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LGA Annual Licensing Conference

8 February 2023

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The LGA's Annual Licensing Conference provides an unrivalled opportunity to discuss all the key strategic and practical developments that can be expected to affect councils' licensing committees and teams over the year ahead.

The conference will examine the Government's plans and expectations for licensing as well as exploring the challenges facing licensing authorities, highlighting innovative work being undertaken by councils and their partners and discussing how we can build on best practice.

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Not out of the woods

Last month's Autumn Statement provided some relief for councils facing rising prices and increasing demand for local services.

The Chancellor's announcements, including additional council tax raising powers and cash for schools and adult social care, will help. But local government needs long-term and sustainable funding if it is to deliver levelling up and local growth (see p10, p24).

Elsewhere in this month's **first**, you can find out about the work of our member peers in supporting council improvement (p12), our new Debate Not Hate toolkit for tackling abuse of councillors (p13), and our first in-person Smith Square debate (on levelling up) since the pandemic (p15).

An LGA-commissioned report makes the case for devolution of adult learning across England to improve skills (p16), and the Care Quality Commission looks at the workforce challenges facing health and care providers (p20).

Our lead comment is from Andrew Lewer MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Devolution, on how levelling up must be locally led (p23).

We also hear about Middlesbrough's amazing alleys and how North Yorkshire is charging 100 per cent council tax on second homes to help tackle the affordable housing crisis (p29).

Cllr James Jamieson
is LGA Chairman



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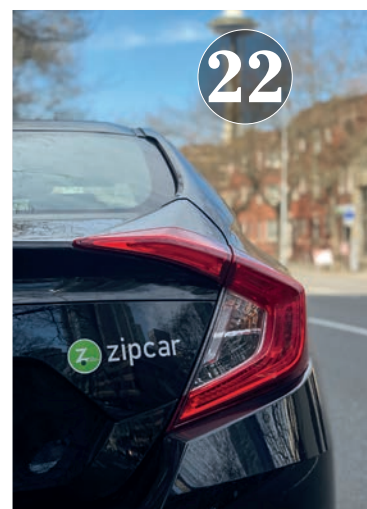
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Autumn Statement: 'better than feared'

More money for social care and schools, a 7 per cent cap on social housing rent rises, and new devolution deals in Cornwall, Suffolk, Norfolk and the North East were among the announcements in last month's Autumn Statement.

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt said that after listening to councils' concerns, adult social care charging reforms will be delayed for two years, with funding being retained in local authority budgets to meet current pressures.

He also increased the basic council tax referendum limit from 2 to 3 per cent, and the social care precept from 1 to 2 per cent a year for the next two years.

These additional flexibilities and new funding provide up to £7.5 billion in new funding for social care from 2023 to 2025.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "It is good that the Chancellor has used the Autumn Statement to act on the LGA's call to save local services from spiralling inflation, demand, and cost pressures.

"While the financial outlook for councils is better than we feared next year, councils recognise it will be residents and businesses who will be asked to pay more.

"We have been clear that council tax has never been the solution to meeting the long-term pressures facing services – particularly high-demand services like adult social care, child protection and homelessness prevention.

"It also raises different amounts of money in different parts of the country unrelated to need and adds to the financial burden facing households."

He added: "We are pleased that government will provide extra funding for adult social care and accepted our ask for funding allocated towards reforms to still be available to address inflationary pressures for both councils and social care providers.

"Councils have always supported the principle of adult social care reforms and want to deliver them effectively but have warned that underfunded reforms would have exacerbated significant ongoing financial and workforce pressures."

Other measures affecting councils include an increase in the National Living Wage, an extension of the Household Support Fund in England, and an additional £4.6 billion for schools.

The LGA is calling for some of the latter funding to be allocated to councils, to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

● See p10 for more on the Autumn Statement

Social care 'in gridlock'

The health and care system in England is gridlocked and unable to operate effectively, according to inspectors.

The Care Quality Commission's (CQC's) annual assessment of the sector has found that most people are still receiving good care when they can access it – but that too often they are not able to get the care they need in the first place.

Health and care staff want to provide good, safe care but are struggling to do so, and more are leaving than ever before.

Providers are finding it increasingly challenging to recruit,

resulting in "alarmingly high vacancy rates which have a direct impact on people's care".

Without action now, staff retention will continue to decline across health and care, increasing pressure on services, leading to worse outcomes for people and putting them at greater risk of harm, the report says.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "All of this will impact on the ability of people of all ages to stay well, to work and to live the life they want to lead.

"Urgent action is needed as



we approach winter to tackle the recruitment and retention crisis, including on staff pay, conditions, skills, training and development.

"And this then needs to be built on with long-term funding plans; a cycle of short-term injections of funding will not deliver the sustained change that is needed."

Although the Chancellor announced significant additional funding for social care in November's Autumn Statement (see p10), the amount falls far short of the £13 billion the LGA has calculated is needed.

● See p20 for more on social care workforce issues and the CQC

End crisis of unaccompanied children in hotels, urges LGA

The LGA has called on the Government to end the crisis of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children being placed in hotels.

It is urging government to work more closely with councils to help develop more placements for unaccompanied children so that they can be moved directly to their long-term homes.

Latest figures show that during the three months from July to September 2022, 1,322 children were housed by the Home Office in hotels, for an average of 16 days.

As of 19 October, 222 young people who have been accommodated in hotels were missing.

Councils have significant concerns over unaccompanied children being accommodated in hotels by the Home Office – often without informing the council beforehand – and are doing all they can to find suitable placements for these children.

Councils made 597 placements in the past six months for which data is available, compared with 136 in the same period the

previous year. This follows the National Transfer Scheme – which moves children from where they are first identified to care placements around the country – becoming mandatory for councils.

The LGA has also raised concerns over councils not being consulted or informed in advance about the use of hotels for asylum-seeking adults and children.

An LGA spokesperson said: “We must have better notice and better engagement locally and nationally with the Home Office and across government and are asking the Government to fix that immediately.

“We can only fix the system by working together to ensure there is sufficient and appropriate accommodation available across the UK.

“We are working with the Government to try to help develop much better communication, engagement and coordination of arrangements in the short term and to develop longer-term improvements to end the current crisis.”

More children seeking help with mental health

Latest figures show a record number of children with mental health problems were seen by social workers last year – an increase of more than a half in five years.

The LGA has called on the Government to adequately fund children's social care and meet the £1.6 billion cost pressure already in the system to help ensure that children are safe and families receive the support they need.

LGA analysis shows that councils spent more than £10.5 billion on children's social care in 2020/21, nearly 25 per cent more than the £8.5 billion spent in 2016/17.

This is because of record numbers of children in care and the increased complexity of some children's needs, including severe mental health needs that require more intensive support packages.

The LGA is also calling for additional

funding to provide the wraparound support increasingly needed by children, including community services, child and adolescent mental health services, and inpatient provision.

The LGA is concerned the current cost-of-living crisis will push more families into poverty, and more children will require support.

Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: “These alarming figures show the huge challenges facing children's social care and the urgent need to ensure that young people get the support they need, as soon as they need it.

“Councils are doing all they can but are buckling under significant funding pressures to ensure they can support children and their families.”

Housing standards letter sent to councils

All local authorities have been asked to review housing conditions in their area, following the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak as a result of mould in his family home.

Housing Secretary Michael Gove has written to council leaders and chief executives, highlighting the need to ensure rented properties in all sectors are of a decent standard.

In his letter, he urges councils to do “everything in their power” to prioritise the improvement of housing conditions for millions of private and social tenants.

Councils are being asked to supply local assessments of damp and mould issues, and the action that needs to be taken.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: “Councils fully support efforts to inspect homes and drive up standards in both the social housing and private rented sector, and want to work with government to ensure that the data capture is effective.

“A legally binding decent homes standard to improve conditions in the private rented sector is a positive step, but councils at present lack the flexibility to use licensing to full effect.

“Removing the requirement for Secretary of State approval for larger schemes would allow councils to regulate the private rented sector more effectively, and councils would benefit from better data with a national registration system of all landlords.”

The LGA continues to support councils to improve their housing management services and engagement with tenants and residents through the delivery of a social housing management peer challenge and promotion of best practice, as part of its sector-led improvement offer, see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/sector-support-offer



Children in care good practice 'not shared'

The Government has established "a proper approach" to assessing whether its new programmes will deliver better outcomes for children in the care system, according to MPs.

But the Department for Education (DfE) has "further to go to embed a culture of evaluation in social care" so that the opportunities to secure better outcomes for children are not lost when dedicated funding for innovation projects ends.

The DfE's £333 million Children's Social Care Innovation programme (CSIP) was intended to improve outcomes for children in the social care system and produce savings for taxpayers.

However, in a new report, the Commons' Public Accounts Committee says it "is not yet convinced the department's dissemination of learning from the programme is delivering widespread improvement".

Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "CSIP has been shown to decrease the rate of children in care in participating council areas, which highlights what councils can achieve when they are given additional funding.

"Therefore, it was disappointing that more than a third of councils did not receive any extra funding from the programme, leaving them unable to develop, or in some cases maintain, crucial services that can make a difference to the lives of children and families.

"Furthermore, it is vital the Government adequately funds children's social care and stands by its commitment to respond to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care by the end of this year so that we can get on with the job of reforming the system without further delay." ● See p26



Support for vulnerable adolescents

Gaps in knowledge and a lack of strategic approach mean the Government cannot yet say whether its plans to spend a further £2 billion will address the needs of families, vulnerable adolescents and children in the most effective way.

According to a new National Audit Office report, central government has a limited understanding of how different risk factors and characteristics combine to cause vulnerability, and limited knowledge of whether the same adolescents are known to, or are receiving support from, different local services – such as children's services, mental health and youth justice.

However, it has started to try to join up different data sets.

Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said:

"This report builds on the concerns raised by councils and the Independent Review of Children's Social Care around the need for far better join-up across government, working with councils, to support vulnerable adolescents.

"In particular, it is vital that we move away from the current system of fragmented and short-term funding pots and towards sustainable funding that allows for strategic, long-term planning and delivery of high-quality services.

"We also need government departments to work towards shared objectives to avoid local partners having to navigate complex or even competing requirements, and instead supports them to get on with providing young people with the help they need."

● See p19

Sexual health services 'at breaking point'

Local sexual health services are at breaking point as attendance has skyrocketed while funding has reduced, a new LGA report has warned.

Analysis by the LGA has found that there were more than four million consultations at sexual health services in 2021, a 16 per cent increase compared with 2020 and an increase of 36 per cent since 2013.

At the same time, more than £1 billion has been cut from councils' public health grant, resulting in a 17 per cent reduction in spending on STI testing, contraception and treatment over the past seven years.

Council-commissioned sexual health services also continue to play an important role in tackling the monkeypox outbreak, helping to identify the first cases of the infection as well as supporting the rollout of a successful vaccination campaign.

The LGA continues to call on the Government to reverse funding cuts

and provide long-term increases to manage the rise in demand, following an Autumn Statement in which public health was ignored (see p10).

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said it was "really encouraging" to see so many people taking their sexual and reproductive health seriously.

But he added: "Councils are facing a perfect storm of increased demand for services while at the same time continued cuts to their funding.

"This is unsustainable and risks a reversal in the encouraging fall in some STIs and potential increases in unwanted pregnancies.

"Inadequate prevention and early intervention increase overall costs to the health service. There can be no sustainable long-term solution to NHS pressures unless we have an equally sustainable solution for public health."

Cutting community courses 'could leave job vacancies unfilled'

Future teachers, carers and nurses could be held back from realising their potential if proposed cuts to community learning courses go ahead, the LGA has warned.

As part of its plans to upskill people for jobs, the Government has been consulting on reforms to the adult skills funding system which include increasing technical skills.

However, councils are concerned the proposals will curtail adult learning provision that supports health and wellbeing and helps build local communities.

Courses under threat include: family learning and healthy eating; helping residents manage their household budgets; studying English; and learning digital skills. GPs also use them as a social prescribing tool to help those experiencing loneliness and depression.

Many adults – including those with the lowest qualifications, low confidence, those out of work for some time, including for health

reasons, or wanting to change career – use these 'first steps' courses to engage in learning.

With dedicated support, many go on to further learning and to fill vacancies in shortage roles, including teaching, social care, and nursing.

Councils say the current plans, which focus activity solely on achieving employment for all learners, will have unintended consequences for the Government's ambition for growth, as it will reduce local options for people looking to increase their skills and manage life's challenges.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said: "Providing people with the means to upskill and increase their opportunities, including encouraging older people and those with little or no qualifications into work, will be ultimately how we boost growth, spread prosperity and help to level up the country."

● See p16 for more on adult skills



Government 'failing on promises' on net zero

The Government's commitment that the public sector should "lead by example" on the road to net zero is not being met, says a report from the Public Accounts Committee.

In the report, MPs are critical of the poor quality of emissions measuring and reporting across central government.

Responsibility for emissions reporting is split across three departments and the guidance issued is too vague, the committee says. This contributes to compliance on reporting standards being low across central government.

Despite the time and resources being committed by central government bodies, the committee is not convinced they, or the wider public sector, are using emissions data to drive decision-making.

Different parts of the public sector have been developing their own approaches to measuring and reporting their emissions, including the LGA's Greenhouse Gas Accounting tool that provides councils with a straightforward and consistent approach to calculate their own carbon baseline.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson, said: "It is vital the Government acts fast to give councils the policy and investment framework as well as the powers and resources to deliver on the projects and culture changes that will make a difference in local communities and help achieve net zero."

"Councils are rooted in their places where people live their lives and businesses do their business, and know their communities better than anyone else. This is why they are best placed to lead the way towards a net zero future."

● Green jobs, see p18

Funding to tackle rogue landlords

A £20 million fund aimed at strengthening the inspection of failing landlords and improving support for residents has been announced by the Government as part of its plan to drive up standards in supported housing.

The funding will support councils in cracking down on rogue landlords who seek to profit through benefit claims but fail to support vulnerable residents.

If landlords are found to be performing poorly, improvement must be shown and better accommodation must be provided, or landlords could face enforcement action, including fines of up to £30,000 or bans from operating.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "Everyone deserves a safe, decent, warm and affordable place to

live – this is critical to the health and wellbeing of communities.

"This funding will be a positive step in helping councils tackle rogue landlords. It is critical that new funding is sufficient to cover the cost of inspecting properties that are below the required standards.

"Councils do everything they can to tackle bad practice and are taking action, where required, to raise standards in the private rented sector.

"However, further funding and support is needed to raise standards in the private rented sector and councils could do more

if they were given the right tools, such as removing the requirement for Secretary of State approval for larger selective housing licensing schemes."

● See p9





Cllr Judi Billing

A leading light in the LGA's local government improvement work has passed away.

Labour Leader Sir Keir Starmer was among those from across the local government family and beyond to pay tribute to the "legendary" Cllr Judi Billing MBE, who died on 24 November.

Cllr Billing, 71, was a member of the LGA's People and Places Board and previously Deputy Chair of its Improvement and Innovation Board, and until this year also sat on the LGA Labour Group's Executive.

She worked across party lines in her board roles at the LGA to help councillors be effective and to improve local government.

She also worked as an officer at the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) for seven years, becoming Director of the Leadership Academy and then Head of Programmes.

A district councillor for 42 years, she was Executive Member for Community Engagement at North Herts Council and served as a Hertfordshire county councillor since 2013, where she was Leader of the Labour Group.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "It is with great sadness that we learned of Judi's passing. Judi was a remarkable person, who dedicated so much of her life to local government, as both an officer and a councillor.

"Her contribution to councillor development and leadership across local government is hard to overstate, and she was always willing to share her experience and expertise for the benefit of others.

"For many years, Judi worked tirelessly with us, and her huge contribution to helping councils improve services for the many people who rely upon them means she leaves a lasting legacy.

"On behalf of all of us across the sector, I offer my heartfelt condolences to Judi's family and friends. She will be very sadly missed."

Children's tooth extraction backlog fears

The number of children's teeth extractions carried out under general anaesthetic in hospital because of decay has tumbled to record lows, amid fears many are missing out on vital treatment.

The LGA said there was a drop of 55 per cent in the number of teeth extractions for those aged 0-19 during 2020/21 compared with the previous year, with around 35,000 fewer procedures taking place compared with previous years.

The data, published by the Office of Health Disparities and analysed by the LGA, also reveals that areas with high levels of deprivation have three times the number of tooth removals than those that are more affluent.

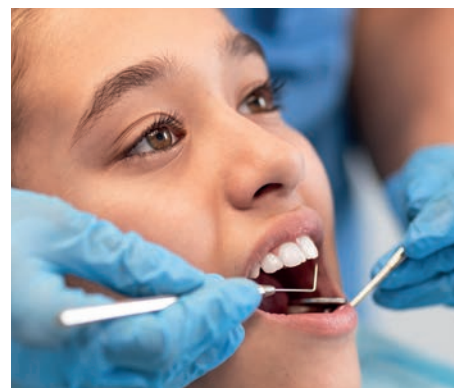
While councils are running good oral health programmes, they warn that the dramatic reduction in numbers indicates many procedures were delayed or cancelled because of the pandemic, with fewer people attending hospital.

Councils are calling for a full disclosure on waiting times for these procedures alongside a properly funded plan to address the backlog. They fear that tens of thousands of children are being left in pain

as well as facing difficulties learning, eating, talking and sleeping.

The LGA is also urging government to recommit to measures to combat obesity and diet-related ill health.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Treatment and prevention are two sides to the same coin. The Government must recommit to vital measures to combat childhood obesity and diet-related ill health, such as the sugar levy that has helped cut down the consumption of drinks with high sugar content."



Low take-up of broadband social tariffs

Households eligible for cheaper broadband deals are not taking up the offer over concerns about slow internet speeds, a survey by consumer group Which? has found.

Ofcom figures also show only 3.2 per cent or 136,000 of 4.2 million households on universal credit, who are entitled to the discounted social tariffs, have taken them up.

Other reasons given by those surveyed for not switching were not being able to leave a current contract, the deal not being good enough and lack of information, with six in 10 eligible households saying they were completely unaware social tariffs existed.

Cllr Mark Hawthorne, the LGA's Digital Connectivity Spokesperson, said: "Fast and reliable internet access is an everyday necessity for households, and it is essential

that providers play their part by offering and raising awareness of their social tariffs, which should include reasonable broadband speeds.

"The Government should also empower councils to place a local digital champion in every local area, who would be a central point of contact for government and broadband providers to help rollout gigabit-capable broadband as quickly as possible.

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

"With the right funding and powers, councils could use their local expertise to play a far greater role targeting those most in need, driving demand and providing the necessary skills to support the rollout."

The unaffordability of housing

The LGA has been raising councils' priorities in Parliament

Housing remains a top priority for councils, and the LGA continues to engage with the Government's programme to reform the housing sector and other parliamentary measures related to housing.

MPs recently debated the Government's 'A fairer private rented sector' White Paper. Ahead of the debate, we briefed MPs on councils' key asks for the private rented sector.

The LGA supports the proposal to ban section 21 'no-fault' evictions and recommendations for a legally binding and enforceable decent homes standard.

To address the unaffordability of housing – a significant cause of homelessness and evictions – we called for more investment in house building and reforms to the Right to Buy scheme, to allow councils to keep 100 per cent of receipts from homes sold to reinvest in housing delivery.

We also said councils wanted to see progress on the Renters' Reform Bill announced in May's Queen's Speech.

During the debate, LGA Vice-Presidents Natalie Elphicke MP (Con, Dover) and Florence Eshalomi MP (Lab, Vauxhall) highlighted the LGA's analysis, including our figures demonstrating that the ending of a private rented tenancy was a common reason for homelessness.

Meanwhile, the Government's Social Housing (Regulation) Bill had its second reading in the House of Commons in November. The Bill seeks to strengthen the Social Housing Regulator's role to increase tenants' rights and improve their ability to hold their landlord to account.

Ahead of the debate, we outlined our key messages to MPs, including calling on the Government to consider the potential implications of removing the cap on how much social landlords can be fined in the event of non-compliance with the regulator's orders, as fines on council landlords would, in effect, end



□ We called for more investment in house building and reforms to the Right to Buy scheme □

up being paid for, at least in part, out of tenants' rents, to the detriment of local service provision.

We also called for a proportionate, risk-based approach to inspection.

During the debate, Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary Michael Gove reminded the House that the Bill was one of several steps to address some of the lessons from the Grenfell tragedy, and that it was crucial to put right what went wrong.

The LGA will be submitting further written evidence during the committee stage of the Bill.

Ahead of a Westminster Hall debate on housing targets and the planning system, the LGA flagged the need for more affordable housing, with 100,000 new, socially rented homes a year required to meet current housing needs.

We also said planning departments should be adequately resourced, with the necessary powers to facilitate delivery, and urged the Government to bring forward its commitment to give

councils powers to incentivise developers to build housing more quickly.

During the debate, Gordon Henderson MP (Con, Sittingbourne and Sheppey) shared his council's belief that housing targets should be set at local and sub-regional levels, and reflect an area's ability to deliver them.

Finally, Parliamentarians considered the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Bill, a private members' bill introduced by LGA Vice-President Bob Blackman MP (Con, Harrow East). The Bill seeks to regulate provision of supported exempt accommodation and ensure council oversight and enforcement.

We said councils have long been concerned about the minority of exempt accommodation providers who fall short in their duties and that councils wanted to see a locally led, fully funded oversight and enforcement regime.

i To find out more about the LGA's parliamentary work, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament

The Autumn Statement

The 2022 Autumn Statement confirmed that budgets for each central government department will be maintained at least in line with those set in the 2021 Spending Review.

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt set out a number of fiscal measures and plans to stabilise public services with the aim of addressing the current economic uncertainty facing the country.

As the LGA flagged in a survey published ahead of his announcement, councils have been hit by additional cost pressures that were not included in their budgets this year – including pay pressures, energy price increases and uplifts in contract prices.

So, it was good to see the Chancellor use the Autumn Statement to act on the LGA's call to save local services from spiralling inflation, demand and cost pressures.

Key measures include: extra grant funding for social care and schools; deferment of adult social care reforms for two years; higher referendum limits for council tax increases; full compensation for business rates measures; a higher-than-anticipated social housing rent cap; a continued commitment to levelling up; extension of the Household Support Fund; and new devolution deals in Suffolk, Norfolk, Cornwall and the North East – see right for more details.

While the financial outlook for councils from 2023-25 now looks better than expected, additional cost pressures in the current financial year remain unmet. The LGA estimates these at around £2.4 billion.

Meanwhile, we continue to emphasise that council tax is not the solution to meeting long-term pressures on key public services, such as adult social care, child protection and homelessness prevention.

The continued model of relying on council tax-raising powers to increase

councils' core spending power is not sustainable or fair on local taxpayers or those who rely on council services.

Councils want to work with central government to develop a long-term strategy to deliver critical local services and growth more effectively. Alongside certainty of funding and greater investment, this also needs wider devolution, so local leaders have greater freedom from central government to take decisions on how to provide vital services in their communities.

● See p24

Social housing

- Rent rises will be capped at 7 per cent in 2023/24.

The LGA says: "Councils recognise the pressures on tenants, exacerbated by the rising cost of living and inflation, and support moves to keep rents as low as possible. Councils will still have to cope with the additional financial costs."

Devolution and levelling up

- The second round of the Levelling Up Fund will allocate at least £1.7 billion to priority local infrastructure projects.
- The Government reiterated its commitment to devolution, with new deals expected in Suffolk, Cornwall, Norfolk and the North East.
- Ministers are exploring the potential to provide single departmental-style settlements for devolved areas (see p24).

The LGA says: "Devolution now needs to be extended further, faster and to more places. It offers the best value for money and is the right response to fiscal constraints... councils will deliver better outcomes than a centralised system characterised by funding silos and local duplication of effort."



Household Support Fund

- £1 billion to extend the Household Support Fund in England over 2023/24.

The LGA says: "The LGA, councils and partners have consistently called for local welfare funding to be put on a more sustainable footing. This commitment to a full year of funding, alongside essential measures in the mainstream benefit system, recognises the strength of local delivery."



This is a summary of the LGA's briefing on the Autumn Statement, which provides more details on these and many other measures set out by the Chancellor. It can be read in full at www.local.gov.uk/parliament. **The LGA's annual finance conference takes place in-person on 10 January in London**, see www.local.gov.uk/events. **The Government's Autumn Statement is available in full** at www.gov.uk/government/publications/autumn-statement-2022-documents



Council tax

- Referendum limit for basic council tax rises up to 3 per cent.
 - Adult social care precept increased from 1 to 2 per cent.
- The LGA says: “No national tax is subject to referenda... residents are able to democratically hold their council to account through the ballot box. Council tax increases add an extra financial burden on already struggling households.”

Business rates

- £13.6 billion of targeted support over five years to support businesses following revaluation of business rates in April 2023.
- Business rates multipliers will be frozen in 2023/24 – described as a £9.3 billion tax cut over five years.
- Extension and increase in support for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses.
- £500 million over three years to protect small businesses facing loss of rates relief due to the revaluation.

The LGA says: “It is positive that the Government has provided assurance that local authorities will be fully compensated for these business rates measures, which... will provide support to a range of businesses affected by the cost-of-living crisis and the 2023 revaluation.”

Adult social care

- New grant funding of £2.7 billion over two years, partly allocated via the Better Care Fund and partly directly to councils.
- Option to raise social care council tax precept by 2 instead of 1 per cent.
- £3.2 billion over two years freed up by delay to charging reforms.

The LGA says: “Although the additional funding to adult social care is welcome, it falls significantly short of the £13 billion we have called for to address the pressures facing the service, including significant recruitment and retention problems. Councils have always supported the principle of adult social care reforms and want to deliver them effectively, but underfunded reforms would have exacerbated significant ongoing financial and workforce pressures.”

Public health

- An additional £6.6 billion over two years for the NHS.
- No announcement on an increase in public health grant, which has reduced by 24 per cent in real terms over the past decade.

The LGA says: “It is a false economy to continue to underfund public health services, given their role in increasing years of healthy life, tackling the growing burden of chronic diseases, supporting people back into employment, and preventing future pressure on health and care services.”

Children’s social care

- £3.2 billion of the funding announced for adult social care will be distributed through the Social Care Grant for adult and children’s services.

The LGA says: “The number of children in care has again reached record highs, so this additional investment is very welcome. However, we need to continue working with government towards a sustainable funding solution.”

Education and SEND

- £4.6 billion increase over two years in the core school budget.

The LGA says: “It is vital that a significant part of this additional funding is allocated to councils to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.”

Asylum and refugees

- £2.5 billion over two years to support Ukrainian and Afghan refugees.

The LGA says: “This should include a focus on securing housing and avoiding homelessness, alongside early confirmation of future funding for councils for their crucial role in helping people build new lives in their new communities.”

Health & care workforce

- Publication of an NHS workforce plan next year.
- Independent review into how integrated care boards can work with appropriate autonomy and accountability.

The LGA says: “A comprehensive workforce plan must extend to the non-NHS health workforce commissioned or directly employed by local councils... and to the adult social care workforce and those in the community and voluntary sector without whose support the NHS would not be able to operate.”



Councillor **Abi Brown** is
Chair of the LGA's Improvement
and Innovation Board

Practitioner perspective

The local government family is
here to support all councils

We've all been there. There is an issue in your council, and you need some help so as not to reinvent the wheel. You know someone else out there in local government land can help, but where to start?

As they used to say at the beginning of that iconic 1980s TV show: "If you have a problem, if no-one else can help, and if you can find them, maybe you can hire the (LGA) Team..."

Well, the good news is that the LGA gives you access to a crack team of local government experts, with a range of backgrounds and experiences, just waiting to swing into action to support good people in need of a little help – whether it's through a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC), mentoring, or training and development.

The recent LGA Member Peer Conference in Sheffield saw more than 100 peers gather to share advice and keep abreast of the ever-changing landscape around local government.

Along with sessions for new peers and on how the CPC is evolving to match current challenges, we had the opportunity to hear from Max Caller CBE, Government Strategic Adviser, and Pat Ritchie CBE, former Chief Executive of Newcastle City Council, on the challenges facing local government – and how the LGA's sector-led improvement (SLI) offer is uniquely placed to contribute towards addressing them.

We were also joined by Stephen Baker, Chief Executive of East Suffolk Council, who shared his experiences as an officer peer, including how to have difficult conversations and get the best from CPCs.

As the local government landscape evolves, our needs as councils continue to change. Keeping the SLI offer fresh and relevant is key to ensuring we can help members in the most appropriate ways.

While a CPC isn't an assessment or inspection, it is increasingly part of government's performance framework, and a good way of testing how well your council knows itself and its development.

The principles of SLI remain the same – that while you're responsible for your council's performance and are accountable to your local residents, the local government family shares an interest in maintaining our overall performance, and the LGA stands ready to help you with the tools and support to drive improvement.

As part of this, member peers from all four LGA political groups are available to help with every aspect of this, and our offer is continually being developed to match the needs of the sector.

CPCs provide a useful measure of progress and performance with comprehensive feedback and follow-on support, delivered by an in-person team of officer and member peers who provide a practitioner perspective and act as 'critical friends'.

A recent poll of councils found that 98 per cent felt their CPC had positively impacted their performance.

There is also an ongoing need to refresh our pool of member peers, both by encouraging peers to keep their training and profiles up to date, but also expanding the pool of those who put themselves forward as peers.

LGA political group officers can provide more details around not just the requirements but also the opportunities for peers in taking part, alongside the support available.

Meanwhile, plans for next year's Member Peer Conference to be bigger and even better are already under way. As the A-Team's Hannibal Smith used to say: "I love it when a plan comes together!"



The LGA Member Peer Conference in Sheffield



To find out more about the **LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge programme**, please visit www.local.gov.uk/our-support/council-improvement-and-peer-support



Councillors **Marianne Overton** and **Shabir Pandor** are Co-Chairs of the LGA's Civility in Public Life Steering Group



Tackling abuse against councillors

The LGA has produced a new toolkit as part of its Debate Not Hate campaign



Cllr Georgia Gould, Leader of Camden Council and Chair of London Councils, signs the LGA's call for #DebateNotHate

Back in June, the LGA launched its Debate Not Hate campaign against the intimidation of councillors, amid growing concerns about rising levels of abuse and toxic debate and their impact on our local democratic processes.

Since its launch and publication of the accompanying report, 'Debate Not Hate: the impact of abuse on local democracy', work has progressed on producing a toolkit to help individual councillors and councils get involved in the campaign.

As identified in the report, respondents to an LGA 'call for evidence' of abuse and intimidation identified a growing normalisation of abuse against politicians, leading to

increased volume and frequency of abuse, particularly online.

This was supported by findings in the LGA's recent 'National census of local authority councillors 2022', where seven in 10 councillors reported experiencing abuse and intimidation within the past 12 months, and one in 10 experienced abuse frequently.

Now the LGA is calling for all councillors and councils to be united in tackling the increasing level of abuse and intimidation aimed at local politicians with the help of the LGA's new toolkit and assets.

The toolkit offers a range of resources and actions that individual councillors and councils can use to support the campaign. These include incorporating digital assets

across council channels, and using our template press release to raise awareness of the issue.

Councils can publicly declare their support for the campaign using media resources to promote healthy debate to the public, councillors and candidates in the lead-up to local elections and in council meetings.

We're also encouraging all councillors, government leaders, and relevant partners – such as the police, social media companies and political parties – to join the 400 signatories so far and sign up to our public statement. This calls on the Government to work with local authorities and partners to set up a working group to develop and implement an action plan to address the abuse of local politicians and concerns about their safety.

Councillors are as much a part of the community as those they represent, and they should not expect to be subjected to any form of abuse because of their position.

It's vital that we come together and push for concrete action to protect current councillors and ensure potential future councillors feel safe to stand for election.

Local democracy is the cornerstone of communities across the country and anyone, regardless of their background or political affiliation, should feel safe and proud to represent their community.

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Photography

Debate Not Hate resources

- You can access the Debate Not Hate campaign toolkit and assets at www.local.gov.uk/debate-not-hate-campaign-toolkit
- Keep up to date on the work of this campaign by signing up for our dedicated newsletter at bit.ly/3NXChfW
- Find out more about the Debate Not Hate campaign at www.local.gov.uk/debate-not-hate, where you can share your personal experiences of abuse and intimidation
- The LGA is offering free workshops for councillors on personal safety and handling abuse, see bit.ly/3V8uZKQ

Celebrating towns and driving growth across the UK

It's time to talk about towns. Towns where most of us live, work, and raise our families. Towns where hard-working, local enterprises are delivering consistently for communities and incubating new ideas.

Despite the huge social and economic importance of our towns, we know they are often overlooked in favour of cities when it comes to national policy making. Our work – together with the Social Market Foundation and the British Retail Consortium – aims to change that.

In a first-of-its-kind report, we have leveraged Visa data insights to better understand the economic vitality of our towns and how it can be bolstered.

An analysis of more than 900 towns across five economic indicators – economic prosperity, people & skills, infrastructure, businesses environment and sustainability – found remarkable characteristics which would not only benefit local businesses and people, but also the whole UK economy.

We learned that towns are far from homogenous; there is no one-size-fits-all solution to unlocking growth; and that local solutions are key to future prosperity. It's local people who need to have a say on their town's future. It is the responsibility of service providers, such as Visa, to help facilitate this conversation.

That's why, in partnership with the BRC, we've now launched Let's Celebrate Towns (<https://www.visa.co.uk/campaign/talk-of-the-town/>), a nationwide competition



celebrating the hundreds of towns helping local businesses and communities to thrive. It will share leading examples of how towns are adapting to new challenges and opportunities in a rapidly changing environment and will actively encourage the adoption of best practices across the nation.

Winning towns will receive a cash prize to help fund a local community initiative, as well as a learning and development package for local businesses. They will be selected by a panel of independent judges looking at a range of factors including business environment, infrastructure, people and skills, sustainability, and economic prosperity.

We're committed to playing our part in realising the economic potential of our towns. Every day, we strive to uplift everyone, everywhere by being the best way to pay and be paid. At the heart of all we do is delivering an innovative, reliable, and secure payments network for businesses and consumers, no matter where they are.

Let's Celebrate Towns – part of our broader Talk of the Town initiative – is where the Visa mission and ambition for supporting local economies to prosper come together. We are doing this because we know that when towns do well, everyone can benefit.

This means more businesses on the high street, more jobs for local people, greater market access that contributes to home-grown growth, and more opportunities for communities to set up local initiatives that serve local people.

In the next phase of Talk of the Town, we will focus on convening businesses, policymakers and trade associations, to help understand the specific requirements for navigating the economic headwinds ahead and develop a policy roadmap for unlocking the potential of towns.



i If you would be interested in contributing, please get in touch via talkofthetown@visa.com

Is England set up to **level up**?

Levelling up is about good governance as well as growth, according to the LGA's latest Smith Square debate

Developing successful approaches to levelling up and tackling deeply entrenched problems is going to take long-term commitment and policy stability from government, an audience has heard in the first of a series of new Smith Square debates.

Hosted by the LGA at its Westminster offices, the hybrid event brought together key thinkers looking at the big picture for local government, with a focus on levelling up. It asked whether England has the right systems and funding in place to meet the wide-ranging and systemic challenges facing the country.

Chaired by Guardian journalist Nosheen Iqbal, the panel consisted of Akash Paun, Senior Fellow at the Institute for Government (IfG); Nick King, Founder and Managing Director of Henham Strategy; and Philip McCann, Professor of Urban

and Regional Economics at Alliance Manchester Business School at the University of Manchester.

Mr Paun, who leads the IfG's work programme on devolution, said the Levelling Up White Paper published in February set out some fairly sensible principles – longevity, coordination, local empowerment, better use of data and transparency – and were a refreshing alternative to constant policy churn and separate regional initiatives over the past 40 years.

He said levelling up had become part of the discourse, with widespread recognition of what the problem is and a developing consensus that tackling it is going to need sustained cross-government action over the long term, as well as enhanced local leadership, devolution and the necessary resources.

Mr King, who was Chief of Staff to former Communities Secretary Sajid Javid, said the success of the

Government's 12 levelling up missions, as set out in the White Paper, depended on the fundamental role of the private sector in helping to unleash and support growth across the country, together with the absolute need for devolution, which he said should be "much wider, deeper, more consistently offered and applied".

He cited the Tees Valley Mayoralty and Greater Manchester Combined Authority as examples of levelling up in practice, with partnership at their heart and a sense of shared mission between local and central government.

Mr King added that devolution was currently far too patchwork, and this was harming good governance, as well as the country's future economic potential; the Government needs to have confidence in local leaders by no longer micromanaging them and leaving them to deliver.

Speaking via Zoom, Prof McCann told the audience that inequalities in the UK are among the largest in the world, with huge underperformance of large urban areas outside of the south of England.

He said data and evidence showed countries that are more devolved grow more evenly internally, as more parts of the country share in and contribute to national productivity and prosperity.

Prof McCann added that our governance system is fragile because it is ill-designed for the challenges we face, with no bottom-up drivers of knowledge – strengthening the case for devolution.

He said "the centre learns nothing from the local because a top-down, pyramid system maximises the degrees of separation between citizens and central government, and causes congestion at the top for influence", and that levelling up was not just about geography of growth, but also about good governance.



The LGA's Smith Square offices in Westminster



The LGA's **Levelling Up Locally Inquiry** is looking at how levelling up might better strengthen local areas, see www.local.gov.uk/levelling-local-inquiry

All councils should be empowered to coordinate adult education and skills in their areas

Improving adult skills is vital to individuals looking to make progress at work and to the productive growth of the economy.

To evidence this need and the contribution of local government to delivering inclusive, economically relevant and place-based training, the LGA commissioned a study by the Heseltine Institute at the University of Liverpool.

It found that, despite progressive improvement in qualification levels over the past two decades, the UK still has a major challenge of low skills, which constrains the productivity of the national economy and is a barrier to individual earnings and progression in work.

Some 6.7 million working-age adults in the UK have no, or low (level 1) qualifications – equivalent to grades 3, 2, 1 or D, E, F, G at GCSE.

This represents 16.2 per cent of adults aged 16 to 64, rising to 21.9 per cent of those aged 50 to 64.

Additionally, the UK has a digital skills deficit, with an estimated 10 million adults lacking essential computer skills. Yet some 82 per cent of all job openings advertised online require competence in basic computer software skills, such as Microsoft Office, while roles in digital technology are growing at three times the rate of all jobs in the wider economy.

Improvement in adult skill levels has been hampered by a sustained decline in funding and participation in adult learning over the past decade.



Councillor **Kevin Bentley** is Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board and Mayor **Marvin Rees** is Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board



Delivering place-based adult skills

Despite additional investment in apprenticeship programmes, the net effect is a fall in adult funding of 35 per cent, or £1.9 billion in real terms, between 2009/10 and 2019/20.

In particular, the adult education budget, which funds basic skills and community level engagement in learning, declined by 52 per cent between 2011/12 and 2019/20.

Transformation of the skills system is vital to realising the Government's ambitions for a high-skill, high-wage internationalised economy.

The Heseltine Institute report calls for actions across three themes: re-engineering the skills system; mobilising adult skills; and transforming in-work learning.

Like councils, it wants to see the devolution of funding, delivery and control of adult learning across England.

Combined authorities already have significant powers in this area that are helping them join up and target provision at the skills needed locally and at the local people vulnerable to being left behind by changing labour markets and automation.

The report and the LGA's Work Local programme propose that non-devolved councils in England should be given a new 'community skills' function to plan, commission and have oversight of all adult skills provision up to level 2 for their area, including Multiply, the Government's adult numeracy programme, and the adult education budget.

Other proposals include using local skills improvement plans (LSIPs) to bring employers' intelligence and advice into existing skills planning partnerships, more effective alignment

Liverpool City Region: test and learn

Using devolved adult education budget flexibilities, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) has supported a programme of 'test and learn' pilots to drive innovation in the delivery of adult skills.

For example, through the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), 'test and learn' has been used to fund introductory courses for people interested

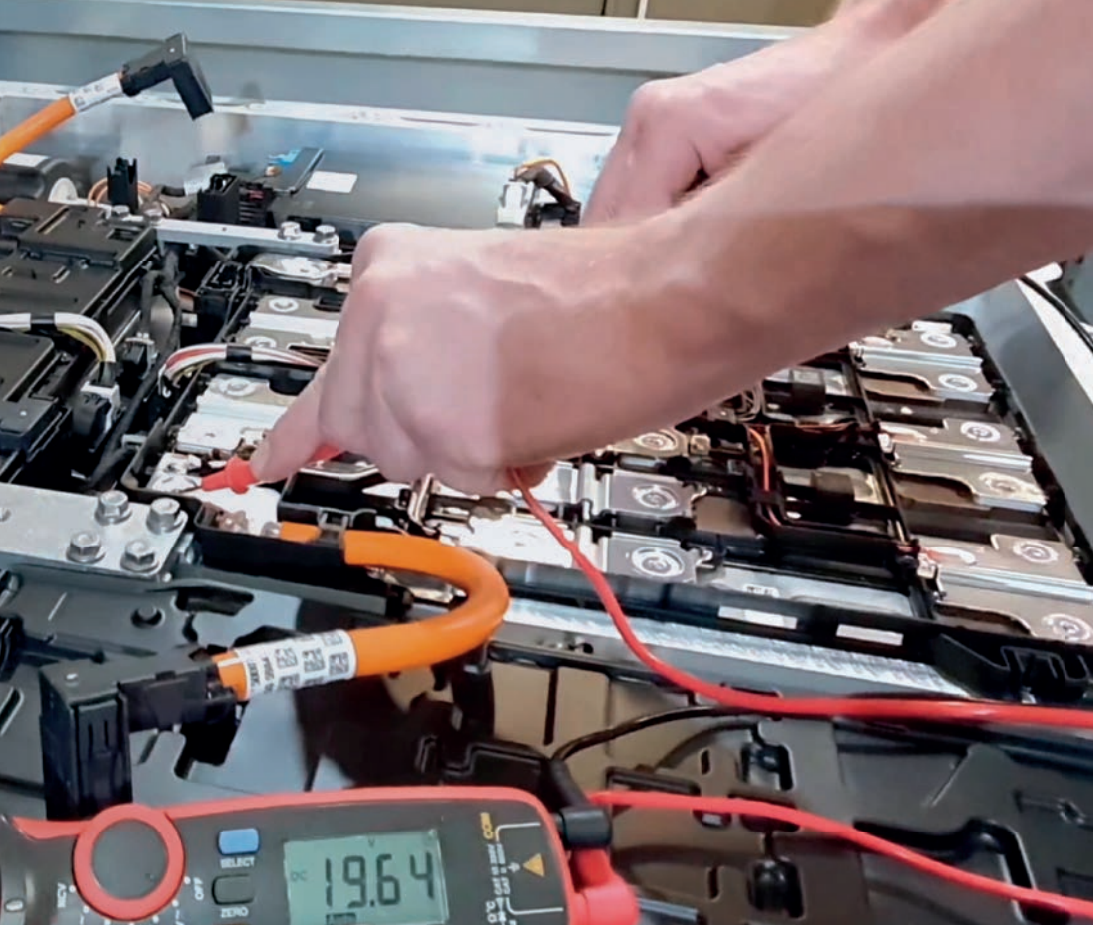
in careers as maternity support workers.

Building on materials developed by the WEA with Liverpool Women's Hospital that create progression pathways for maternity support workers towards level 3 qualifications, the pilot has funded level 1 and level 2 courses for local residents.

A small group of eight learners – all unemployed women – were involved in

the pilot that was delivered over 25 hours, with the primary aim to increase the number of black, Asian and ethnic minority entrants into maternity support roles.

The project has demonstrated the effectiveness of providing short courses within a progression pathway to help individuals gain confidence and the foundations needed to develop in-work skills.



Kirklees Council: adult and community learning

Kirklees Council has re-organised its adult and community learning services to provide a clearer focus on adult skills and local growth, and to deliver what residents actually need to access and progress in employment.

Working with West Yorkshire Combined Authority, the changes have created space to focus on strategic aspects of skills delivery, in anticipation of continuing devolution of powers and resources from central government.

While there is a strong higher and further education offer in Kirklees, there is also a significant skills gap, with 13 per cent of residents having no qualifications.

The council's adult and community learning offer is diversifying access points into learning, blending on-line and in-person training to provide a strong foundation for progression, with short 'first steps' provision deployed experimentally to assess new forms of delivery to meet the needs of learner groups.

A key value for Kirklees is to move away from outputs focused on 'any job', to support residents to achieve quality outcomes in their working lives, to improve earnings and make the most of employment opportunities locally and in the region.

By integrating the employment and skills programming, and having a focus on employer demand in key sectors, Kirklees is working to increase social mobility and unlock the ambitions of residents.

of training and support for small and medium-sized businesses to drive the productive use of skills, and, of course, more funding.

Across the three themes of this study, building stronger partnerships is the basis for accelerating improvements in adult skills levels.

Local and national government need to collaborate at political and official level to hardwire 'place' and local democratic accountability into the design, commissioning, funding and delivery of skills and employment interventions, as advocated in the LGA's report, 'Work Local: unlocking talent to level up'.

Councils and devolved authorities are already working hard on this agenda (see case studies below and right). Empowering local government to do more would allow Whitehall to re-focus its resources where it can be most effective and reduce the need for a large national level bureaucracy.



'Place-based adult skills and training'; the Heseltine Institute's study, is available in full at www.local.gov.uk/publications. **To find out more about the LGA's Work Local programme for devolved and integrated employment and skills provision**, please visit www.local.gov.uk/work-local

Essex County Council: electric vehicle training

Responding to employer demand for up-to-date training in electric vehicle maintenance, Essex County Council secured £100,000 from the first round of the UK Community Renewal Fund to establish a new electric vehicle centre at Harlow College.

The funding will allow the college to offer free training to 50 locally employed mechanics over the next two years, expand the curriculum to offer Institute of the Motor Industry training at level 2 and 3, update the knowledge of college

tutors and engage with local employers.

The pilot was developed in the context of Harlow needing up to 14,000 battery electric vehicles (EVs) by 2030.

It is intended to encourage greater employer investment in green skills and provide evidence of the importance of training for business performance.

The investment contributes to the council's climate change goals, getting ahead of the anticipated high demand in maintenance skills that will emerge with increased ownership of electric vehicles.

Green jobs

Councils need a skilled workforce to deliver climate change commitments and sustainable local growth



Councillor **Kevin Bentley** is Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board and Mayor **Marvin Rees** is Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board



As the pressures of rising costs and the impact of climate change become more visible for our communities, it is even more important that local government is enabled to deliver net zero.

As place leaders, we are greening our economies by putting net zero and sustainability at the heart of local approaches to levelling up and economic growth.

This can only be achieved if we have the skilled workforce to deliver these ambitions.

Not only will it help achieve net zero, but this will also provide an opportunity to create good employment prospects, which will contribute to the wider levelling up agenda.

The LGA's People and Places and City Region Boards have been focusing on the development of green jobs and skills, starting with retrofit, insulation and other energy efficiency measures needed to help reduce energy consumption and bring down energy bills.

We know there is an opportunity to accelerate retrofit to deliver the long-term decarbonisation effort and stimulate economic growth, both locally and nationally.

However, this can only be achieved if national government enables local government by providing councils with the time and resources to develop the partnerships, private funding and careers pathways needed to grow the retrofit workforce.

There is a whole range of other green jobs that have the potential to level up our communities.

For example, LGA research has shown that there is the potential for 694,000 jobs in the low-carbon and renewable energy economy by 2030, rising to 1.1 million by 2050.

These jobs will be key to energy security in the future.

There are other ambitions – such as for land management, food production and sustainable tourism – which provide great opportunities to deliver jobs that achieve local growth, nature restoration and net-zero ambitions.

Local government cannot do this alone. It is essential that there is a strengthening of the partnership

between national and local government, as councils can help bring together local educational and training establishments, regulators and businesses.

Top-down approaches have not worked, as they do not fully consider local decision-making and local labour market conditions.

We welcome the formation of the Government's cross-departmental Green Jobs Delivery Group, which will gather evidence from a range of organisations to develop government policy on green jobs.

Local government has been included in that conversation, which provides the sector with an opportunity to influence national policy. The LGA is supporting the group's local government representatives to maximise the diverse voice of the sector and ensure issues relating to capability and capacity are made effectively.

We know through our wider net-zero work that there is a lot of innovative practice already under way in local government to develop green jobs and skills.

We would like to hear about any additional innovative practices that local authorities may be undertaking, to help inform the working of the Green Jobs Delivery Group.

If you would like to contribute any ideas or case studies, please get in touch with paul.green@local.gov.uk.



For more on the **LGA's research on green jobs**, please visit www.local.gov.uk/local-green-jobs-accelerating-sustainable-economic-recovery



Celebrating youth work

Youth work is one of many local services that cannot be cut twice



Councillor **Louise Gittins** is Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board

Last month, we celebrated Youth Work Week, which provided an opportunity to share the positive impact that youth work has on young people.

The LGA held a webinar for local authorities and their partners on what works for developing and delivering youth work.

During this webinar, we heard from Durham Council and the North East Youth network, Harrow Council and Young Harrow Foundation, and Hull City Council.

Attendees had the opportunity to come together to share the challenges they are facing, but also to celebrate positive practice.

We heard about the positive

results of collaborative work with the voluntary sector, with each agency having its own role in supporting children and young people in the community.

However, youth work is one of many local services that cannot be cut twice.

Youth services have seen a significant decline over the past 10 years and councils will continue to face difficult decisions about services because of rising demand and funding pressures.

Youth workers were essential during the pandemic, showing the difference they make to young people and their families through targeted outreach work, coordinating service responses and visiting young people.

Youth work remains incredibly



For updated council case studies on youth work during the pandemic, please visit www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus. **To find out more about the LGA's work in this area**, see www.local.gov.uk/topics/children-and-young-people/youth-services

important in supporting young people to reach their potential, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and young people who are growing up in challenging circumstances.

There has been some progress from central government, with expectations set out in the youth guarantee and the delivery of the Youth Investment Fund.

However, we were disappointed that this was reduced from £500 million to £378 million: that shortfall could have paid for 1,200 full-time youth and community support workers within councils over three years.

Investment into the recruitment and training of qualified youth workers has declined, with fewer than 300 students a year taking up courses that should have an annual intake of up to 2,000 undergraduates.

To deliver the youth guarantee, and if greater expectations are placed on local authorities, we must have appropriately qualified staff.

Although national funding cuts have had a significant impact on councils' ability to directly deliver youth provision, they continue to play an essential role in setting out the vision and direction of youth services in their area.

As conveners of place, working with local partners – such as schools, health partners and the voluntary and community sector, plus young people themselves – local authorities have an essential role.

If we are to understand where we need to go next, we need to know what is currently available – which is why the National Youth Agency is asking all commissioners and providers of youth services to record their services in its national census (see www.youthworkone.org.uk).

We want to ensure there is an accurate picture of local authority provision, so please make sure you have updated your information online.

Our ultimate ambition is for all young people to have access to the services they need, want and deserve.

To achieve this, the LGA continues to call on government for sustainable funding, which will be essential to ensure all councils can provide a strong, long-term youth offer.

Alongside this, we want to see ministers bring forward a cross-government strategy that puts children and young people's outcomes at the heart of all policymaking, with a specific plan for youth services and the youth workforce.

Supporting the social care workforce

The challenge facing providers and employers



David James is Head of Adult Social Care Policy at the Care Quality Commission

In our recent 'State of Care' report, the Care Quality Commission highlighted that the health and care system is gridlocked and unable to operate effectively.

The report shows that one of the challenges adult social care providers face is around workforce.

Every good employer wants to support its workforce to feel valued, involved and able to thrive, knowing they are empowered and enabled to make a difference through their work.

We believe some of the foundations for achieving this are staff wellbeing, workforce planning, positive and inclusive leadership, and culture.

Our new 'single assessment framework' – the basis for our assessments of all registered providers, local authorities and integrated care systems, happening from 2023 – uses a set of 'quality statements', setting out what high-quality, person-centred care looks like and what people should expect from providers, commissioners and system leaders.

We will be seeking to improve how we hear from staff, as well as from people who use services. This will be invaluable evidence to help us assess individual providers and local systems more widely.

There are also specific quality statements on workforce within our new framework. For example, when we look at whether a service is safe, we'll include a quality statement on safe and effective staffing.

We'll expect providers to demonstrate how they make sure



Every good employer wants to support its workforce

there are enough qualified, skilled and experienced people, who receive effective support, supervision and development to provide safe care that meets people's individual needs.

Another example is, when we explore how caring a service is, we'll include a specific quality statement on workforce wellbeing and enablement.

Our teams will be looking at how a provider demonstrates that they care about and promote the wellbeing of their staff, supporting them to always deliver person-centred care.

We hope providers will be

encouraged to think about their workforce and how best to support not only their professional development, but also their health and wellbeing.

In local authority assessments, we will consider how the authority understands the needs of the local population, how it ensures people have access to a diverse range of safe, effective, high-quality support options to meet their care and support needs, and how it supports services to be sustainable, affordable and provide continuity for people.

In doing this, we will consider how the local authority understands its current and future workforce needs and how it works in partnership with care



See www.cqc.org.uk for the CQC's single assessment framework and 'State of care' report

providers, including personal assistants and other agencies, to develop, support and promote a capable and effective workforce.

We'll use available data from our assessments of providers in the local area, including scores on safe staffing and workforce wellbeing, to help shape and inform our conversations with the local authority.

We'll be interested in how they develop, support and promote a capable and effective workforce in order to deliver care provision, integration and continuity.

In addition, we'll explore other issues that impact on how the local authority workforce – including social workers, occupational therapists and others – feel about where they work.

These include things such as whether there's a stable leadership team with clear roles and accountabilities; whether equality, human rights and diversity principles are embedded throughout the values, cultures and leadership behaviours; and how leadership gets feedback from staff – and learns from it to inform their strategy, areas for improvement, and decision-making.

Health check for social care professionals

'The standards for employers of social workers in England', developed by the sector and hosted by the LGA, set out the key components of 'whole systems' approaches to supporting social workers and the shared core expectations of employers.

They can help to improve recruitment and retention by providing the right conditions for social workers and other key professionals, such as occupational therapists, to thrive.

The eight standards include effective workforce planning, safe workloads and case allocation, wellbeing, continuing professional development, and strategic partnerships.

Councils can use the standards to help develop a working environment where social work practice and social workers can flourish, in turn supporting recruitment and retention and enhancing their own reputation as a service provider and employer.

Each year, the LGA surveys thousands of social workers in an annual 'health check', to find out what they think about their working environment, what factors influence them to remain engaged with their work and to stay with their organisations, and how well employers are delivering the standards.

This year's survey is open now until the end of January 2023, so please ensure your council emails the LGA at workforce@local.gov.uk to sign up for it, and encourage your registered social workers, mental health practitioners, occupational therapists and social care teams to take part.

The LGA will give you an anonymised breakdown of your council's results, providing invaluable local information that can inform your improvement work and help you plan and manage recruitment and retention, staff morale, training needs and other issues.

As well as offering a way for you to assess and review your council's social work performance against the standards, the results will also help support the LGA's lobbying work.



For more information about the LGA's support for social workers, and to register your council for the 2022 Health Check, please visit www.local.gov.uk/social-workers or email workforce@local.gov.uk



LGA Annual Culture, Tourism and Sport Conference 2023 (Hybrid)

Wednesday 15 March 2023, London

The process of recovery from COVID-19 is firmly underway with levelling up, economic recovery and reducing inequalities at the heart of council recovery plans. But addressing the effects of the pandemic on communities and places, as well as the increasing impact of rises in the cost of living, will require a radical rethink of how services are viewed, valued and delivered.

Join us to hear from councils who are taking innovative approaches and from experts on the challenges facing the sector and how we can best harness the power of culture, tourism and sport to support our communities and places.

Book now: www.local.gov.uk/events



Pay-as-you-drive

Car clubs can reduce vehicle use and pollution



Ross Williams is a Senior Consultant at transport consultancy Steer

Car clubs provide access to vehicles on a trip-by-trip basis and are increasingly available at locations across the UK, alongside other shared mobility services including shared bikes and shared e-scooters.

They allow people to share a car, giving individual drivers and households the benefits of access to a car while reducing – and often removing – the need and expense of owning and

maintaining their own private vehicle.

Car clubs positively contribute to transport decarbonisation goals through lower car ownership, reduced car use and less-polluting vehicles.

They are an important shared mobility solution for local authorities to embrace in their local transport plans.

This is particularly pertinent to building on the momentum of the UN climate change conferences (COP26 and COP27), and to delivering on the UK Government's commitment to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2050.

Car clubs provide access to shared vehicles to club members on a pay-as-you-drive basis. There are different types of car club models, but each involve access to a vehicle that is paid for by the minute, hour or day depending on the

pricing structure. Tariffs are typically all inclusive (fuel is included in some tariffs, others charge a rate per mile).

According to CoMoUK, the national charity for shared transport, there are currently more than 780,000 car club members with nearly 5,000 vehicles in the UK. Total membership has increased threefold since 2016.

If introduced with the right market conditions and appropriate local authority support, car clubs can provide multiple benefits.

For example, CoMoUK highlights through research with car club users that:

- one car club car in the UK removes up to 20 private cars off the road
- car club vehicles are cleaner than the private fleet with 100 per cent of publicly available car club cars compliant with low emission zones
- battery electric vehicles form a growing part of car club fleets (currently 12 per cent, compared with 1 per cent of private vehicles).

With increasing living costs, car clubs can provide a timely relief to the financial burden of private car ownership.

Car club members avoid the full cost of repairs, maintenance, depreciation, insurance, fuel, tax, servicing and parking.

Research also suggests car club members tend to then increase their sustainable and active travel journeys after signing up, particularly in urban environments, with walking, cycling and public transport fulfilling shorter journeys previously undertaken by a private car.

Councils can take a range of measures to promote and support car clubs and ensure these benefits are optimised. These include:

- procurement approaches to allow car clubs to be introduced in sufficient quantity
- permit pricing to assist with initial financial sustainability
- facilitating parking provision (either marked bays or permits across the local authority)
- providing sufficient charging infrastructure when introducing electric car club vehicles.

Car clubs also need policy support in transport plans and political buy-in and promotion, along with backing from local stakeholders and residents themselves.

Steer is developing a report for the LGA that will explore these benefits and considerations in more detail, and which will be published on the LGA's website in due course (see www.local.gov.uk).

Car clubs can provide a timely relief to the financial burden of private car ownership



COMMENT

Levelling up must be locally led



Andrew Lewer MP MBE (Con) is Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Devolution and an LGA Vice-President

The mission of levelling up is a noble one and one attracting broad political consensus, at least in a generalised sense.

Ensuring those areas that have felt left behind make progress and are able to achieve their ambitions is likely to be at the centre of any government's decision-making.

The Levelling Up White Paper was, therefore, a deeply significant policy moment in this Government's history. At the very least, it could be described as a useful roadmap for the Government's future plans.

Sadly, the deterioration of the public finances and a broader atmosphere of political uncertainty, together with a feeling of running out of time, have led many to wonder whether levelling up will continue to be such a priority.

Rarely in this nation's modern history has politics been so febrile, but have we now – at least in a narrow Westminster sense – reached a calmer period?

Having indicated a likely departure

from frontline politics, we now find Michael Gove back as Secretary of State for Levelling Up.

As someone with real drive and ambition for levelling up, it was timely that the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Devolution, which I chair, launched its latest levelling up report just as he returned to office.

What better time to produce guidance from a respected source on how to proceed? It should be even more welcome than usual.

Our report into the Levelling Up White Paper focuses on the themes of leadership, representation and accountability.

Our previous report, 'Levelling up devo', suggested a range of recommendations that required a profound cultural shift in attitude towards local government from Westminster. Some of those themes have appeared again in our new report, as it was clear that there is still some way to go in this regard.

The appetite for new devolution deals is very clear, and we know from our evidence that where they are right they can be transformative.

The Government must, however, listen more to local communities about what they want and what works for them.

There is a compelling case for arguing that, for levelling up to truly succeed, it must be locally led. There is strong case for it to draw on the deep well of skills and experience in our existing local government structures.

Through local leadership and a clear view of where we are going, we can significantly improve outcomes across the board from areas that have previously felt left behind.

During my time in politics, I have served at town, district, county, regional, national and European level.

My certainty that progress towards a greater degree of local decision-making is not only desirable but necessary has been reaffirmed by this enlightening inquiry and our report. There is a hunger and enthusiasm at a local level to make this process work; some of our most passionate evidence came from local leaders such as Mayor Andy Burnham, of Greater Manchester, and Stoke-on-Trent's Leader Cllr Abi Brown, and our nation has a deep well of expertise that is waiting to be tapped.

It is my sincere hope that the Government will adopt our recommendations and be bold in pushing forward with a levelling up agenda that works for every part of our country.



The Devolution APPG's report on the Levelling Up White Paper can be read in full at www.connectpa.co.uk/devolution-appg



Twelve years of economic failure



Councillor **Shaun Davies** is Leader of the LGA's Labour Group

Just 55 days after the disastrous mini-budget, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt delivered his Autumn Statement, which confirmed that working people will pay the price of Tory incompetence.

The chaos of recent months has seen three Prime Ministers, four Chancellors and unprecedented economic chaos.

Yet the Autumn Statement is neither the result of the mini-budget nor Putin's war in Ukraine, but 12 years of Conservative economic failure.

There have been 24 tax rises this Parliament, making the tax burden the highest since World War II.

Living standards will be lower at the end of this Parliament than at the start, with the UK forecast to have the

lowest growth in the G7 over the next two years.

PM Rishi Sunak's model of high tax and low growth results in stagnant wages and broken public services.

Mr Hunt announced that councils can increase council tax by up to 5 per cent a year. But increases in a regressive tax based on out-of-date property values will never be the solution to meeting the long-term financial pressures facing local government.

The ability to raise council tax is unrelated to need, with more prosperous areas with the least demand for services able to raise the most: a 5 per cent increase raises £85 per household in Richmond upon Thames compared with only £39 in Manchester.

The latest increase will only heighten disparities between councils, worsening regional inequalities (though perhaps this is Rishi Sunak's aim, given he boasted about his record of removing funding from

deprived areas to give to wealthier areas?).

More importantly though, council tax places an extra financial burden on households already struggling with the cost-of-living crisis and hits the poorest the hardest.

The Conservatives have slashed funding for councils and are now forcing council tax payers to pick up the bill.

Neither local government nor working people can afford more years of Tory incompetence. We need a fresh start and a government on the side of working people: so instead of yet another Budget, how about we have a General Election instead?

"Council tax increases place an extra financial burden on households already struggling with the cost-of-living crisis"



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

Devolution – driving local growth

Financial turbulence is as damaging to local government as it is to businesses, and rising costs and inflation are eating away at both council and household budgets.

While I am pleased that November's Autumn Statement provided some relief for councils and the vital services they provide – such as social care, planning, leisure centres, waste and recycling collection – we continue to face an uncertain future.

The Chancellor gave us additional council tax raising powers, more money for social care and schools, a higher cap on social housing rents, and set out spending plans for the next two years.

But to tackle local challenges and to drive local growth and levelling up, we need a sustainable and long-term financial settlement. We also need devolution.

So, it was positive to see the Chancellor recommit to the Government's levelling up and devolution agenda, with



announcements on a second round of the Levelling Up Fund and several new devolution deals.

These deals will give greater powers, freedoms and funding to those local communities. Devolution now needs to be extended further, faster and to more places, so every area of England can secure the deal that works for them and their residents by the end of decade.

These deals must be based on a transfer of power to areas from Whitehall. It is also important that councils of all sizes are engaged in the devolution process.

It is also very welcome that the

Government is exploring a single department-type settlement to areas with 'trailblazer' deals.

Devolution offers the best value for money and is the right response to fiscal constraints. Given the tools and resources to tailor spending to local needs and opportunities, councils will deliver better outcomes than a centralised system characterised by funding silos and local duplication of effort.

The LGA has long called for an end to the fragmentation of government funding, and to bring budgets together in a place. This policy could benefit all local places.



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

Time for a period of political stability

This is my last first column of 2022, and it is fair to say that in terms of both domestic and international events it has been an extremely busy and turbulent year.

Indeed, having used my previous column to congratulate Liz Truss on her election as Conservative Party Leader and Prime Minister, I now want to take the opportunity to belatedly do likewise for Rishi Sunak.

From his appointment as a junior minister at the then Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to his time as Chancellor, Rishi has always been a strong and consistent supporter of local government, and I look forward to continuing to work with him on a range of issues.

I would also like to offer belated congratulations to Michael Gove on his return as our Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Having worked well with Michael over the past year, Conservative Group colleagues and I have been delighted to again have positive engagement with him and his ministerial team, including new appointments Lucy Frazer and Felicity Buchan.

"Both domestically and internationally, it has been an extremely busy and turbulent year"

I would also like to thank Simon Clarke for his engagement with us during his time as Secretary of State and to wish him and Paul Scully, who has moved to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, all the very best for the future.

After a difficult 12 months, my festive hope is for a period of political stability in 2023, and I would like to wish **first** readers a very merry Christmas and a happy new year.



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

Voter ID will stop people voting

The UK Government has announced a multimillion-pound plan that would stop people from voting in elections unless they can show photo identification (ID).

This is a terrible move that will badly impact voters who are from underrepresented and marginalised backgrounds.

Please don't tell me it's not about voter suppression when, for example, an over-60's Oyster travel card will be considered ID and an over-18's will not.

"Voter fraud is not a big enough problem to justify disenfranchising millions of people"

The argument against voter ID is clear: with very few cases of voter fraud, photo ID verification on a national scale would see many more people left out of the decision-making process.

The numbers make this obvious. Currently, 3.5 million people do not have access to photo ID and 11 million people do not have a passport or driving licence.

A government minister admitted there were just six cases of voter fraud at the last election. It's not a big enough problem to justify disenfranchising millions of people.

Trials in just 10 UK areas, in 2019, saw 2,000 voters turned away from the polling station. On a national scale, this would see many left out from voting – most likely those who do not traditionally engage in politics or do not have a form of photo ID.

Our government should be helping people to get involved in politics, and having their voices heard at the ballot box, not making the situation worse. Everyone deserves their right to vote, regardless of whether they possess a form of photo ID or not.



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

Mitigating the Truss mini-budget

The Chancellor's Autumn Statement has attempted to mitigate the disastrous Liz Truss Budget, adding £8.5 billion to health, social care and schools' budgets in 2024/25, but leaving other departments to absorb the impact of higher inflation.

It was a win, however, for the LGA's Independent Group that ministers have increased the windfall tax on energy companies – an issue on which we have been lobbying.

The Government also announced an additional £6.6 billion for a new Energy Efficiency Taskforce, and the LGA needs to be at its heart, shaping sensible solutions.

We haven't agreed with the Government on introducing a limit on social rents, because these decisions should be taken at a local level and will be part of longer investment plans for local social housing stock.

As the Independent Group has highlighted previously, we need to invest in energy efficiency to reduce fuel bills, where any 'savings' on social rents will be outstripped.

"We need to invest in energy efficiency to reduce fuel bills"

I was invited to speak at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP27) as a spokesperson for the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

I was pleased to give four speeches and exchanged plans with ministers and community leaders from around the world, stressing the importance of local government being at the forefront of climate action.

The draft agreement was changed to include local government as part of the solution.

It was encouraging to meet dedicated leaders, including from some of the world's major polluters, keen to engage in what needs to be done urgently to save our planet.

Ensuring every child has a loving family



Dr Carol Homden
is Chief Executive
Officer of Coram

Over the past five decades, Coram has been dedicated to the task of putting children first and ensuring, where they need it, that they can grow up in safe, loving, adoptive families.

Registered as a voluntary adoption agency in 1972, Coram (formerly The Foundling Hospital) has built on its centuries of experience as the birthplace of children's social care.

It has championed progressive practice from LGBT+ adoption and early permanence (enabling infants to be matched with foster carers who could go on to adopt them) to national matching practice and pioneering therapeutic and parenting programmes.

Our recent report, 'A lifetime of difference', features the development of the early permanence quality mark, now being developed into practice standards in



partnership with regional adoption agency leaders; the impact of adoption activity days, which have enabled the matching of 1,400 children with families over the past 10 years; co-production with young people; and distinctive cross-sector partnerships.

Coram's work as the first voluntary

adoption agency to deliver local authority adoption services began in 2006, with a ground-breaking 10-year partnership with the London Borough of Harrow.

During the first three years, there was a cost benefit of £400,000 – a significant sum given the small scale of the service

Listening to children in care

Coram Voice and the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford have published a report summarising the views of thousands of children and young people in care.

The report, '10,000 voices: the views of children in care on their well-being', summarises responses collected through the largest survey of its kind from children and young people aged four to 18 between 2016 and 2021.

It found that 83 per cent of children and young people felt that life is getting better. Compared with the general population of children and young people, a higher proportion reported feeling safe where they live, like school and felt that the adults they live with took an interest in their education.

However, a larger proportion of young people in care (aged 11-18 years) rated themselves as having 'low life

satisfaction' compared with young people in the general population and, by the teenage years, one in six reported low overall wellbeing.

The report also found that girls had lower wellbeing than boys, and that a greater proportion of young people living in residential care or supported accommodation reported lower wellbeing than in foster and kinship care.

The report makes five key recommendations to improve policy and practice:

- listen to children in care's views – councils should have mechanisms for capturing how children in care feel about their lives
- children's rights and co-production – co-produce service improvements with children to address issues they say

would make their lives better

- make life good – services should have mechanisms to address the areas that children and young people say are important to them
- build trust – the care system must put trusting relationships at its heart
- recognise difference – professionals should be mindful of the wellbeing concerns of different groups of children in care.

There is also a resource bank with local authority case studies – see coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/



You can read a longer version of this article on first online, see www.local.gov.uk/first



placing 10 to 12 children each year – with a high proportion securing early permanence placements.

The distinctive approach was taken up by the London Borough of Redbridge, City of London and, later, Thurrock Council, and two five-year programmes with Kent and Cambridgeshire both won ‘excellence in practice’ awards.

Such partnerships were the precursor to the development of regional adoption agencies, as part of the Government’s drive to speed up the matching of children with families.

In 2019, Coram became the first voluntary adoption agency to deliver a regional adoption agency, Coram Ambitious for Adoption, in partnership with local authorities across London. This exceptional partnership working was recognised by Ofsted in its ‘outstanding’ judgement in 2021.

At the heart of the work remains the fundamental shared commitment to children, like Anthony, adopted at 20 months into a family of mixed heritage.

Now a 21-year-old postgraduate student, who has taken part in fundraising events for Coram, he speaks out for other adopted young people.

He says: “I wanted to give back to an

organisation that gave me the life I – and all other children in care – should’ve had: a life with a loving family that enabled me to fulfil my potential.”

In our 50th anniversary year, we celebrate this lifetime of difference while recognising the challenges for all parts of the sector.

Children face unprecedented challenges in securing a stable loving home and in accessing support they need, especially in their teenage years.

Despite the availability of approved adopters, data shows that the number of children adopted in England has fallen by more than 13 per cent in the past two years and 23 per cent in the past four years – at the very time when more children need timely permanent homes.

It is only by working together across regional and voluntary sectors, and supporting early permanence, co-production and lifelong links, that we can ensure that every child has the loving family they need for life.



To find out more and read ‘A lifetime of difference’ in full, please visit coramadoption.org.uk



LGA Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition

7- 8 March 2023,
Crowne Plaza Hotel, Nottingham

The Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition is a key event in the conference calendar for senior fire officers and members of fire and rescue authorities and provides an opportunity to meet in-person and discuss developments impacting the fire and rescue sector.

We will hear from a range of expert speakers about some of the key issues facing fire and rescue services and consider how we can meet these challenges.

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



Collaborating to support homeless veterans



Yvonne Castle is Chair of Greater Manchester Housing Providers' Armed Forces Steering Group and Chief Executive Officer of Johnnie Johnson Housing

Greater Manchester Housing Providers (GMHP) is a partnership of 24 housing providers working together to make a positive difference to people and communities across our city region.

Bringing together collective experience and expertise, the group works to find lasting solutions to housing challenges – including supporting homeless veterans.

Set up in 2018, the group is the first of its kind in the country to support former service personnel and their families in this way.

Through our armed forces workstream, the partnership is committed to helping veterans in practical ways, including access to housing and advice, employment opportunities, and wrap-around support after they leave the armed forces and beyond.

In the past year, the workstream has:

- worked to increase the number of partners asking people whether they have served in the armed forces, to better identify veterans needing support
- increased housing provision for veterans, including exploring veteran-specific funding and development
- collaborated across Greater Manchester to share knowledge and opportunities, as well as a consistent approach
- established strong partnerships with local authority armed forces leads
- created an Armed Forces Champions network, to bring colleagues from the frontline together to share ideas and best practice
- developed an e-learning package to equip colleagues to deal with the

complexities that veterans face during transition to civilian life

- increased the number of partners signing the Armed Forces Covenant, to make sure that veterans don't face disadvantage
- offered employment interviews for all armed forces applicants who fulfil the minimum criteria for posts
- contributed to the Veterans' Gateway, an online portal to signpost veterans and their families to support and advice, including mental wellbeing, finances and housing.

GMHP is proud to offer a wide range of support to serving and former members of the armed forces and their families.

By working collectively, we ensure a consistent approach across the city region, and share ideas and opportunities to continually improve the support we offer to veterans.



For more about GMHP, please visit www.gmhousing.co.uk. The **No Homeless Veterans toolkit** is a free resource for local authorities and housing providers produced by the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation (Stoll), Homeless Link and the National Housing Federation – see www.stoll.org.uk/no-homeless-veterans/resources. It contains a self-audit tool, guidance and best practice, with tailored versions for England and Wales.

Warming up winter



Tracey Robbins is Head of UK Delivery at Eden Project Communities

The Big Lunch, an Eden Project initiative, has been bringing neighbours together annually each June since 2009.

This year was an exceptional one, as the Big Jubilee Lunch 2022 was part of the official Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

A massive 17.2 million people took part – one in four of the UK population – making it the biggest Big Lunch in the campaign's 14-year history.

The celebrations varied from small get-togethers in gardens and driveways to huge, traditional street parties and festivals, bringing whole villages and towns together – made possible thanks to local authorities backing the initiative, facilitating events and minimising red tape and costs for road closures.

As with previous years, research following the event was incredibly positive, with 79 per cent of attendees saying it made them feel closer to their neighbours and 73 per cent more likely to go on to further community activities.

Another 77 per cent agreed that the Big Lunch is important to connect communities during the cost-of-living crisis and 11.7 million people said it made them feel less lonely.

These last two statistics, and the increasingly tough times in which we're living, have spurred Eden Project Communities, working with the London Borough of Newham, to launch the Big Lunch at Christmas.

Alongside Christmas light switch-ons, Newham is hosting a week-long Big Christmas Lunch, where council events will take place alongside lunches hosted by organisations across the borough.

Together, we are calling on others to take part in the Big Lunch at Christmas, and to consider hosting their own events



to share some much-needed festive cheer this year.

It could be as simple as sharing mince pies on the doorstep with neighbours or setting an extra place at your dinner table for someone living alone, through to larger community or council-led events providing food and warm spaces.

As with the Big Lunch in June, you can use the Eden Project's free guide, posters, invitations and resources – see www.edenprojectcommunities.com/the-big-lunch-at-christmas – and help share a little friendship, food and festive fun this winter.

The critical lack of affordable homes



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

North Yorkshire can lay claim to being one of the most desirable places to live in the country, from its rolling Dales to the bleak beauty of its moorlands and the breathtaking coastal scenery.

But with that comes a huge demand for second homes, as thousands of people seek to sample life in the county without moving here permanently.

North Yorkshire County Council is acutely aware of the impact this can have on local communities, and that is why we have taken the bold move to introduce a 100 per cent premium for council tax bills on second homes.

This is not about persecuting the owners of these second homes, but decisive action must be taken to

address the affordable housing crisis in North Yorkshire.

Many local people simply cannot realise the dream of owning their own home as they have been priced out of the housing market.

House prices in the Yorkshire Dales, for instance, are about a third higher than the county's average. The average cost of a property in the Dales is nearly £400,000, while the weekly wage in North Yorkshire is just over £530.



With the proposed scheme to introduce the council tax premium, we hope that some second homes will be brought back into use for local communities.

But for those owners who keep their properties as second homes, the premium is set to provide a multi-million-pound boost to finance key council priorities, including a central aim to use the funding to help introduce more housing in areas particularly affected by the affordability crisis.

The landmark independent North Yorkshire Rural Commission, which was established by the county council in 2019 to tackle a host of issues affecting the countryside, highlighted the affordable housing crisis as among the greatest challenges to resolve.

And that is why we are taking such bold and decisive action to tackle the issue, and ultimately attempt to provide local people with the opportunity to remain in the communities they cherish so much.



For more on the North Yorkshire Rural Commission, please see **first** 663 and www.northyorks.gov.uk/north-yorkshire-rural-commission

Making alleys amazing



Andy Preston (Ind) is Elected Mayor of Middlesbrough Council

A significant proportion of the older housing in central Middlesbrough consists of traditional terraces, and they remain the close-knit and vibrant communities they've always been.

But in common with their counterparts up and down the country they also have their challenges – in particular, the alleyways that separate individual rows and which can become magnets for anti-social behaviour, vandalism and fly-tipping.

The installation of secure alley gates in recent years – with access restricted to individual households – has gone some way to tackling the problem.

But the single most amazing transformation has been brought about by the creativity, passion and local pride of the residents themselves.

Not content with simply securing their

alleyways, they've turned them into colourful communal gardens and meeting spaces that have gained national attention.

More than 20 alleys around the town have been given visually striking makeovers, and there are more in the pipeline.

Projects to date range from clean-ups to colourful hanging baskets and planters, wooden benches and bird houses, and even striking murals created by residents and local artists.

One fabulous image showing the newly created oasis of calm behind Longford Street in the town centre has been viewed by more than 200,000 people on social media, and when the same image was shared on Twitter by one of our local housing associations it racked up more than 13,000 likes.

We're not unique of course, but I've had messages from politicians in places hundreds of miles away asking how we got the scheme going.

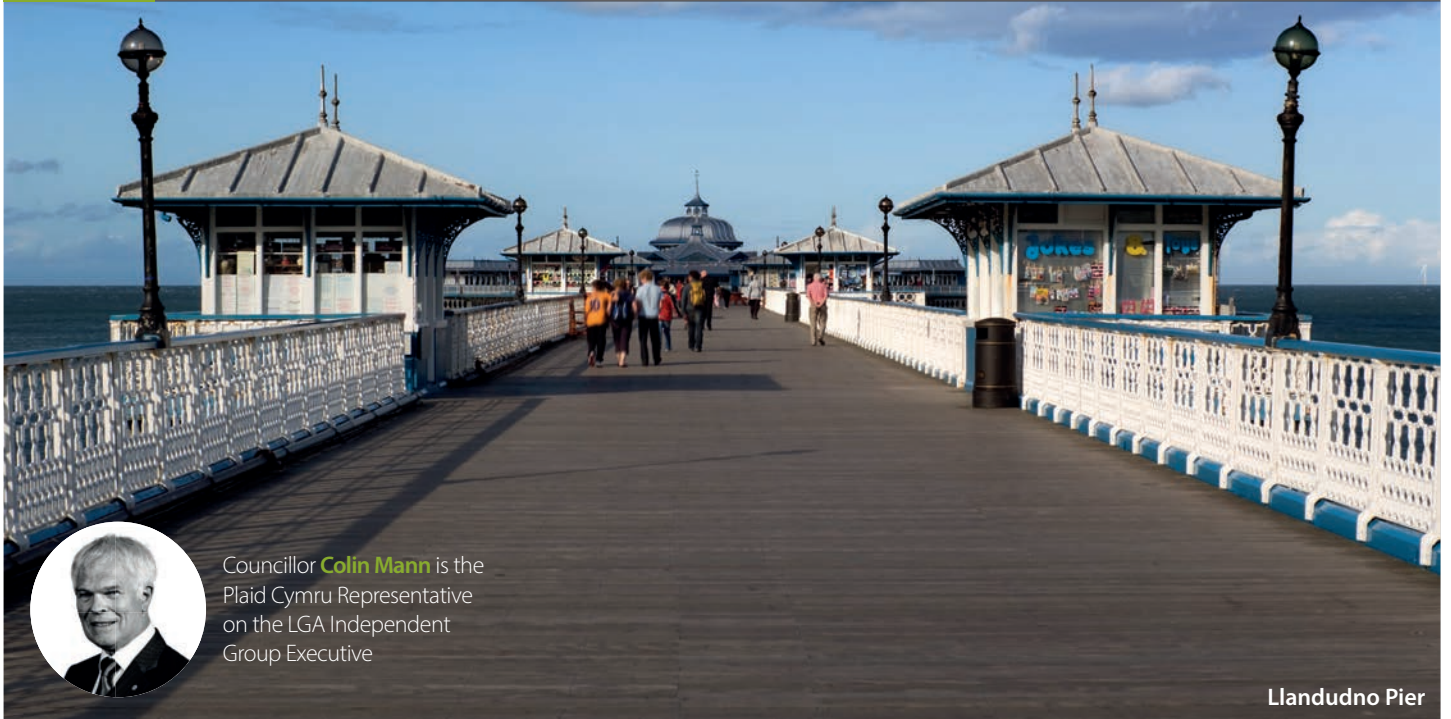
It's important to stress that the council can't take the credit – that's down to the passionate local people who work tirelessly to create places of which they can be truly proud.

We learned that we don't just go in and do it – the residents do it themselves and we help them with resources, maybe a little money and other forms of support.

It's all about empowering them, helping to build and strengthen communities in the process. The results really do speak for themselves.



Middlesbrough's Longford Street alley, 'liked' more than 13,000 times on Twitter



Councillor **Colin Mann** is the Plaid Cymru Representative on the LGA Independent Group Executive

Llandudno Pier

Gweithredu dros Cymru: making a difference

Plaid Cymru – the Party of Wales – returned to Llandudno in Conwy County Borough Council for its annual conference, held in October.

Plaid holds cabinet positions on Conwy council: the party also leads four Welsh councils, has cabinet positions in eight, and has 13 Members of the Senedd.

Addressing the conference, Plaid Leader Adam Price MS launched what he described as a “radical” People’s Plan – slashing energy prices, freezing rents and providing affordable public transport.

He called for a return to the £1,277 a year fuel price cap, an immediate universal credit uplift of £25, and a commitment to raising benefits in line with inflation. There was also a need to ban housing evictions this coming winter.

Mr Price spoke about the party’s ambitions and asked the obvious question: “Can we make a worse job of running Wales than those in control in Westminster?”

“No, it would be impossible! We need ‘Made in Wales’ solutions rather than relying on a broken Westminster system.”

Gweithredu dros Cymru (Making a difference) was not just a Plaid election slogan at the May 2022 Welsh local elections. It is a pledge to the people of Wales that has been reinforced by the 2021 Cooperation Agreement between

the Welsh Government and Plaid, which sets out 46 policy priorities embedded in the government’s programme.

One of the highlights of the agreement is the provision of free school meals for primary pupils, a scheme that Labour had voted against until the agreement was signed. Plaid is also looking to extend this scheme to secondary school pupils.

Elsewhere at conference, delegates welcomed the First Minister Designate of Northern Ireland, Michelle O’Neill, who called for the re-introduction of democratic government and the importance of all parties respecting the Good Friday Agreement.

Motions were passed on the need for affordable housing, the advantages of a universal basic income, and the implications of fuel poverty, among others.

Also debated were the future of hydrogen energy, a call for a victims’ commissioner for Wales, the climate and nature emergency, Wales in Europe, and the country’s fiscal future.

Clr Llinos Medi Huws, Leader of Ynys Môn (Anglesey) Council emphasised the importance of local government services.

She related the impact of local government to a young boy going to school where all the services he benefited from during the day were provided by the

council. How serious would the consequences be if these services were not available?

The Welsh LGA hosted a discussion on bereavement issues, addressed by council leaders and chaired by Llŷr Huws Gruffydd MS.

Councillor Marianne Overton, Leader of the LGA’s Independent Group, also addressed Plaid’s Councillors’ Association’s AGM (Plaid Cymru and the Green Party are members of the LGA’s Independent Group).

Plaid Cymru and the Wales Green Party also announced the creation of a Future Cymru Forum to grow the case for independence. There will be a detailed shared programme to research and set out economic, social and environmental policies.

Closing the conference, Plaid’s Westminster Leader, Liz Saville Roberts MP, mentioned the chaos at Westminster and compared Liz Truss’s tenure as Prime Minister to the gestation period of a ferret – 44 days against 42!

She also predicted that an independent Wales would rejoin the European Union.



See www.partyof.wales for more information about **Plaid Cymru**, and www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent to find out about the **LGA’s Independent Group**

ELECTIONS

Turnovers, defeats and split decisions



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



Sixteen of the latest batch of 35 councillor vacancies (46 per cent) saw a seat change hands. Strangely, given the current state of national politics, a quarter of turnovers brought Conservative victories.

The party suffers in general, though, having lost 54 per cent of its by-election defences during 2022 – defeats surpassed only by 1994 (69 per cent of seats lost)

and 1985 (56 per cent). Labour made seven gains from the Conservatives, averaging a 13 per cent swing. Most impressive was Broadland's Thorpe St Andrew North West, where Calix Eden overcame a 27 per cent Conservative majority.

Blackburn and Darwen's Conservatives were faced with a difficult task in defending Darwen South. Labour cut their majority when finishing second last May and succeeded this time.

Voting is close in Blackpool's Greenlands ward with a few votes often separating second from third in the two-member ward. In 2019, just 16 votes gave

the Conservatives the second seat. Labour won this time despite no change in its vote share as the Conservative vote went Liberal Democrat.

Last year was the only time in 20 years that a Conservative had won Burnley's Rosehill with Burnley Wood ward. The formbook suggested a Liberal Democrat win, but instead it was Labour, albeit by just nine votes.

The Liberal Democrats gained two seats from the Conservatives.

Guildford's Tillingbourne ward elected a Conservative and a Green with a Liberal Democrat placed last in 2019. Green hopes of taking both seats disappeared after a Liberal Democrat campaign that brought a 35-point increase in vote share.

The win in Wiltshire's Salisbury St Paul's ward, where the Liberal Democrat ran a close second in 2021, was made easier when the Greens chose not to contest the vacancy. A Liberal Democrat defeat in Kingston's Green Lane and St James ward saw Yvonne Treacy, who lost last May, take the seat for Kingston Independent Residents' Group (KIRG).

Another Conservative defeat, to an Independent in Nottinghamshire, meant total losses of 10 seats and seven held. However, the party did make four election gains of its own.

The first was Epping Forest's Waltham Abbey South West ward, a vacancy prompted by the disqualification of Green councillor Dave Plummer, who had a surprise victory in 2019 in the Conservative-dominated ward.

And in Leicester's North Evington ward, Labour slipped to third place, behind Conservative and Green candidates, with a high turnout of 45 per cent.

Liberal Democrats lost seats to the Conservatives with local issues possibly costing them crucial votes in one of the contests.

Last May, South Cambridgeshire's Longstanton ward narrowly elected two Liberal Democrats who then both resigned citing personal reasons.

The Conservative campaign opposed proposals for a congestion charge in nearby Cambridge. Voting produced a split decision with the Liberal Democrats failing to keep both seats by 33 votes.

Local by-elections

Blackburn with Darwen, Darwen South

LAB GAIN FROM CON
0.6% over Con Turnout 19.9%

Blackpool, Greenlands

LAB GAIN FROM CON
2.8% over Con Turnout 23.1%

Braintree, Braintree South

LAB GAIN FROM CON
6.7% over Con Turnout 17.4%

Broadland, Thorpe St Andrew North West

LAB GAIN FROM CON
13.6% over Con Turnout 27.9%

Burnley, Rosehill with Burnley Wood

LAB GAIN FROM CON
1.0% over Lib Dem Turnout 20.6%

Derbyshire, Long Eaton

LAB GAIN FROM CON
17.6% over Con Turnout 22.8%

East Devon, Newton Poppleford and Harpford

IND GAIN FROM IND EDA
47.7% over Lab Turnout 46.1%

Epping Forest, Waltham Abbey South West

CON GAIN FROM GREEN
10.4% over Green Turnout 14.2%

Fareham, Portchester East

CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM
1.0% over Lib Dem Turnout 28.7%

Guildford, Tillingbourne

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
25.1% over Con Turnout 32.0%

Kingston Upon Thames, Green Lane & St James

KIRG GAIN FROM LIB DEM
11.3% over Lib Dem Turnout 40.2%

Leicester, North Evington

CON GAIN FROM LAB
23.8% over Green Turnout 44.9%

Lichfield, Chasetown

LAB GAIN FROM CON
46.5% over Con Turnout 13.3%

Nottinghamshire, Eastwood

IND GAIN FROM CON
1.4% over Lab Turnout 30.3%

South Cambridgeshire, Longstanton

CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM/ LIB DEM HELD
0.4% over Con Turnout 31.9%

Wiltshire, Salisbury St Paul's

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
46.3% over Lab Turnout 33%

i Only seats where there was a change of political control are shown here. For more details on other recent and previous results, please visit www.lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections

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