine over the past two months have been heart-breaking.**

Since the Russian invasion, the LGA and councils have been working closely with the Government to ensure support for new arrivals from Ukraine is put in place quickly and at scale, and families are kept safe.

As part of our national engagement, the LGA's Chairman Cllr James Jamieson, Chief Executive Mark Lloyd and Principal Policy Adviser Sonika Sidhu, gave evidence to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee as part of its one-day inquiry on support for Ukrainian refugees.

The session was an opportunity to highlight the amount of work already going on in local government to support new arrivals.

Our witnesses detailed councils' key priorities on a range of issues including: the quality and breadth of data councils are receiving on sponsors and new arrivals; the need for further guidance on accommodation and safeguarding checks; what happens in the event of sponsorship breakdown; and any additional funding which may be needed.

Cllr Jamieson also used the LGA's latest survey data to highlight the number of arrivals presenting as homeless.

The Minister for Refugees, Lord Harrington, appeared before the committee after the LGA, and was questioned on the issues highlighted in the LGA session.

Later that same day, a Liaison Committee session took place with the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. This influential committee comprises of all of the Commons' select committee chairs, and questions senior figures on the significant issues of the day.

Chairing the session, Clive Betts MP, an LGA Vice-President and Chair of the

Levelling Up Committee, questioned Mr Johnson on the schemes for new arrivals.

The Prime Minister said he would look at local authority funding to support those on the family scheme and stated there was no reason why councils should not have access to more data.

This LGA session received widespread media coverage, including on BBC News, and was raised by Shadow Local Government Secretary Mike Amesbury MP in an urgent question.

Dame Diana Johnson MP, an LGA Vice-President and Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, also used the data to ask the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary what steps his department is taking to ensure that local authorities are aware of all the residents in their local area who have registered an interest in sponsoring Ukrainian arrivals.

Demonstrating the cross-party support for our calls, the survey data was used in a Lords' debate on Ukrainian refugees by Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (Crossbencher) and Lord Coaker (Lab).

Since the session, the Government has updated its guidance for councils on Homes for Ukraine and given councils access to data specific to their area.

The guidance confirms that councils have local discretion on accommodation checks, and that payments for new arrivals (£10,500 per person), and their sponsors (£350 monthly 'thank you' payments) will be provided to county councils.

In two-tier areas, councils will need to agree to distribute funding locally in relation to which council will provide the services that new arrivals will need. This expectation will be reflected in the grant conditions placed on funding for the Homes for Ukraine scheme, to be set out in due course.

The LGA is continuing to work with the Government so councils can do their utmost to protect and support new arrivals as they start their new lives in the UK.



**For more on the LGA's parliamentary work,** please visit [www.local.gov.uk/parliament](http://www.local.gov.uk/parliament). **The Government's latest guidance for councils on Homes for Ukraine** is available at [www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-guidance-for-councils](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-guidance-for-councils)





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

# A better welcome

As councils continue to support new arrivals from Ukraine, changes are being made to the wider asylum system

**W**ith the war in Ukraine continuing, I know councils around the country are working hard to welcome new arrivals and support local residents who have opened their homes to them.

Councils also continue to support arrivals from Afghanistan and Syria, and the LGA has been lobbying for

improvements to the broader asylum system. Just before Easter, the Government wrote to council leaders and chief executives to announce its plans for a new system of 'full dispersal', under which all regions will be expected to take a share of asylum seekers needing housing.

The announcement responded to our long-standing calls for change, including a

commitment to providing specific funding to recognise the contribution of local authorities and to work with councils to develop plans to widen dispersal.

The 'full dispersal' model aims to reduce the use of hotels to accommodate asylum seekers – currently, more than 25,000 are thought to be housed this way.

It would allow the Home Office to procure dispersal properties within the private rental sector in all local authority areas across England, Wales and Scotland, rather than the minority of councils that currently participate.

The Government has committed to working with local government to capture and evaluate data to understand the impact of asylum dispersal on councils.

We will continue our work to ensure local government is involved in shaping a fairer distribution of asylum seekers and that the system is appropriately funded.

In the meantime, we continue to work closely with councils to understand the ongoing issues with the Ukrainian resettlement schemes and feed the information into the Government.

These include the need for clarity around accommodation checks under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and on how new arrivals can be rematched with sponsors if matches under the scheme break down or family arrangements under the Ukraine Family Scheme do not work out.

## Heightened cyber threat

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has included cyber attacks aimed at the Ukrainian government and banking sector. Western intelligence has warned that more attacks are likely to come.

In addition to guidance on the heightened cyber threat, the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has a board toolkit to support essential conversations between senior leaders and their technical experts (see [www.ncsc.gov.uk](http://www.ncsc.gov.uk)).

Councillors have a hugely important role to play in showing political leadership and initiating useful conversations around how councils are approaching and managing cyber risk.

In addition to keeping up to date with NCSC advice and threat information, you may want to speak to your officers to understand the cyber risk – see [bit.ly/3EuDCre](https://bit.ly/3EuDCre) for a recent **first** article containing some strategic considerations and questions you may want to ask.

You can also access the LGA's cyber security support offer, including the LGA Cyber 360 programme (see [bit.ly/38kzZZj](https://bit.ly/38kzZZj)) and funding for officer training (see [bit.ly/3qQwJuY](https://bit.ly/3qQwJuY)).



## Anti-slavery safeguarding

Protecting Ukrainian refugees from the risk of trafficking and being exploited on their arrival in the UK is a priority for councils, and something the LGA is focusing on in our discussions with the Government.

Councils may wish to draw on various workers' rights materials developed by the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (see [www.gla.gov.uk](http://www.gla.gov.uk)), while the anti-trafficking charity Hope for Justice has collated a suite of useful materials (see [bit.ly/3OxWt9M](http://bit.ly/3OxWt9M)). You can access LGA resources at [www.local.gov.uk/modern-slavery](http://www.local.gov.uk/modern-slavery).

I was able to highlight and praise your work in getting checks right and keeping people safe on BBC Radio 4's Today programme – and flagged that accommodation and safeguarding checks are not holding up the approval of visas for new arrivals by the Government.

As you will have read previously (see p9), the Government has updated guidance to councils on Homes for Ukraine, confirming that councils have local discretion on accommodation checks, and that funding for new arrivals and their sponsors will be paid to county councils in two-tier areas. We are also

in discussions with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the voluntary sector around how rematching could work.

We know councils need a clear and quick process to enable re-matches if sponsor arrangements break down or are unsafe, both before and after arrival.

The British public has been very generous in making offers to sponsor people, and councils are rightly keen to work with this pool of people so that new arrivals are rematched as quickly as possible when needed.

Rematching across both Homes for Ukraine and the Ukraine Family Scheme would put councils in the best position to ensure new arrivals do not end up in temporary accommodation.

Having lobbied over the past few weeks for better access to data for all councils, DLUHC has confirmed that all councils are now able to access

Homes for Ukraine data specific to their area using the online Foundry system (see [bit.ly/3Md4JKj](http://bit.ly/3Md4JKj)).

The LGA and councils are keen to continue working with the Government and the community, faith and voluntary sector, and other local partners, to build a process at pace and scale for both the current phase of support for Ukrainian arrivals and for the end of sponsorship arrangements.

We also continue to stress the need for clear and systematic engagement with local government that tackles the real-time challenges councils are having to work through, with many thanks to those who are already representing their councils and their region.

Please continue to share your thoughts and any issues you may be experiencing in respect of Homes for Ukraine and support for new arrivals with your LGA principal adviser (see [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-principal-advisers](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-principal-advisers)). We are also keen to share examples of the huge amount of work councils are putting in place locally to welcome families into your communities on our Ukraine hub (see [www.local.gov.uk/ukraine](http://www.local.gov.uk/ukraine)).

Despite all these challenges, thank you for all the work you and your staff are doing with your partners and your communities to ensure families are safe and made welcome in your local areas.

✧ *The British public has been very generous in making offers to sponsor people* ✧



## Homes for Ukraine matching service

National charities, including Reset, Refugees at Home, and Citizens UK, are developing a process to assess applicants' suitability and eligibility for the scheme to allow Ukrainians to be matched with UK sponsors.

This 'phase two' of the scheme will run in parallel with the current individual level matching and will then be rolled out to other accredited organisations.

Reset is also providing a training service for sponsors, councils and community groups, with DLUHC providing an initial grant of £300,000 to help design the matching process and pilot the service. Please do share any experiences you have of this next phase of the matching process with your LGA principal adviser ([www.local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-principal-advisers](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-principal-advisers)).

## European match-making platform

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has launched an online match-making platform (see [bit.ly/3vrgy8V](http://bit.ly/3vrgy8V)), bringing together councils in Ukraine with councils across the rest of Europe to coordinate a response to the Russian invasion.

The platform is focused on providing immediate humanitarian assistance and aims to help to build longer-term partnerships through technical assistance during the rebuilding and reconstruction of Ukrainian municipalities.

It will potentially meet a need, already expressed by some councils, to help municipalities in Ukraine with different forms of technical assistance that can be provided from the UK. English councils need to satisfy themselves that they have the legal powers to provide the support they want to provide to Ukraine, and each council should seek their own legal advice on what legislation allows them to do.





Councillor **Lucy Nethsingha** is Deputy Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board

# Schools White Paper

Councils played a crucial role in education during the pandemic – the Government must recognise their importance

**A**fter many years of campaigning by the LGA, the Government has announced it will be giving councils powers to set up and lead their own multi-academy trusts (MATs).

The long-standing LGA ask was confirmed in the first schools White Paper in six years. It pledges to provide an excellent teacher for every child,

delivering high standards of curriculum, behaviour and attendance, targeted support for every child that needs it, and a stronger and fairer school system.

The LGA has said the ability for councils to open MATs should be on offer in every area where that is the preference of schools and parents.

As we have emphasised all along, councils have a crucial role to play in education, from ensuring every child has a school place to turning around struggling schools. This was demonstrated, in particular, during the pandemic, with councils providing vital support at such a hugely critical and challenging time.

It is only right that councils are seen as the effective education partner they are by government.

Councils have an excellent track record in providing a high-quality education for pupils, with 92 per cent of maintained schools rated by Ofsted as outstanding or good – a higher proportion than any other type of school – and this will continue in a fully academised system.

We have called on the Department for Education (DfE) to use this expertise while the White Paper proposals are implemented, and allow councils to support 'orphan' schools where regional schools commissioners are struggling to find a strong MAT to take them on. We are also pleased that councils will be given powers to direct all schools, including academies, to admit pupils that are out of school and make sure they are back in the classroom as quickly as possible.



The White Paper reiterated the Government's intention to introduce a duty on parents to register home-schooled children with their local council. This is also something that the LGA has lobbied on for some time, and it is good that government has acted on our members' concerns around the increasing number of children receiving an education outside the classroom. While home schooling is often a positive choice for families, this register will enable councils to ensure children are receiving their education in a safe environment.

We support the White Paper's aspiration of helping all children to thrive, with the right support at the right time. This is especially important as we emerge from the pandemic. We have said that the DfE's education recovery package must be kept under review to ensure every child gets the support they need.

Of course, it is absolutely vital that any education package supports children with special educational needs and disabilities, and it is good the Government has also set out how it plans to do this in a Green Paper, which we explore in further detail opposite.

As we have made clear already, councils are a key education partner of government. With the right powers and funding, councils are ideally placed to act as the 'middle tier' between central government and schools, thanks to their place-based leadership, existing duty to promote the wellbeing of children, and their links to other critical areas, including safeguarding, public health, criminal justice, employment and skills.



**To find out more about** the schools White Paper, see [www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-schools-white-paper](http://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-schools-white-paper)

# SEND Green Paper

## Sufficient powers and funding are needed to meet the needs of children with SEND



Councillor **Lucy Nethsingha** is Deputy Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board

**F**ollowing the publication of the schools White Paper (see opposite), the Government set out its long-anticipated review into the support provided to children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The SEND and alternative provision Green Paper will consult on addressing three key challenges:

- Poor outcomes for children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision.
- Navigating the SEND system and alternative provision is not a positive experience for children, young people, and their families.
- Despite unprecedented investment, the system is not delivering value for money for children, young people and families.

The LGA has long raised concerns over the provision of SEND support for children and their families, and we are

pleased government has put forward proposals to tackle these.

As our recent report, 'Agreeing to disagree? Research into arrangements for avoiding disagreements and resolving disputes in the SEND system in England' showed, the aspirations of the SEND reforms of 2014 have not been achieved. This is evident from the huge rise in legal disputes and tribunal hearings over SEND support, with the number of appeals more than doubling since the reforms were introduced, rising by 111 per cent between 2013/14 and 2020/21.

While placing children at the heart of the SEND system was right, the reforms were not accompanied by sufficient powers and funding for councils to meet the needs of children with SEND, or hold health and education partners to account for their role.

We are therefore pleased that the Green Paper recognises that councils are ideally placed to act as convenors of local SEND systems, bringing together health and education partners

to develop local inclusion plans. We look forward to taking this forward and working with the Department for Education (DfE) to ensure councils have the powers to hold partners to account. Having a collective responsibility will be crucial in delivering a system that works for children and their families.

It is also positive that the paper focuses on improving mainstream provision and inclusion levels. This will be central to the success of the Green Paper, and we would be keen to explore the development of a more contractual relationship between councils and schools in the provision of high needs funding, focused on outcomes and holding all schools to account for their delivery.

It will take several years for these proposals to go through the legislative process and become law. This is why, in the meantime, we want to work with the DfE to develop a plan that eliminates every council's dedicated schools grant deficits.

We will now be looking to work closely with government, partners, and parents and carers to develop these proposals in further detail.

Above all else, these proposals will only be a success if parents and carers have confidence in the system, and councils stand ready to work with parents and families to ensure these new reforms meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.



**For the LGA's response to the SEND Green Paper,** please visit [www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/send-green-paper-29-march-2022](https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/send-green-paper-29-march-2022)



*Councils are ideally placed to act as convenors of local SEND systems*



# Financial oversight of children's care providers

Better understanding of private companies needed to safeguard those in care



Councillor **Lucy Nethsingha** is Deputy Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board

**T**he LGA has become increasingly concerned about the levels of debt and financial risk in independent children's social care placement providers, as well as the lack of market oversight.

While councils provide some of their own fostering and children's home places for those in care, more than three in four children's homes – and more than a third of fostering placements – are now provided by the independent sector, which includes private and charitable companies. We are also seeing significant consolidation of providers.

The worry for councils is that we have no clear understanding of how profit, consolidation and risk are affecting the market or the experiences of, and outcomes for, children in care – though the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) recently confirmed councils' concerns that the children's social care market is “dysfunctional”.

To improve our understanding of the market, and to support councils in their commissioning, we have been publishing research for two years on profit-making and financial risk in the largest providers of children's social care placements.

The latest update, published in March, found that:

- The 10 largest independent providers of children's social care placements (residential and fostering) made a combined profit of more than £300 million last year.
- On average, the largest 20 providers achieved profits that were 20 per

cent of income – 14.2 per cent higher than the previous year.

- The total income of the largest 20 was more than £1.6 billion – 60 per cent of which was made by the largest four providers.
- Private equity (PE) ownership among the largest providers is increasingly prevalent. Ten of the 20 largest providers have PE ownership, and this proportion increases to eight of the largest 10.
- Nearly half (nine) had more debts and liabilities than tangible assets.

Our absolute priority is that children who can't live at home feel safe, loved and supported, in homes that best suit their needs. While many providers work hard to make sure this is the case, it is wrong that some providers are making excessive profit from providing these homes, when money should be spent on children.

Despite increasing their children's social care budgets, most councils are overspending each year as costs continue to soar.

The LGA estimates that future costs are set to increase by an estimated £600 million each year until 2024/25, with more than 8 in 10 councils already in the unsustainable position of having to overspend their budgets as a result of rapidly rising demand.

Councils have seen spending on residential placements increase by 84 per cent since 2015. They are having to divert funding from other local services – including early help for families – to meet these and other costs to provide desperately needed support to children in care.

Yet the largest privately run companies, which provide many residential and fostering homes for children, bring in huge profits. At the same time, many carry significant levels of debt that the CMA concluded create a risk of failure – which could disrupt the placements of children in care.

Stability for children in care is paramount if we are to help them to thrive. So, it is vital that there is oversight of the financial health of these providers to help catch them before they fall and ensure company changes don't risk the quality of provision.





# Investing in mental health

How councils can use their influence to encourage healthier workplaces



**Amy Browne** is Stewardship Lead at CCLA Investment Management

**A**s we emerge from the biggest public health crisis in a generation, there is another, less tangible health crisis looming: mental health deterioration. For councils struggling with an increase in mental health needs during the pandemic, it won't be surprising to hear that mental health featured in the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report for the first time in 2021, and was given greater focus for 2022.

## Mental ill-health is an expensive business

In 2021, the Centre for Mental Health estimated that up to 10 million people may

need mental health support in the aftermath of the pandemic. It put the cost at close to £120 billion per year once the expenses of health and social care, lost productivity and reduced quality of life are accounted for.

It is not only councils facing economic challenges – companies are struggling, too. As a result of poor mental health in the workplace, employers are losing billions of pounds because employees are less productive, off sick, or leaving, according to the Stevenson/Farmer review, Thriving at Work. Research by Deloitte suggests this costs UK businesses an average of £1,652 for every employee.

## The opportunity for councils

Councils are not only providers of care, they are also investors. With around £51.5 billion in investments and £337.1 billion in pension funds collectively, local authorities have an opportunity to use their influence as stakeholders to improve the way businesses approach the health of their people.

Why take this opportunity? Because, irrespective of its cause, the workplace is a setting that can assist in the identification of mental illness and the facilitation of proper treatment. Because creating a positive environment for mental health costs less than failing to do so: the average return to employers for every £1 spent is £5 (Deloitte). And because, as investors, councils also stand to benefit from the positive action taken by businesses to address such issues.

## CCLA's mental health engagement work

It has not always been straightforward for investors to understand what companies are doing to safeguard the mental health of their employees. CCLA, investment manager for local authorities and charitable organisations, is working to change that.

This month, it will launch the CCLA

Corporate Mental Health Benchmark, developed with the support of mental health charity Mind, Lord Dennis Stevenson, and the Principles for Responsible Investment.

The benchmark will provide investors with a tool for assessing how effective corporate leadership is in managing business risks associated with mental health. It will define expectations for workplace mental health and give investors an accessible way to understand and evaluate whether corporate practices meet these. Importantly, it will offer investors a level of insight not previously available and allow them to gain a clearer picture of the extent to which the investee company provides the right conditions for mental health at work to thrive.

Investment teams at councils will be able to view data on on the UK's largest listed companies. Councils can encourage their investment managers to use it as a monitoring and engagement tool, asking questions of investee companies to encourage them to implement best practice. Or for councils that invest directly, it can help facilitate such conversations with direct holdings.

Ultimately, a healthier workforce makes a healthier community – and healthy, thriving communities make a better world for everyone.

# CCLA

GOOD INVESTMENT

## Disclosure

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## Helpful resources

**1** In August 2020, the LGA and Centre for Mental Health published Our Place, which details the work of nine councils that are pioneering best practice for preventing poor mental health in communities: [www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/our-place](http://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/our-place)

**2** Read more about CCLA's work on mental health and the launch of its mental health benchmark: [www.CCLA.co.uk](http://www.CCLA.co.uk)



# Shopping for health

Putting public health services at the heart of local communities can also help revive high streets



Councillor **Louise Gittens** is Vice-Chair of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board

**A**s leaders of place, councils have already been working hard to repurpose their town centres and respond to longer-term trends in how our high streets are used.

They recognise that the pace of change and intervention will need to quicken as a result of the pandemic.

Councils regard the long-term changes needed as an opportunity to reconnect communities with their high streets and town centres, as well as meet other priorities, such as housing, access to services and better public health.

## Middlesbrough: one-stop wellbeing clinic

In the heart of Middlesbrough town centre, the Dundas Shopping Centre is home to a host of retailers, from clothes shops to beauty therapists and eateries. Nestled alongside them is the Live Well Centre, a one-stop shop for healthy living run by the council's public health team.

The centre was launched in 2017 and has gradually been expanded to include a wide range of services, from smoking cessation and substance misuse to an exercise-on-referral service and sexual health clinic.

The Live Well Centre also hosts NHS clinics and works with a range of partners, including Groundwork, which provides employability and skills support, and Impact on Teesside/Mind, a mental health charity.

They want to do what they can to help all areas adapt to changes in the way we use our high streets and town centres.

The most vibrant town centres offer a wide range of services, events and promotions that establish the town centre as a multi-purpose retail, cultural, community and economic hub. This service mix is crucial to the future of high streets, as it is an offer that cannot be matched by its main competitors – out-of-town shopping centres and the internet.

Local authorities understand this and have been working to diversify the high street offer based on local circumstances.

There are social and financial costs associated with empty shops. For example, vacant shops cost London's economy an estimated £350 million

according to the Greater London Authority, through loss of business rates, loss of earnings, and the subsequent cost of unemployment and jobseeker's allowance. Further to this, empty shops can cause a 'negative feedback loop', which means they discourage investment, decrease the offer of a high street, prevent consumers from visiting, and contribute to a general sense of decline and neglect.

There is increasing appetite from across local government and the NHS to realise the role of health in supporting the economic and social recovery, and, in particular, to reimagine our relationship with the high street.

In 2020, the NHS Confederation and the community businesses charity Power to Change published 'Health on the high street: how integrating health services





into local high streets can generate economic, social and health benefits for local communities’.

The report examines how place leaders and managers can begin to better embed health into the heart of our places.

Building health into the high street has multiple benefits. It can play an important role in addressing health inequalities, offer much-needed additional capacity for health service delivery, and attract more people into their local high street, while encouraging healthier lifestyles.

Not only would more people visit and use high streets, the types, ethos and diversity would change. Those who may not use high streets regularly to shop would, for example, use them to attend health services, making more vibrant community spaces.

As high streets tend to be at the centre of public transport networks, this can make a wide range of health services more accessible to people and, importantly, increase their engagement and effectiveness.

Placing this principle at the heart of service design can stimulate a new chapter in how public services, such as local councils and the NHS, engage with citizens and communities.

## Leicester: running a sexual health clinic in a shopping centre

In Leicester, a sexual health clinic has been established in the city’s main shopping centre. The retail unit, which used to be home to TK Maxx, was converted in 2019. It was chosen because it was convenient, but also through a desire to destigmatise sexual health.

Historically, sexual health clinics have

tended to be hidden away in quiet corners of hospitals or located away from the hustle and bustle of town centres. Now, the glass-fronted clinic is situated right in the middle of the Haymarket Shopping Centre.

Leicester Public Health Lead Commissioner Liz Rodrigo said: “The new centre exists alongside coffee shops and clothes shops, and has helped to normalise sexual health. There has always been a stigma around it, but now people see it as part of everyday life. You pop in for a coffee with friends, a bit of shopping, and then to the sexual health clinic.”

This can include widening the offer in existing NHS high street premises, such as community pharmacists, and looking at newly vacant space on the high street that could be used by the NHS and local public health services, in partnership with a range of other services.



**‘Shopping for health’ is a new LGA publication, including additional case studies from councils around the country,** see [www.local.gov.uk/publications](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications), where you can also find ‘Public

health in local government: celebrating 10 years of transformation’. ‘Health on the high street’ is available at [www.nhsconfed.org/publications/health-high-street](http://www.nhsconfed.org/publications/health-high-street)

The case studies on these pages highlight how local areas are working in partnership to make health a focal point within their communities.

The Government has rightly identified local authorities as having a critical role to play in the future of high streets and we welcomed the original and subsequent increase in funding through the Future High Streets Fund.

The Stronger Towns Fund and Towns Deal funding will also help many places to adapt to changes and make the most of opportunities.

High streets are notoriously difficult contexts in which to effect change, with multiple stakeholders and interests that cross local authority jurisdictions and departmental divides.

By learning from others who have taken a wide range of approaches to addressing the multi-faceted issue of retail vacancy, the examples presented here will provide a resource that can support positive action to generate economic, social and health benefits for local communities.

## Hertfordshire: a network of healthy hubs in community locations

A network of healthy hubs has been set up across Hertfordshire – on high streets, in leisure centres, at food banks and in community halls – to take health and wellbeing services to the public. The hubs provide advice and guidance on everything from weight management and debt advice to mental health problems.

Initially conceived in 2019 as a two-year project, the Healthy Hub programme is a partnership between Hertfordshire County Council and the 10 district councils. The hubs are funded by the county, but run locally by the district and borough councils, with the idea of tailoring services to meet the needs of each area.

Most work with the charity Mind to provide mental health support and counselling. There is also support for weight management and healthy eating, and drug and alcohol dependency, and some offer free NHS health checks.

Health Improvement Lead Fiona Deans, who runs the programme, said: “We have found, with the lifting of covid restrictions, that districts have started delivering pop-up hubs in a range of places. Sometimes, it is just for a couple of afternoons in one location before moving on to another. It really depends what works best in that community.”





# Building better places **in York**

Affordable and zero-carbon homes are at the heart of the city's new housing programme



Councillor **Denise Craghill** (Green) is Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods at City of York Council

**C**onstruction work on the first two Passivhaus and zero-carbon sites in the City of York Council's ground breaking 600-home Housing Delivery Programme will begin this summer.

The sites will deliver 117 new homes, with up to 60 per cent affordable housing, including council housing and shared-ownership properties, and opportunities for five self-builders to design and build their own homes.

The new homes, which include a mix of terraced houses and apartments, are intended to set the standards for providing new affordable housing while also tackling the climate emergency and creating resilient, mutually supportive new communities.

In keeping with 'Building better places', the council's own design manual, all the new homes will be zero carbon in use. With the very high levels of insulation that are a feature of Passivhaus, very little space heating will be needed.

Occupants will have warm, comfortable, well-ventilated homes, needing very little energy use. Large numbers of solar PV panels, alongside air source heat pumps, will help to deliver zero carbon.

Designed by Stirling prize-winning architects Mikhail Riches, the new homes are also built to national space standards.

Lifetime adaptability and accessibility also feature, and there are generous amounts of public and private green space, which can be used for socialising, quiet reflection, creative play and community food growing.

A feature of the design is secure 'ginnels', or back alleyways, between terraces – spaces for neighbours to meet and socialise, and for children to play safely.

Each site is individual and responds to its local neighbourhood, but following extensive community engagement and involvement in the design, they also reflect the design principles that aim for the whole site to support residents to live low-carbon lifestyles.

All sites in the programme have low levels of car parking provision and very high levels of secure cycle parking, along with electric cargo bikes for hire. There are cycling and walking links to and through the sites, as well as car-free play streets.

Future sites will also include small workshop, business start-up and 'maker' spaces, to support working close to home.

Projects aim to promote inter-generational living to help tackle social isolation and provide support structures for young families and others.

An earlier first phase of the programme, to deliver 165 new homes up to Energy Performance Certificate A standard, and with many similar design principles, is already well under way, with many homes occupied.

A third zero-carbon site has been submitted for planning approval, with two further sites at the design and community consultation stage.

It is really important that new-build homes are adding no new emissions to the increasingly urgent climate emergency. There are also obvious benefits to very low energy use homes with respect to soaring fuel prices and security of energy supplies.

Our contractors will also be working with local education providers to develop training in the green construction skills that are needed to deliver this programme and which complement energy efficiency retrofit work on our existing housing.

I am particularly pleased that we are not just providing very low-energy housing, but also designing whole sites that support low-carbon living and healthy communities.



See [bit.ly/3xl6ocu](https://bit.ly/3xl6ocu) for 'Building better places', City of York Council's design manual

*Projects aim to promote inter-generational living to help tackle social isolation*



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# Action on exempt housing

Improvements are needed to ensure vulnerable residents get the support they expect and need



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

**S**upported housing has played a valuable role for people who need additional support to live independently and safely.

It is a vital part of local housing offers. However, there has been an increasing issue with the 'exempt accommodation' sub-sector of supported housing.

In this type of housing, landlords that provide 'more than minimal care, support or supervision' get significantly higher levels of rent covered by housing benefit than under the normal rules.

While many housing providers are providing secure housing and personalised support, unfortunately some organisations are failing to deliver the necessary quality in provision or services to protect vulnerable people.

These include domestic abuse survivors, those recovering from alcohol and drug addiction, rough sleepers, care leavers, and asylum seekers and refugees.

This has a significant and detrimental impact on the lives of the people who live in poor-quality housing without the right level of support, and the wider community, as well as a cost to the public purse.

A lack of transparency and regulation has also enabled some exploitative providers to profiteer.

Currently, councils have limited powers to act when there are concerns about the quality of exempt accommodation, the support that is provided and the concentration of this type of housing.

For example, the licensing of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and some planning powers do not apply to exempt accommodation. It is also very difficult for councils to

challenge unjustifiably high rents.

Councils, the LGA and housing charities, including Commonweal Housing and Crisis, have been campaigning for the exempt accommodation system to be reformed.

So, it is good news that the Government is acting on councils' concerns and has announced its intention to bring forward a package of measures (see <https://bit.ly/3qUfaKG>) to put an end to landlords exploiting the exempt accommodation system. The measures include:

- Minimum standards for the support provided to residents, to ensure residents receive the good quality support they expect and deserve in order to live as independently as possible and achieve their personal goals.
- New powers for local authorities in England to better manage their local supported housing market and ensure no individual falls through the cracks.
- Changes to housing benefit regulations to seek to define care, support and supervision to improve quality across all specified supported housing provision.

The Government will also provide £20 million for a Supported Housing Improvement Programme.

*A lack of transparency and regulation has enabled some providers to profiteer*

Funding for this three-year programme will be open to bids from all local authorities, to build on the success of the recent supported housing pilots while Government works to develop and implement longer-term measures.

People living in supported housing deserve to live in decent homes and to receive good quality, personalised support that meets their needs.

We look forward to working with government, supported housing providers, people with lived experience of supported housing and other partners to take forward the important measures the Government has announced.

It is also important that councils are adequately resourced to use new powers and that these reforms move along at pace.



**For more information about the LGA's work on housing**, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/topics/housing-and-planning](http://www.local.gov.uk/topics/housing-and-planning)



# Accessible homes

Councils share the collective national ambition to tackle the country's housing shortage, and our goals can only be achieved by strong national and local leadership working together



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

**A**s house builders, housing enablers and landlords; as planners, place-shapers and agents of growth, transport and infrastructure; as responsible guardians to the vulnerable and the homeless; and as democratically accountable representatives of communities – local government is at the heart of the housing solution.

The Government has set a target of building 300,000 homes a year. The last time this country built at least 250,000 homes a year, councils delivered more than 40 per cent of them.

The pandemic has made it harder to deliver new housing. Rates of construction are picking up as we move to recovery, but this backlog is unlikely to be cleared until 2025 or beyond, at a time when almost eight million people in England are estimated to have some form of housing need. Projected demand for supported housing in England is set to grow by 125,000 by 2030 and, at present, we have more than 1.1 million homes that, since 2010, have been granted planning permission but have not yet been built.

*Projected demand for supported housing in England is set to grow by 125,000 by 2030*

A local, plan-led system is crucial for our levelling up ambitions, to ensure councils can deliver the right types of homes in the right places, with appropriate infrastructure. Councils must also be empowered to incentivise developers to bring allocated sites forward without delay.

Long term, we would like to see reform to the Right to Buy scheme, to allow councils to retain 100 per cent of receipts so that more can be invested in new homes, and discounts set locally.

The LGA has also long called for the removal of permitted development rights, under which full planning permission is not required and certain requirements, such as the need to provide affordable housing, can be ignored.

Quite often, councils include a policy in their local plan requiring that a proportion of new homes meet certain accessibility standards. However, permitted developments are not subject to local plan policies, meaning that fewer homes are delivered to these standards.

In the levelling up White Paper, it was positive to see steps taken to address the quality and security of housing, particularly for older people. The Government announced a task force that will work alongside government departments, housing providers, developers and older people, with appropriate links made to the housing commitments in the adult social care reform White Paper.

Alongside this, the White Paper includes a commitment of at least £300 million over the next three years to embed the strategic commitment in all local places to connect housing with health and care, and drive the stock of new supported housing. A further £570 million per year will help deliver the Disabled Facilities Grant, something the LGA fully supports.

Councils want all tenants to live in safe and secure, high-quality housing. To turn this ambition into a reality, the Government needs to ensure councils have the ability to establish landlord licensing schemes and the appropriate tools and resources to support the enforcement of housing quality.







Councillor **Kevin Bentley**  
is Chairman of the LGA's  
People and Places Board

# Making work local



Councils can improve jobs and skills outcomes for less if given the powers to coordinate local provision

**L**about market and skills issues differ from place to place. New analysis for the LGA confirms that a 'one size' or even 'five sizes fits all' national approach to employment and skills cannot address these local issues effectively.

We know how much you want to work with partners to address local challenges, including high vacancies and growing numbers of people not looking for work, and to capitalise on opportunities created by green growth, automation, and new global markets.

For too long, however, local government has had limited routes to discuss employment and skills issues with government, with funding short-term, fragmented and held centrally, and powers to affect change too remote, unless you are part of an area with a devolution deal.

In England, 49 national employment and skills-related schemes or services are managed by multiple Whitehall departments and agencies, delivered over different boundaries by various providers.

No single organisation is responsible for coordinating this locally, making it difficult to target and join up provision for learners, unemployed

people, career changers and businesses.

The 'Levelling up the UK' White Paper could transform the employment and skills system, opening the possibility for new and strengthened devolution and for all places to have devolved powers by 2030.

The LGA's own Work Local model for an integrated and devolved employment and skills service is a ready-made blueprint for making this happen sooner.

Democratically elected local leaders would have the power and funding to work with partners to join up careers advice and guidance, employment, skills, apprenticeships, business support services and outreach in the community.

The LGA will shortly be publishing new analysis of the cost benefits of the Work Local model, which are expected to run into tens of millions of pounds, and benefit not just the local economy and people moving into work, but also the health and wellbeing of local communities.

Integrated and devolved employment and skills services are good for the economy – they join up services, respond to local economic needs, and deliver better outcomes at lower costs.

But they are also good for people – with more personalised, joined-up and responsive services – and employers, by

delivering a locally rooted, demand-led and integrated approach.

To make this happen and improve the system for all areas, local and national government need a new partnership in place by the end of 2022. We need to:

- get the basics right everywhere and embed 'place' and local oversight into all provision and agree improvements to join up the offer more effectively across all places
- empower local leaders to go a step further by agreeing a framework for employment and skills devolution
- implement Work Local and roll out more place partnerships before 2030.

In early May, the LGA will be launching 'Work Local – unlocking talent to level up'. Championed by the LGA's People and Places and City Regions Boards, it will demonstrate how we can build on the Government's 'Levelling up the UK' White Paper to draw together a coherent framework for devolution, and set out our recommendations to Whitehall to improve the current system for all places.



**For the latest on the LGA's Work Local programme**, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/topics/employment-and-skills](http://www.local.gov.uk/topics/employment-and-skills). See also **the LGA's reports on 'Local green jobs'** ([www.local.gov.uk/local-green-jobs](http://www.local.gov.uk/local-green-jobs)) and **'Councils' role in supporting the exports industry'** ([www.local.gov.uk/publications](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications)), and **its work on mapping national employment and skills** ([bit.ly/3E54YnE](https://bit.ly/3E54YnE))



Councillor **Cecilia Motley**  
is Chair of the Rural  
Services Network

## Will 'levelling up' deliver for rural areas?

**Launched with a flurry of grand statements, the 'Levelling up the UK' White Paper promised to 'break the link between geography and destiny, so that no matter where you live you have access to the same opportunities'.**

Rural areas in England have long suffered from historical underfunding by successive governments. Rural councils will receive 37 per cent (£105) per head less than their urban counterparts in 2022/23.

As a result, council tax in rural areas has increased steadily to help balance budgets, with rural residents paying, on average, 21 per cent (£104) per head more than those in urban areas.

Everyone can support the White Paper's four headline aims: to boost productivity, spread opportunity, restore a sense of pride and belonging, and empower local leaders and communities. It's how these will be delivered and monitored in a rural context that is missing.

Productivity in rural areas is 83 per cent of that for England as a whole, with predominantly rural areas accounting for 22 per cent of the population, but contributing around 15 per cent economically.

The high cost of housing in rural areas, combined with lower average wages and the significantly higher fuel-poverty gap in which many rural households find themselves, has created a perfect storm for the current cost-of-living crisis.

Funds available as part of the levelling

up agenda should assess the standards of living achievable in different locations given local labour market conditions, to distribute funding to those areas in need.

The measures and metrics in the White Paper need to be available at a suitably micro level to enable the pockets of deprivation in rural areas to be acknowledged with support targeted appropriately.

Using county or regional averages often masks smaller clusters, which are either ignored or left behind in any policy interventions. The Government must acknowledge the differentials within rural areas that need to be addressed.

The White Paper is light on details regarding which bodies will be charged with delivery. Local government will clearly have a key role to play, but additional

funding to meet change on the scale envisaged is not set out clearly, nor is the current funding gap addressed.

While we welcome the focus on digital connectivity and improved mobile connectivity, this is almost the only place in the whole document that makes substantive reference to rural areas.

Unfortunately, there is a long history of broken promises in relation to access to high-quality broadband for rural areas.

There is real concern that the Government could achieve many of its 12 missions set out in the White Paper without addressing the pressing challenges that rural communities face around the increased cost of service delivery, productivity, wage levels, the ageing demographic, access to skills, training and transport, and a social care sector on its knees.

Can the White Paper deliver levelling up for rural areas? It can, but it needs to measure the current status quo at the right level, and introduce targeted interventions, delivered locally, that meet rural challenges and enable our rural areas to achieve their full potential. Unless such efforts are made, the verdict on the levelling up White Paper from the rural perspective will be 'could do better'. This would be a serious lost opportunity to transform rural services.



**The Rural Services Network is a special interest group of the LGA, see [www.rsnonline.org.uk](http://www.rsnonline.org.uk)**



# Giving buses priority



**Graham Vidler** is  
Chief Executive of  
the Confederation of  
Passenger Transport

**One in 10 car journeys made today needs to be made by bus by 2030 if the UK is to remain on track for its net-zero goals, according to the independent Climate Change Committee.**

So, introducing measures that will speed up bus journey times and encourage more people out of their cars and onto the bus is vital.

Helpfully, our recent research shows that most people support measures that give buses greater priority on roads. In fact, three times as many people support bus priority as oppose it, rising to a ratio of four to one for businesses, with all regions enjoying more support than opposition.

Of those who expressed an opinion, support is even higher – 79 per cent back the introduction of measures such as bus

lanes and bus-only roads, with the same level of support among businesses.

Despite these high levels of support, however, councils can find it challenging to introduce such measures locally.

To help, the Confederation of Passenger Transport has produced a toolkit that includes recommendations, based on research with the general public and business owners, for how best to communicate the benefits of prioritising buses.

Key findings include the importance of highlighting the role that bus travel can play in delivering local environmental goals and improving the liveability of an area, and of being transparent about potential disruption during construction.

Early and meaningful engagement with local communities is also vital to



**'Delivering better bus services: a toolkit for engaging with local communities'** is available at [bit.ly/3vjwVEC](https://bit.ly/3vjwVEC)

ensure we avoid concerns about schemes where the benefits to local communities are not clearly set out.

Our research shows that councils enjoy public and business support when it comes to giving buses priority, helping them meet their own net-zero targets and the UK's overall climate change goals.

I hope local authorities find the toolkit useful and are emboldened by its findings to give buses the priority on the road they need.



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Andy Shields / 01223 378 005 / [andy.shields@cpl.co.uk](mailto:andy.shields@cpl.co.uk)

## Local issues remain vital



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

As you read this, hundreds of Independent, Green, Plaid Cymru and smaller party candidates are out and about in their communities and working hard online, organised and determined to focus on getting the very best for their local residents.

I am so proud and humbled to see people who already work in the heart of their communities prepared to do more and stand up for their neighbours in their councils.

Experienced councillors and staff of the LGA's Independent Group have been there to support candidates in the months before the election and will be ready to help out post-election.

Civility is vital, and the LGA's booklet on this is useful to avoid problems and challenge behaviour when necessary.

At the same time as local elections across Wales, London, some unitary authorities and in other councils, residents are raising concerns over what is going on nationally.

We've seen 'Partygate', a Prime Minister accused of lying to Parliament about breaking his own laws, concerns of tax avoidance, news of a looming recession and a rise in the cost of living.

As 200,000 families registered to share their homes to help desperate refugees, the Government announced a bizarre move to send unknown arrivals on what has been dubbed an expensive one-way ticket to Rwanda 'for processing'.

Many of our members have done all we can to show support for Ukraine, still under horrendous attack. Some have made donations, or criss-crossed Europe to deliver essential items such as ambulances, and

even bring back refugees with visas under the sponsorship scheme.

At the LGA, we have held important cross-party weekly meetings with ministers to secure the best possible arrangements and enable our councils to assist most effectively – a pattern we found productive in tackling Brexit and COVID-19.

Local issues remain vital: housing, schools, roads, waste, and care, while tackling climate change in everything we do. Together, we have a terrific record of support for our communities and councils and I wish all of our members and candidates every success.

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**"I am so proud and humbled to see people prepared to do more and stand up for their neighbours in their councils"**

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

## Joining up support

More than two months after Russia's invasion, I know some of you have been able to welcome Ukrainians fleeing the fighting into your communities – and your own homes too, via the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

The LGA continues to work hard with government to ensure new arrivals are supported and kept safe, with our influence felt in improved guidance to councils and more and better data provided about arrivals and their sponsors (see p9-11).

However, concerns remain – including about the quality and consistency of data, accommodation and safeguarding checks, and funding.

As **first** was going to press, councils were only being told who was arriving in their areas via Homes for Ukraine; but they also need advance notice of new arrivals under the Ukraine Family Scheme, and the funding to support them when they are here.

While council discretion in respect of



accommodation checks is welcome, it currently means councils are bearing both the legal and reputational risks of making the judgements about what is suitable.

And we don't have guidance on what to do if children arrive with adults who are not their parents or carers – whether that's other family members, or strangers. It's unclear if councils are expected to take those children into care.

Meanwhile, councils are still supporting the victims of other conflicts, including thousands of Afghan and

Syrian refugees – many of them still accommodated 'temporarily' in hotels.

The Government's plans for a 'full dispersal' system (p10), under which all regions in England, Wales and Scotland would be expected to take asylum seekers, is a welcome step forward.

The LGA wants to see all the current schemes for supporting new and recent arrivals joined up, and the establishment of a joint taskforce, similar to the Brexit committee: more needs to be done to create an effective, safe, sustainable and humane asylum system.





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

## Getting on with the job

**O**n 5 May, people across the UK will vote in a set of local elections, choosing more than 6,000 councillors and assembly members, the outcome of which will be crucial in deciding who runs services in your area and how much you will pay for them.

None of us need to be reminded of the global instability we are currently experiencing – inflation, the war in Ukraine and energy price spikes – impacting on families facing the rising cost of living.

**“Our priorities must continue to be keeping bills down, cutting council waste and strengthening the progress communities are making in recovering from COVID-19”**

Our priorities must continue to be keeping bills down, cutting council waste and strengthening the progress communities are making in recovering from COVID-19.

Our hardworking local Conservatives have a proven record of managing money well, delivering high-quality local services and supporting good local jobs.

Conservative councillors work with the Government to deliver on the people's priorities in their area and to unite and level up the country as a whole.

It's vital that we don't get distracted by playing politics.

As polling day approaches, we cannot rest on our laurels: every seat is valuable, and we must fight hard to retain those we have and to win those we don't.

For those of you standing for re-election, I thank you for your continued support and wish you all the very best of luck.

It is your hard work and dedication that continues to be the backbone of the Conservative Party.



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

## Supporting our local communities

**A**s I write this article, the Prime Minister has just made history... but for all the wrong reasons.

Boris Johnson is the first serving Prime Minister to have been found guilty of breaking the law – and his Chancellor is guilty, too.

While people across the country were making unimaginable sacrifices during the pandemic, the Metropolitan Police have now confirmed that those outlining the rules were the ones to break them.

When the penalty notices landed on their doorsteps, both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor offered 'unreserved' apologies for breaking the rules.

Why then did they reserve their regret for when they'd been issued with fines rather than when the stories broke back in December? They really have taken the public for fools.

With the 5 May local elections fast approaching, it seems more important than ever to have Labour champions supporting our local communities.

While the Conservatives were throwing parties, Labour in local government stepped up to support vulnerable people.

**“While people were making unimaginable sacrifices during the pandemic, those outlining the rules were the ones to break them”**

Labour councils offer lower council tax and maintain safer and cleaner streets. Despite years of funding cuts, Labour councils continue to provide essential services for their residents. And now they are doing everything they can to protect local people from the cost-of-living crisis.

The Conservatives broke the rules they expected everyone else to follow and then lied about it, too.

Now more than ever, as the cost of living soars and families struggle to make ends meet, people need a government that is on their side.



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

## Inspired by our nation's generosity

**A**s the horror unfolds in Ukraine, it is impossible to not be moved by the fight of the Ukrainian people, in the face of an aggressive neighbour led by a tyrant and a bully willing to do anything to achieve his goals.

The generosity of our nation is inspiring, with thousands of people willing to open their homes and their hearts.

**“Many Syrian and Afghan refugees are still waiting for help. They deserve our support too, where is their resettlement scheme?”**

Yet, I have become increasingly frustrated by the red tape and bureaucracy that people are facing as they offer support, and I am furious with parts of the press for their attempt to cover up the Government's incompetence and blame local government for the delays.

We need less rhetoric and more action. Refugees Minister Lord Harrington needs to kick some backside.

There is a stark contrast between the Government's response to this crisis and that facing Syrians and Afghans. Many refugees are still waiting for help. They deserve our support too, where is their resettlement scheme? They cannot be forgotten.

I want to use this opportunity to say thank you to those councillors who are stepping down from elected office this month – you have been inspirational in your work.

Thank you for standing up for liberal values in your communities, at a time those values are under threat.

And to those seeking re-election, I wish you the best of luck on 5 May. I look forward to welcoming even more Liberal Democrats to our ever-growing local government family.



Councillor **Doug Pullen** (Con), Leader of Lichfield District Council, has recently returned from the Ukraine/Poland border, where he helped transport people to safety and deliver essential supplies as part of humanitarian efforts to help those fleeing the war with Russia

# A humanitarian crisis

## Friday 18 March

Feeling utterly sickened, yet helpless, watching the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I'd decided a couple of days ago to fly out to Poland, and had booked a cheap flight, car hire and hotel.

But I was nervous – I'd never been to Poland before and was very unsure about what I'd find there, and even if I could be of any help.

I drive to the main humanitarian aid camp in the border town of Przemysl. Nothing is formally organised here and there's a real mix of people.

Public sector organisations sit next to organised charities and volunteers sleeping in their campervans.

I ask about registration, and eventually find an unmarked tent staffed by Aleks, a scout. They have cobbled together a hi-tech registration process using QR codes, SMS verification and passport scanning, which results in me being given a purple wristband.

As I'd later find out, this wasn't entirely adequate, and not recognised by the Polish police, but it did help to partly reassure some people I was genuine.

husband... you are splitting your family up, you should have stayed here in Ukraine". Julia is crying.

The decision to flee Ukraine is not one anyone takes easily. Many people have had their bags packed for weeks but are in two minds about leaving or staying. It's heart-wrenching.

## Sunday 20 March

After 10 minutes of asking around at Przemysl station, I meet Nik, his wife Natasha, and their two neighbours, Yelen and Oksana. They are all in their late-60s, there is no mutual language, so plenty of hand gestures and Google translate.

As I walk towards the train station doors, four policemen block my way. A translator arrives – apparently, they want to do some checks, as there have been reports of people trafficking at the border. I'm grateful they are doing a good job and spend 45 minutes with them as they check my details.

## Monday 21 March

I head to the supermarket to buy supplies from a list the scouts gave me at the station. An hour later, I arrive at Przemysl station with a car full of supplies, confident that I'm bringing only what they need, only to be turned away by Gzregorz, who is running a makeshift warehouse.

A quick call to the humanitarian aid centre and it is immediately redirected!

A volunteer tells me about Olga, Aleks, Dianna, Anna and Lui the dog. Olga is a vet, with her 14-year-old son Aleks going to stay with friends in Warsaw. Dianna and Anna are mother and daughter, escaping to friends in Spain.

Small talk in the car feels odd, being lighthearted when they have left their family in a war zone.

**"The decision to flee Ukraine is not one anyone takes easily"**

## Saturday 19 March

At Przemysl train station, Teanna, a US citizen living in Poland, has 'Eng.Rus' written on her hi-vis and is liaising in English and Russian. I approach her, show my wristband, and say I can take four people and their luggage anywhere in Poland.

Teanna finds four people for Warsaw – Lydia, Julia, Margarita and Nikita. Lydia is going to take the train from there to stay with friends in Germany. Julia and her children are going to stay with relatives until they work something else out.

Conversation is slow – they are tired, you can see the exhaustion in their faces.

It becomes clear we are on the edge of a war zone. We see a Hercules-type transporter plane overhead, a transporter loaded with UN jeeps passes us in one direction, a convoy of tanks passes us in the other.

Julia is having an animated phone conversation in the back of the car and Lydia translates. A friend is angry at Julia, asking her "how dare you leave your



Signs point refugees in the direction of help





Food supplies and beds for those fleeing their homes

### Tuesday 22 March

I see a tweet about a family who need a lift, so I respond confirming I can do the drive, later today. As I'm leaving, a volunteer tells me about an orphanage for Ukrainian refugees that need supplies. She sends me the list and, after a drop at Krakow, I head to Carrefour and on to the orphanage in remote southern Poland

kitchen and camping beds – maybe 200 beds and 400 people eating food, 200 lining up for clothes.

I find Janek and Dorota, city council officials, who need supplies. We spend £400 in Carrefour Express. Cereals, juices, baby wipes, sanitary products, toothpaste, coffee, biscuits.

As we deliver supplies to the distribution point, I see two young boys, maybe aged eight and 10, looking longingly at the trolley while queuing politely. I ask them what they want. "Sok" I pass him my phone and he expertly finds Google Translate, changes the language and types in "sok" – "juice". I hand him two juices; they are so happy.

As I head for the airport, there's no sense of personal relief or achievement, just an emptiness and a worry about when these families will be able to return home.

### Wednesday 23 March

It's a hot day in Krakow, as I head for the train station. There is a huge soup

**i To contribute to Cllr Pullen's fundraiser** to help transport Ukrainian refugees, please visit <https://gofund.me/230b905e>

# first packaging

100% COMPOSTABLE

**Alongside the majority of councils, the LGA has declared a climate emergency. We have pledged to reduce our own carbon emissions and to support councils and our partner organisations to do the same.**

Rising paper prices and energy costs coupled with the pledge to reduce our carbon emissions have led the LGA to take the decision to replace first's paper wrapping with a fully compostable starch polywrap.

Made from starches, cellulose and vegetable oils, the starch wrapping can be used to line your food waste bin, or can be disposed of in food waste bins, green waste bins and any compost heap. At least 90 per cent of the material will compost within 12 months.

The magazine and address sheet should continue to be recycled via local paper/cardboard waste collections.

**If you need further information about this change, please email [karen.thornton@local.gov.uk](mailto:karen.thornton@local.gov.uk)**

Local government  
**first**





**Andy Fry** OBE is Chief Executive of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

# Delivering good governance in fire and rescue

**As a former chief fire officer, I was delighted to be invited to deliver a series of workshops on good governance at the LGA's recent annual fire conference in Gateshead.**

The theme for the conference was 'Delivering transformation in the fire and rescue sector'. Now, as the Chief Executive of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, you'd expect me to say this, but I really do believe that good governance is essential to successfully delivering any organisational change, let alone transformational change.

It's also a hot topic in fire and rescue at present, as the sector eagerly awaits a white paper on reform that's certain to include proposals for changes to fire authority governance structures.

Of course, structures and other constitutional arrangements are an important aspect of the good governance 'jigsaw', but there are three other 'pieces' that also require consideration:

- members and officers understanding their respective governance roles
- a commitment to developing the skill sets necessary to exercise their different, but complementary, roles effectively
- a focus on ensuring that their political and professional practice is always consistent with the Nolan Principles of public life.

As well as making sure all four pieces of the jigsaw described above feature, it's crucial that they are pieced together and operated in a 'professional partnership' between fire authority members and their senior officer colleagues.

The workshops at the LGA conference centred on this relationship and provided delegates with an opportunity to explore the ingredients required to build and maintain a professional partnership that supports good governance in the interests of

achieving great outcomes for communities.

The starting point for the discussion was my assertion that the partnership should be characterised by openness, honesty, mutual respect, and high levels of trust – but that it is a partnership, not a friendship, and must also, therefore, include room for constructive challenge in both directions.

The delegates expressed strong support for this characterisation, and we then moved on to examine how such partnerships can work in practice.

In the free-flowing debate that followed, member and officer delegates shared valuable examples of how they work well together.

They also posed questions about some of the 'real world' challenges involved in establishing and holding a professional partnership together – particularly during turbulent and tough times.

It's difficult to do justice to the rich material that emerged from the workshop discussions. That said, a strong consensus emerged around two particular issues.

The first was the importance of members and officers collaborating when developing strategic policy; not simply coming together at formal decision-making meetings but proactively creating opportunities to bring political aspirations together with professional expertise in informal environments and co-creating agendas for change and improvement.

The second focused on the performance oversight role of members in holding officers to account.

This can be a particularly tricky aspect of governance but, when done well, drives performance improvement. The secret, it seems, is members and officers recognising real value in the process and engaging constructively in it.

So, in summary, while fire authority members and officers have distinctly different roles, there is much to be gained from examining where overlaps exist and operating as professional partners in those shared spaces.

Doing so improves governance and, as an extension of that, delivers better fire and rescue services to the public.



*It is a partnership, not a friendship, and must also, therefore, include room for constructive challenge in both directions*



**For more information about the work of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny,** please visit [www.cfgs.org.uk](http://www.cfgs.org.uk)



# ELECTIONS

## Lib Dems and Greens make gains



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



There are another two Green gains from the Conservatives to report, bringing the total to 14 seats captured over the past year.

The Conservative vote in Horsham, Denne was similar to the previous result there; the Liberal Democrats held the seat despite losing vote share, while the Green vote rose by a modest six percentage points.

So, there were no clues that a major upset was in the offing two weeks later in Horsham's Storrington and Washington ward, where the Greens' Joan Grech triumphed.

In 2019, they had not fielded a candidate, and three Conservatives faced single-candidate challengers from the Liberal Democrats and Labour.

For this by-election, however, Labour withdrew from the fray. Grech then successfully squeezed the Liberal Democrat vote and appears to have persuaded some Conservatives to switch too.

From a standing start, she won a 48 per cent vote share and a winning margin of more than 200 votes.

A second gain, this in Dorset's Lyme and Charmouth ward, saw Belinda Bawden win the seat for the Greens after switching her allegiance from Labour.

A third defeat for the Conservatives was delivered by East Riding's Liberal Democrats, who filled the vacancy in South Hunsley ward.

Established since 2003 on its current boundaries, the ward had always returned Conservative councillors, most recently

with a majority of more than 50 percentage points in 2019.

So, what explains the 35 per cent swing that gave winning candidate Margaret Corless such a spectacular victory?

Local press reports cite the Conservative-controlled council's recent planning permission awarded to Amazon for a distribution centre in the local area. Another possible explanation might be the Conservative Party's national decline in support.

If so, how might we then explain the party's gain of a Labour seat in High Peak's Cote Heath ward on the same day it was losing seats to both the Greens and Liberal Democrats?

Some part of the explanation lies in Cote Heath's deserved reputation as a super-marginal, siding with Labour at one electoral cycle and with the Conservatives at the next.

In 2019, Labour's Keith Savage, whose death caused the vacancy, split the two

Conservative candidates and finished in second place, only two votes behind the overall winner.

In effect, this was the tiniest majority to defend, but the Conservative winning majority reflects a relatively poor performance from Labour, whose vote was also squeezed by the Greens.

Labour's performance in by-elections generally sees the party failing to make real progress. Over the past year, it has made just seven gains from the Conservatives, but 36 seats have gone in the opposite direction.

The Liberal Democrats, with 19 gains from the Conservatives, together with the Greens, are providing the main competition.

*There were no clues an upset was in the offing*

Local by-elections			
<b>Doncaster, Wheatley Hills and Intake</b>		<b>Melton, Melton Sysonby</b>	
LAB HELD		CON HELD	
22.7% over Con	Turnout 13.9%	28.6% over Lib Dem	Turnout 17.8%
<b>Dorset, Lyme and Charmouth</b>		<b>Mid Devon, Cullompton South</b>	
GREEN GAIN FROM CON		LIB DEM GAIN FROM IND	
17.3% over Con	Turnout 32.9%	5.9% over Con	Turnout 20.6%
<b>East Riding of Yorkshire, South Hunsley</b>		<b>Northumberland, Seghill with Seaton Delaval</b>	
LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON		CON HELD	
18% over Con	Turnout 29.4%	15.1% over Lab	Turnout 27.4%
<b>High Peak, Cote Heath</b>		<b>Scarborough, Mayfield</b>	
CON GAIN FROM LAB		CON HELD	
16.3% over Lab	Turnout 33.2%	21.5% over Lab	Turnout 16.2%
<b>Horsham, Denne</b>		<b>Telford &amp; Wrekin, Brookside</b>	
LIB DEM HELD		LAB HELD	
11.3% over Con	Turnout 24.2%	23.6% over Con	Turnout 21.8%
<b>Horsham, Storrington and Washington</b>		<b>Test Valley, North Baddesley</b>	
GREEN GAIN FROM CON		LIB DEM HELD	
12.6% over Con	Turnout 35.5%	27.8% over Con	Turnout 30%
<b>Liverpool, Everton</b>		<b>Thanet, Nethercourt</b>	
LAB HELD		LAB HELD	
37.7% over Green	Turnout 13.6%	30.2% over Con	Turnout 27.9%
<b>Liverpool, Warbreck</b>		<b>Wolverhampton, East Park</b>	
LAB HELD		LAB HELD	
2% over Lib Dem	Turnout 17%	31% over Con	Turnout 13.2%

**i** For more details of these and other recent by-election results, visit [www.lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections](http://www.lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections)

# Going to the polls



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not tally with its current national poll leads.

On the other hand, all bets may be off if the recent revelation of 'partygate' fines for the Prime Minister and Chancellor plays badly for the Conservatives on 5 May.

The danger of the party bring caught in a pincer movement was graphically illustrated by two by-election results just before Easter. A 'red wall' seat in Durham was lost in a direct swing to Labour. In Surrey, it was the Liberal Democrats who took a previously safe Conservative seat in Communities Secretary Michael Gove's Surrey Heath constituency.

London has always been something of an exception to the pattern of Labour electoral woes. It posted a near 50-year high in the number of councillors elected in 2018; the Conservatives, by contrast, fell back to their lowest total since the boroughs were created in 1964.

Yet, although the Conservatives lost control of both Kingston upon Thames and Richmond upon Thames to the

**This year's local elections in England and Wales encompass 5,600 seats in 168 councils. Labour is defending the largest number in both countries.**

In England, the Conservatives are in second place; in Wales, Independent candidates continue to perform strongly, especially in rural areas.

With most contests in England reprising those last held in 2018, context is the key to understanding and interpreting what might happen.

Four years ago, Labour and the Conservatives were neck and neck in opinion polls and local elections alike, a situation reflected in the relatively small number of seats and councils then changing hands. Labour then performed poorly in the 2019 and 2021 local contests, and its record in council by-elections does



Liberal Democrats, Labour could make no headway in its own target councils.

Remedying that must be the party's main goal in London this year, rather than simply increasing its majority in councils it already controls.

Wandsworth, long seen as a Conservative, low-council tax flagship, voted 75 per cent 'remain' in the EU referendum, with Labour capturing Putney in 2019 to register a clean sweep of all three parliamentary seats in the borough.

The boundary changes here put Labour within touching distance of

## England

4,359\* seats in 146 local authorities comprising 32 London boroughs, 33 metropolitan boroughs, 21 unitary councils (including four new 'county' unitaries), and 60 shire districts.

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	Ind/other	No overall control
Current control	46	62	11	-	-	27
Seats being defended*	1,400	2,226	517	52	164	22

## Wales

All 1,234 seats in 22 councils, all with boundary changes.

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	Ind/other	No overall control
Current control	1	7	-	1	3	10
Seats being defended*	197	462	59	208	308	-

\*accounting for boundary changes but not casual vacancies/defections





## Context is the key to understanding and interpreting what might happen

becoming the largest party, but, by the same token, few marginal wards appear to have been created.

In Westminster, the Conservatives won more than twice as many seats as Labour in 2018, despite the narrowest-ever gap in the popular vote between the two major parties – less than 2 per cent.

If the new boundaries help to dampen this prevailing votes/seats imbalance, the outcome could be very tight indeed.

But it may not all be one-way traffic. The financial and other problems besetting Labour-held Croydon council have been well documented. Most of the party's wards have hefty majorities, but a swing to the Conservatives of the order of 6 percentage points could put them back in control for the first time since 2010.

To make the election even more intriguing, eight candidates are competing to be Croydon's first directly elected mayor, following strong support for such a system at a referendum in October 2021.

Labour retains its dominance in the metropolitan boroughs, with overall control in 28 out of 36 councils.

However, the party has fallen back since 2018, registering seat losses in each of the past two years as voters deserted it in several of the so-called 'red wall' areas of the north and midlands.

All seats fall vacant in Birmingham,

which has moved to a four-year electoral cycle, and in Bury, Rochdale and St Helens following boundary changes. It is in Bury where Labour's majority seems most under threat, with localist groups making their presence felt last year.

Elsewhere, Labour's minimum ambition must be to replicate both the overall share of the vote it achieved and the seats it won back in 2018. This may not make for dramatic headlines, but would provide evidence that the party has put the electoral nightmare of the past two years behind it.

Sunderland will remain Labour, but the 17 seats won in 2018, rather than the 12 in 2019, must be the aim. The party habitually wins two-thirds of the seats in Coventry, but its vote share dropped by 10 percentage points between 2018 and 2021.

The three Conservative-controlled boroughs – Dudley, Solihull, and Walsall – are all safe, but the Greens will want to consolidate their position as Solihull's official opposition, as they habitually poll more than a fifth of the total vote.

More than one in three of all Liberal Democrat metropolitan councillors are concentrated in just three authorities – Newcastle upon Tyne, Sheffield, and Stockport. The party controlled them all once, but is now condemned to opposition even in Stockport, where it remains the largest group.

The most competitive unitary council elections look to be in Plymouth and Southampton. In the latter, Labour needs two gains for control, but has won neither of the pivotal wards since 2016.

The Conservatives in Plymouth, who run the council as a minority, have been riven by internal disputes. Twelve out of 57 councillors now sit as Independents, with Labour just the largest party.

The elections could help restore a degree of normality, but any Labour advance may be handicapped by its defending a relative high water mark from 2018.

The new unitary authorities of Cumberland, North Yorkshire, Somerset, and Westmorland and Furness are holding inaugural elections prior to vesting in April 2023.

North Yorkshire seems certain to fall into the Conservative column, but the Liberal Democrats have an outside chance in Somerset, which they held earlier this century and where they currently have by far the largest proportion of district councillors.

The number of district councils with

annual or biennial elections continues to shrink, partly as a result of the piecemeal creation of more county-wide unitaries and partly reflecting local choice, often aimed at saving costs.

Of those with elections, many are mathematically safe from any change in control. However, in places such as Newcastle-under-Lyme (which has moved to all-out contests), Crawley, West Lancashire, and Worthing, Labour and the Conservatives go head to head in a traditional two-party battle.

In Crawley, which had whole council elections in 2019 following boundary changes, the Conservatives are a single seat ahead of Labour, and the same margin short of overall control.

There may be some surprise that Worthing is now a council in play. Occasionally Liberal Democrat, but never Labour, in its near 50-year history of Conservative predominance, the two main parties are currently tied.

Demographic change has helped Labour here and it could now become the largest party by winning the council leader's Gaisford ward seat, as happened in both 2019 and 2021.

The Liberal Democrats should retain control of the eight councils they are defending (including St Albans, where there are boundary changes) and, as in Somerset, could benefit from Conservative weakness in places such as Hart and Woking.

Local elections are being held in Wales for the first time since 2017. All 22 councils are subject to boundary changes, though, in most cases, these are quite modest and unlikely on their own to have significant electoral repercussions.

Despite them, Wales retains a number of very large four- and five-member wards, including Sketty in Swansea (five) and Grange town in Cardiff (four). The other innovation is that 16- and 17-year-olds are able to vote for the first time, though this too may not have a big political impact.

The Conservatives and various Independent groups polled comparatively strongly in Wales five years ago and Labour will now be looking to recover ground in councils such as Bridgend and Merthyr Tydfil. The party fell back by more than 12 percentage points in Bridgend in 2017, losing control of the council and then of the eponymous parliamentary constituency at the 2019 General Election.

In Cardiff, Labour's majority control could be sacrificed if it lost the marginal and unchanged Canton ward to Plaid Cymru.



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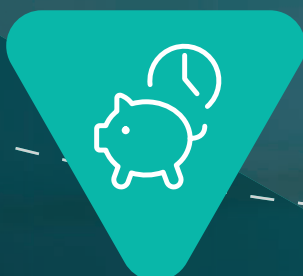
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