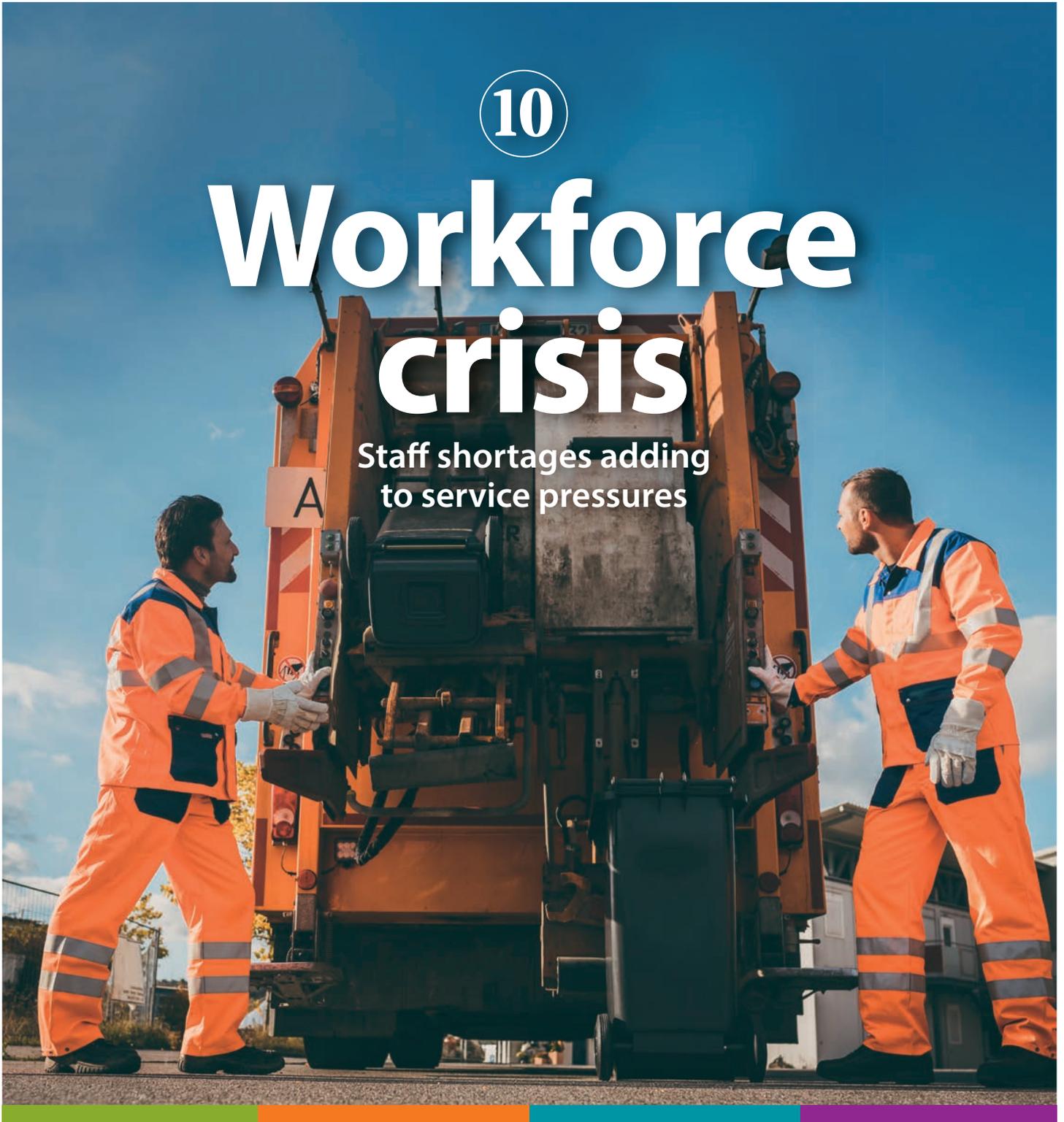


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Recruitment and retention

Nine out of 10 councils are struggling to find and keep the staff they need to run vital local services – from adult social care and children’s services, to planning and building safety.

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Elsewhere in this month’s **first**, we mark Children’s Mental Health Week (p16), National Apprenticeship Week (p18) and LGBT+ History Month (p20), and take a look at ‘Mission zero’, the independent review of net zero from former Energy Minister Chris Skidmore (p15).

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The LGA, the Association of Directors of Social Services and NHS Confederation recently published their own joint vision for a high-quality and sustainable health and care system (p12).

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Cllr James Jamieson
is LGA Chairman



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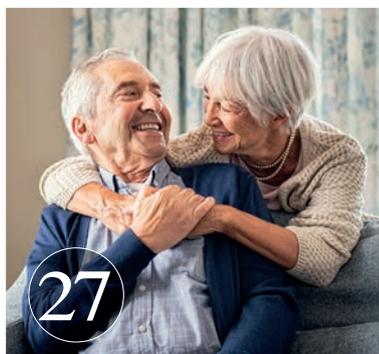
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Government 'must engage with councils' on care

Small allocations of funding and placing blame on social care are not the solution to tackling delays in discharging patients from hospitals, according to local government leaders.

The LGA, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, and Solace, the membership network for local authority chief executives, have

jointly written to Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Steve Barclay asking the Government to engage urgently with councils and care sector partners to address the current delays in hospital discharges.

The letter highlights how crucial it is to end the narrative of social care being blamed for discharge delays when it is not

the primary reason for delay in the majority of cases. Much of the recent narrative on social care suggests that it exists solely to ease pressure on the NHS and is failing to do its job.

However, social care is an essential service in its own right and needs to be valued equally as highly as the NHS, says the letter.

Many people rely on social care to support them to live independent and fulfilling lives, and the continual focus on supporting the NHS – important though it is – places these vital services at risk.

Current pressures can only be addressed by collaborative working in every area between councils, the NHS and wider health and care providers, and a range of measures across systems.

The letter urges more engagement, saying councils must be included in discussions if workable solutions are to be found.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "A decade of consistent underfunding of social care and underinvestment in community health services has led us into this crisis, and it will not be fixed through tacked-on funding that fails to address any of the root causes of this situation.

"We have consistently said that £13 billion is needed for social care so that its many pressures can be addressed, and councils can deliver on all of their statutory duties.

"This is the level of investment needed to ensure people of all ages can live an equal life and reduce the need for hospital treatment in the first place."

● See p12

Call for ministers to 'recommit' to sugar levy

Councils are calling for the Government to recommit to the sugar levy, after the University of Cambridge published one of the first long-term studies into its effectiveness.

The research found that the tax, placed on sugary drinks, may have prevented more than

5,000 cases of obesity every year among girls in their final year of primary school.

The data found that the sugar tax seems to have had a measurable effect on older girls' obesity levels, leading to an 8 per cent drop in obesity in Year 6 – preventing 5,234

cases of obesity per year in this group alone.

Reductions were greatest (9 per cent) among girls whose schools were in deprived areas, where children are known to consume the largest amount of sugary drinks.

Councils are using the evidence from the study to call for the Government to recommit to the levy, after questions had been raised about its future, and to ensure investment is targeted at communities with the highest level of need.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's

Community Wellbeing Board said: "This compelling piece of evidence shows the impact the sugar levy has had on addressing rising levels of childhood obesity.

"Vital funds previously raised by the levy have been allocated towards measures to improve child health, such as breakfast clubs and additional sports and PE provision in schools.

"The Government should recommit to maintaining the levy and work with councils to ensure that it is delivered effectively in local communities and targeted to the areas that really need it the most."

Levelling up funding 'should be evidence-led'

More than 100 communities have been awarded a share of £2.1 billion from the second round of the Government's flagship Levelling Up Fund.

The scheme aims to create jobs and boost economic growth across the UK, as well as increase people's pride in their local areas.

Successful projects include the Eden Project North visitor attraction in Morecambe, a new AI campus in Blackpool, a new rail link in Cornwall, and a major regeneration scheme in Gateshead.

Of the latest round, £672 million will be used to develop better transport links, £821 million to kick-start community regeneration and £594 million to restore local heritage sites.

This follows the allocation of £1.7 billion to 105 projects from the first round in 2021.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said the funding will give those councils that were successful the ability to forge ahead with ambitious plans to transform their communities.

But he warned that fulfilling these projects had become more challenging because of rising inflation and costs, particularly in the building industry.

"Levelling up should be locally led by evidence of where crucial investment needs to go to, not based on costly competitive bids between areas," he added.

"This is not a sustainable approach to economic development or public service delivery... the Government must boost local productivity and save money, through building on the White Paper's commitment to streamline the long list of individual local growth funds.

"Local government must be trusted with the powers and funding to deliver for their communities."

● See p24



New waste deposit scheme announced

The amount of waste produced in the UK needs to be reduced, the LGA has said, in response to a government announcement on deposit return schemes.

A new cash incentive system, placing deposits on drinks bottles and cans, was announced in late January by environment minister Rebecca Pow.

The scheme, covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland, is set to be introduced in 2025, and will allow people to recycle their drinks containers via 'reverse vending machines' sited at the retailers who sold them.

Every year, UK consumers use around 14 billion plastic drinks bottles and nine billion drinks cans, many of which are dropped as litter or condemned to landfill.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson, said: "Councils are pleased to see some further details for how the deposit return schemes (DRS) would work, but need to understand how the implementation of DRS will work alongside other planned waste reforms, such as the plans for packagers to pay for waste processing.

"Deposit return schemes are another way of collecting waste, but they do not reduce the amount of packaging or require producers and retailers to reduce the amount of waste.

"We want to prioritise plans to reduce the amount of waste produced in the first place.

"Councils look forward to working with government and partners on wider waste reforms as a whole, focused on ensuring councils can respond to the needs of local communities in moving towards a circular and zero carbon economy."

Local audit 'in crisis'

Local auditors gave opinions on only 12 per cent of local government bodies' 2021/22 financial statements by the statutory deadline, according to a report from the National Audit Office.

That compares with just 9 per cent the previous year (2020/21) – but 45 per cent in 2019/20 and 97 per cent in 2015/16.

The report says delays in completing audited accounts can have significant implications for local accountability and the effective management of public money, with high-quality local auditing essential for public trust in how taxpayers' money is spent.

Factors contributing to audit delays include a lack of qualified and experienced staff in both councils and audit firms, and the increasingly complex and commercial activities undertaken

by councils. Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "Effective external audit and clear and transparent financial reporting are vital, and councils take them extremely seriously.

"However, as this report makes clear, local audit is in crisis, which is a serious concern for councils.

"While it acknowledges some actions have been taken to address this, we support the call for the Government to set out a detailed timetable by which it expects to restore timely audited accounts.

"The report also highlights the wider impact the crisis in local audit is having elsewhere in the public audit system, which reinforces the need for long-term and permanent solutions to address these challenges."



In brief

Ageing and disability

The narrative needs to shift on ageing and disability, to build better attitudes towards social care and the people who draw on it. So says 'Care and support reimagined: a national care covenant for England', from the Archbishops' Commission on Reimagining Care. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "This report is another important and helpful contribution to the conversation around adult social care. It also brings to light the importance of people being trusted to manage their own care and decide what help they need. We support the recommendations of the report, particularly the need for investment in communities."

Addiction services

The LGA has urged clarity on the future of councils' funding for public health services, as the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities published its annual statistics on access to adult addiction support services. These show 11,000 more people accessing services between April 2021 and March 2022 than in the previous year. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "These vital addiction support services are funded by councils' public health grant, which has seen reductions of around £1 billion since 2015. The Government should commit to a long-term increase to the public health grant so people can get the best support possible in overcoming addiction."

Council graduates

More than 4,600 high-calibre and diverse graduates have applied to work in local government this year via the LGA's flagship National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP). The two-year programme, which includes a prestigious learning and development offer provided by the LGA, aims to attract new talent to local government and help councils build capacity by developing the future leaders of our sector. Councils have until 31 March to sign up for NGDP graduates this year. Please visit www.local.gov.uk/ngdp-councils or email ngdp@local.gov.uk to find out more.

Support needed for coastal clean-up

Hundreds of historic coastal landfill sites are at risk of polluting Britain's beaches and waterways.

A survey from the LGA's Coastal Special Interest Group (SIG) shows that 26 coastal councils have sites already spilling large amounts of waste onto cliffs and beaches.

Coastal landfill sites, inherited by councils, are a big problem on Britain's coastlines, and are often on low-lying coastal and estuary sites that have historically been an easy target for the disposal of toxic rubbish.

Many of these sites are more than 100



years old, which means significant gaps in understanding of what waste and risks are present.

Councils want to work with the Government to find a long-term solution to this historic problem.

This will include urgent funding to allow councils to embark on immediate remedial works to stop the leaching of pollution from sites that are already eroding or being flooded, as well as to develop an understanding of what these sites contain.

Cllr David Renard, LGA Environment Spokesperson, said: "Our coastlines need urgent support. This problem will not go away, and funding is needed to prevent hundreds of disasters on our shores.

"Councils want to protect their local environments, but need urgent support from the Government to save our coastlines from this ticking time bomb."

Mark Stratton, Officer Lead for Coastal Landfill at the LGA's Coastal SIG, said: "There are hundreds of coastal landfill sites at risk of tidal flooding and erosion.

"During visits to sites, I have been overwhelmed by the scale of the problem, especially the threat of waste eroding or leaching out onto the often-designated natural coastal environment."

Warning sounded over health visitor shortages

Councils are warning of growing shortages in the number of local health visitors, in response to a report by the Institute of Health Visiting.

The report found that health visitors had seen significant increases in the number of families struggling with the burden of the cost of living, with 91 per cent of those surveyed reporting an increase in poverty affecting families over the past 12 months.

The report also revealed that cuts to the numbers of health visitors are leaving children living with significant risk and vulnerability undetected.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "As this survey clearly shows, health visitors play a

vital role in our communities, but councils face growing shortages of them, with the number of health visitors decreasing by nearly 40 per cent since 2015 because of cuts in councils' public health grant.

"At a time of increasing need and complexity, health visitors are needed now more than ever. That is why the Government should commit to an ambitious plan to increase the number of health visitors, so we can rebuild and regain these vital public health nursing services that have been lost.

"Long-term investments in these key services can benefit children's lives both now and into the future, through improving their school-readiness and taking away burdens from our overstretched health service."



‘Workforce crisis adding to service pressures’ – LGA

A workforce crisis is threatening vital local services, with more than nine in 10 councils experiencing staff recruitment and retention difficulties, an LGA survey has revealed.

The LGA’s 2022 Local Government Workforce Survey found that:

- more than 8 in 10 councils were having difficulties recruiting children’s social workers and almost three-quarters (72 per cent) were having problems retaining them
- 57 per cent were struggling to retain and 71 per cent to recruit adult social care workers
- 58 per cent were struggling to recruit planning officers
- 22 per cent were experiencing recruitment difficulties for HGV drivers
- 45 per cent were having difficulties finding environmental health officers
- 43 per cent struggled to recruit building control officers.

Significant staff shortages in local government

risk having a serious impact on councils’ capacity to deliver services – from protecting vulnerable children to caring for older and disabled adults to ensuring buildings are safe – the LGA has warned.

It is also restricting councils’ ability to help government meet key pledges, such as building more homes, boosting and levelling up economic growth, and reforming adult social care.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: “Local workforce shortages are adding to the challenges facing our local services.

“In the coming years, some services are likely to continue to see a significant increase in demand that they will not be able to meet without an increase in the supply of skilled staff.

“Government investment in local government and its workforce is key to ensuring services are protected and to delivering its own policy agenda.”

● See p10 for more on the workforce survey

Pools and leisure centres ‘at risk’

Public leisure centres and swimming pools could close after missing out on additional support towards energy costs, the LGA has warned.

A new Energy Bills Discount Scheme was announced by the Government in January, providing extra support for industries deemed ‘energy intensive’, including libraries, museums and archives.

However, swimming pools and leisure centres were not included, adding to existing pressures and the risk of closures and service reductions.

Public leisure centres and swimming pools are eligible for the basic energy support that all businesses will receive, which is much reduced from the current level of support.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA’s Energy Spokesperson, said: “While it is good the Government will continue to help the public sector and businesses keep their energy bills lower, we remain deeply concerned about the risk to some council services.

“Libraries and museums will be eligible for extra support, but leisure centres and swimming pools will not be equally protected from high energy prices.

“These valuable public facilities are at risk of reduced hours or even closure because of unsustainable and increasing costs.

“If the Government is serious about reducing pressure on the NHS, as well as meeting its other targets on physical activity and sports participation, it must continue to support our leisure centres and public swimming pools, which help people stay active, healthy and out of hospital.

“Councils need support with their energy bills for all their local services, so they can stay open and provide a safe haven for residents during this unprecedented cost-of-living crisis.”

● See p13

‘Complacency’ on creative industries

Government complacency risks undermining the UK’s creative industries in the face of increased competition and technological change, according to Peers.

A report from the House of Lords’ Communications and Digital Committee, published in January, found that continued investment is needed in the successful ‘Creative clusters’ programme and highlighted issues around skills shortages – reflecting evidence heard by the LGA’s Commission on Culture and Local Government (see [first 679](#)).

It also concluded that the UK’s creative industries should sit at the heart of the country’s economic growth plans, being worth more than £115 billion before the pandemic.

In fact, their contribution to the economy in 2019 was more than the automotive, aerospace and life sciences industries combined.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA’s Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: “The creative industries are an important driver of local economies: prior to the pandemic, they accounted for 2.2 million jobs, geographically

dispersed in more than 700 micro-clusters across the UK.

“To support councils to maximise the potential of the creative sector, we need a joined-up, devolved approach to skills that recognises the value of culture and creativity at every level of the education system.

“Councils can play an important role in diversifying access to creative careers and we support the report’s calls for a cross-government focus on addressing skills shortages in the sector.”

In brief

Brownfield land

The second allocation of support through the Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF2) was launched in January, with councils across England able to bid for a share of £60 million to regenerate disused and unloved brownfield sites. The fund is expected to deliver 17,600 new homes and 56,000 skilled jobs over the next four years, with applications for this round closing on 31 March. Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "Councils are at the forefront of housing delivery, with BLRF2 supporting them to meet the needs of their communities by releasing their surplus land for new, high-quality, energy efficient homes."

Coaching for disabled councillors

The LGA is offering one-to-one coaching sessions for disabled councillors, to support them to be brilliant leaders of their communities. The coaching focuses on personal leadership development and is open to all councillors. Each councillor will have an initial 'chemistry meeting', to get to know their coach and set their personal leadership goals, with subsequent sessions helping them to achieve those. Sessions are via Microsoft Teams or Zoom. To find out more or to book a place, please email leadership@local.gov.uk.

Finance settlement

As first was going to press, the final local government finance settlement for 2023/24 was expected to be published in early February. In its response to the provisional settlement, the LGA welcomed an overall increase in baseline funding for local authorities, but expressed concern that a significant proportion of the increase in core spending power has been achieved through potentially one-off grants, ring-fenced funding, reallocation of existing funding, and the assumption that local authorities will implement council tax increases. It continues to make the case for multi-year settlements and for more long-term certainty around funding and budgets, see bit.ly/3HsfTu3.

'Make household support permanent'

The Government should make the Household Support Fund permanent and more flexible so councils can help residents in the greatest need, the LGA has said.

The call came in response to the Resolution Foundation's annual 'Living Standards Outlook' report, which shows that a typical family is set to be £2,100 worse off over two years because of the rising cost of living.

Typical disposable incomes for working-age family households are on track to fall by 3 per cent in this financial year, and by 4 per cent in the year to April 2024, with only the very richest households seeing their incomes rise, according to new research published by the think tank.

Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said protecting the most vulnerable from the rising cost of living is a

critical priority for councils and that targeted government support is helping, but this crisis will not end overnight.

"Councils are urging the Government to make the Household Support Fund it has provided to councils permanent," he said.

"This would also allow councils to crucially shift their focus from short-term crisis support to investing in preventative services that build financial capability and resilience, such as: welfare benefit entitlement checks; debt advice; and employment, health, and housing support.

"Councils continue to try to fund their own local crisis support schemes, but this is increasingly difficult amid ongoing funding pressures. Permanent local welfare funding would help councils ensure no one is left behind."

Careers boost for young people

Primary school pupils will benefit from a new careers programme to encourage them to think about future jobs early, while nurturing aspirations and challenging stereotypes.

Young people will also benefit from strengthened careers advice through a change in the law, which will result in all year 8-13 pupils having at least six opportunities to meet a range of providers of technical education.

The £2.6 million scheme will be rolled out across 55 disadvantaged areas of the country where school outcomes are the weakest and have been for some time, supporting more than 600,000 pupils in around 2,200 primary schools.

Pupils will get to understand the full range of opportunities available to them, including apprenticeships, T Levels and Higher Technical

Qualifications, as well as the traditional academic route.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said the labour market has changed significantly in recent years and continues to adapt, so people need joined-up local support – including training and careers advice – to go into long-term, sustainable employment.

"It is councils who are ideally placed to help achieve this," he said.

"This will require a radical overhaul of our careers advice, which gives councils the funding and powers to use their local leadership and expert knowledge of their areas to coordinate the right support that can best introduce children and young people to the jobs of the future."



Accelerating energy efficiency

The LGA has been lobbying for better-insulated homes

Councils are on the frontline of providing support to vulnerable residents.

They continue to do all they can to support those in our communities who are facing hardship and help them to improve their financial security in the long term.

Improving the energy efficiency of our homes will play a fundamental role in helping families to reduce their costs, become more financially resilient and stay warm throughout future winters, as well as achieving wider objectives such as delivering net zero and improving the UK's energy security.

As leaders of place, councils will be a vital partner in scaling up retrofit and we stand ready to work with government to redouble efforts to better draught-proof and insulate all homes, and ensure the most vulnerable benefit first.

Last month, the LGA took part in an energy efficiency drop-in event in Parliament, where we spoke to MPs across all parties about how improving energy efficiency must be central to the Government's response to the cost-of-living crisis.

Alongside a coalition of other stakeholders, including Energy UK, the Federation of Master Builders and the National Housing Federation, we also wrote a joint letter to the Chancellor, setting out what is needed to accelerate retrofit.

As we set out in a joint media statement, this included calling on government to work in partnership with industry, local government and



wider stakeholders to develop a long-term deliverable plan for energy efficiency and bring forward the £6 billion that was committed for energy efficiency in the Autumn Statement.

The letter also highlighted the dramatic benefits of place-based approaches to decarbonisation. It called on the Government to work with councils and other partners to develop significant pilots at scale to test place-based approaches that could help achieve our energy efficiency ambitions faster, and at lower cost.

Some of the specific action we called for included creating the conditions to enable local areas to develop the long-term, skilled and qualified workforce needed to deliver retrofit and energy-saving measures.

We also said government should continue working in partnership with industry-led efforts, the social housing

sector, and councils to support a long-term, cross-departmental approach to policy-making in this area.

We will continue to highlight that retrofitting more homes as quickly as possible is a practical, sustainable, and economically responsible solution to keeping many people warm and safe through winters, reducing our carbon emissions and driving green jobs and growth. It will also be vital in our preparation to become a net-zero nation.

Effective and efficient rollout will require long-term funding that gives industry the certainty needed to invest in skills and capacity.

Councils are critical to working with their communities – going street by street to help households permanently reduce their bills – and urgently need the funding and support to accelerate energy efficiency.

i For the 'Joint call for energy efficiency drive to tackle cost-of-living crisis', see bit.ly/3H6HHDO. To find out more about the LGA's work in Parliament, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament



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

Workforce crisis

Councils are struggling to recruit and retain staff for vital local services

Working in local government is hugely challenging and varied, but equally rewarding. It is a great place to grow your skills and your career.

However, councils are struggling to recruit and retain the staff they need to provide vital local services, from children's services and adult social care to planning and environmental health.

The LGA's recently published 2022 Local Government Workforce Survey sets out the challenges. It found that more than 9 in 10 councils were struggling to find and keep staff, across a range of services and professions.

More than 8 in 10 councils, for example, were having difficulties recruiting children's social workers and almost three-quarters (72 per cent)

were having problems retaining them – meaning they are having to turn increasingly to agency staff to plug gaps, which is more costly and leaves less funding for children's services overall.

When it comes to adult social care, 57 per cent of councils were struggling to retain care workers and 71 per cent to recruit them.

National adult social care organisations, including the LGA, have called for government to deliver a long-term care workforce strategy and tackle the issue of care worker pay (see p12).

Almost 6 in 10 councils (58 per cent) were struggling to recruit planning officers. This will have an impact on the ability of councils to plan and deliver new homes and ensure new housing meets local needs and has the right infrastructure.

More than a fifth (22 per cent) were



experiencing recruitment difficulties for HGV drivers. HGV driver salaries in the private sector are going up fast, which is an issue for councils and their contractors, putting pressure on gritting and waste and collection services.

Meanwhile, 45 per cent of councils that run environmental health services couldn't find enough environmental health officers, and 43 per cent were having difficulties recruiting building control officers.

This comes as councils struggle to fulfil new duties being placed on them, such as implementing the new post-Grenfell building safety system and reviewing the condition of social and private rented housing.

The services councils provide are relied on by vulnerable people particularly, and those who urgently need support, as well as by government to help it meet key pledges – from building more homes to boosting economic growth and reforming adult social care.

Councils are pulling out all the stops to tackle recruitment and retention issues, by offering more flexible working, running targeted recruitment campaigns locally, and offering accessible training and development opportunities.

They are also looking to grow their

The workforce crisis in numbers

- Nearly **1.4 million people** work in around **800 different occupations** in local government.
- From 2009-22, the English local government staff headcount fell from **2,254,700** to **1,346,400**. Full-time equivalent totals fell from **1,584,200** to **1,022,000**.
- 33 per cent** of council chief executives and senior managers in England **did not have enough** skilled staff to run services to an acceptable standard (Solace, 2021).
- In September 2021, the vacancy rate in local authority adult social services was **7.1 per cent** (Skills for Care).
- England's children's social work vacancy rate **rose to 16.7 per cent** in 2021, with **6,500 empty posts**.
- More than half** of public health services were disrupted by staffing shortages, according to the LGA/ADASS 2022 Public Health Annual Report.



There needs to be a broader, long-term strategy for the local government workforce

apprenticeships to develop 'pipelines' of the skills they need, with nearly two-thirds (62 per cent) saying they were going to do this in 2022/23 (see p22).

Addressing the issue at an individual council level is difficult, however. There is recognition that there needs to be a broader, long-term strategy for the local government workforce, and the LGA is looking at how we can support the sector with this.

It will require cross-sector agreement and support from government and other agencies, and we will bring forward proposals to the LGA's boards this spring.

It can also be difficult for councils to make long-term plans for staffing and development when they continually have single-year funding settlements.

The LGA is always reviewing our work and exploring new ways to support member councils, and already provides a range of government-funded practical support to councils on workforce issues (see right).

We are clear that government investment in councils and their workforce is key to ensuring services are protected, and to government delivering its own policy agenda.

Sector support

To help with workforce recruitment, training and retention, the LGA offers a range of government-funded programmes to support and develop council professionals and build a talent pipeline. These include the National Graduate Development Programme, and schemes for chief executives, executive directors, middle managers and 'rising stars'. The LGA also provides a range of practical support to the local government sector on workforce, including strategic workforce planning, recruitment and retention, and workforce capacity – see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support

See www.local.gov.uk/publications/2022-local-government-workforce-survey for the LGA's 2022 Local Government Workforce Survey



The National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) has been developing new talent in local government for over 20 years.

Every year, thousands of bright, motivated graduates apply to the NGDP to fast track their career in local government.

We run a subsidised, rigorous national recruitment process to place high calibre graduates in councils across the country.

Find out how the NGDP could help your council to build capacity and develop future leaders of your workforce.

www.local.gov.uk/ngdp | ngdp@local.gov.uk

Prevention and **early intervention**



By Councillor **David Fothergill**, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board

The LGA and its partners have set out a joint vision for health and social care

High-quality, responsive, preventative and personalised health and care services contribute so much to our lives and society.

They enable people to live their best lives and be active in their local communities, supporting unpaid carers to continue caring while working and living their own lives, while offering rewarding, skilled employment and long-term careers to more than three million people.

They also bring together the best of the NHS, local authorities, adult social care providers, public health and the community and voluntary sector to support people to live good lives, while also boosting local, regional and national economies as major employers.

However, all of the evidence points to a stark truth: our health and social care services are struggling to meet their statutory requirements to provide people with timely, safe, high-quality and effective care and support.

Despite the heroic efforts of all those working in social care and health, without immediate and long-term action from central government, they will fail to improve, leading to worse health, wellbeing and economic outcomes for all of us.

In response to this, the LGA, along with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) and NHS Confederation, have agreed a vision on the long-term solutions required to make our health and care system resilient, preventative and promoting independence.

We call on the Government to

work with us and to put in place concrete measures to ensure that local leaders can achieve this culture shift, consisting of three key asks:

- invest in prevention and early intervention
- create the ability to plan for the long term
- deliver a long-term, fully funded workforce plan that covers health and social care – including the public health workforce.

We are pleased the Autumn Statement provided more resources over the medium term to meet inflationary pressures in health and social care, but this funding will not address the underlying gaps, market fragility and workforce pressures.

Neither does it provide sufficient long-term certainty for social care and health organisations to invest in different models of care that prevent ill health

Long-term solutions are needed to make this shift a reality

and promote wellbeing, resilience and independence.

We acknowledge and support the Government's ambition to invest more in prevention and early intervention but, as a nation, we have often struggled to shift from ambition to reality. Attention is too often focused on acute hospitals, rather than on working to maximise our health and wellbeing and to keep people well and independent for as long as possible.

Long-term solutions are needed to make this shift a reality, including a major reset of our social care and health services and supports.

It is only by doing so that we will turn the growing tide of ill health and dependence on acute and hospital services – so that when people need treatment, care and support, our responses are built around what matters most to the individual and enables them to live meaningful and independent lives.

Our three national organisations agree that our vision for all partners in the health and care system must focus first and foremost on promoting the health, wellbeing and prosperity of our citizens.

This vision is relevant to all of us, whether we need care, support or treatment now or in the future, provide unpaid care for family members, work in social care or health, or run businesses that contribute to health and wellbeing outcomes.



i You can read the **'Joint vision for a high quality and sustainable health and care system'** in full at bit.ly/3JbE9CX

Councils can help residents through the cost-of-living crisis

Keeping communities active



Councillor **Gerald Vernon-Jackson** is Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board

Over the past three years, we have seen first-hand the positive contribution sport, physical activity, leisure, green spaces and parks make to the lives, health and wellbeing of our communities.

Research confirms the value placed on these services by our communities, with Sport England's 2021 customer experience survey showing that 86 per cent of respondents prefer to exercise in a leisure centre.

Of this number, it is people living in deprived areas who most prefer exercising in a leisure centre, and when leisure centres reopened their doors following the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, it was a higher proportion of people living in these areas that walked through them.

Sadly, the ongoing effects from the pandemic, rising living costs and the energy crisis is making it increasingly difficult for councils and leisure operators to sustain these vital services, resulting in closures and reduced services.

Other data show 40 per cent of council areas are at risk of losing their leisure centre(s) or seeing reduced services before the end of this March, and that 100 pools are under threat of closure or a reduction in services in the next six months.

A Sport England survey shows that 40 per cent of respondents found the cost-of-living increase was having a 'negative impact' on their ability to be active in August 2022, up from a third of people in March 2022.

The LGA has been making a strong

case to the Government for additional funding for leisure centres and swimming pools and to get them included on the list of energy intensive businesses to receive a higher level of support under the extension of the Government's energy support scheme, announced in January.

Contrary to the extensive evidence we provided, it was disappointing to see pools and leisure centres not included on the list. This will result in closures, service reductions and widening inequalities.

We continue to lobby the Government and encourage you to raise this issue and the impact it's having on your communities with your MP – see bit.ly/3HAYnF3 for a template letter.

So, how can we keep communities active and services viable in the face of such challenges?

First and foremost, councils are unique because of the multitude of assets we have access to that can be used or repurposed to offer opportunities to be

active at low or no cost – for example, leisure facilities, online classes, green gyms, GP health referral, free activities such as parkrun, pop-ups on the high street, and social prescribing.

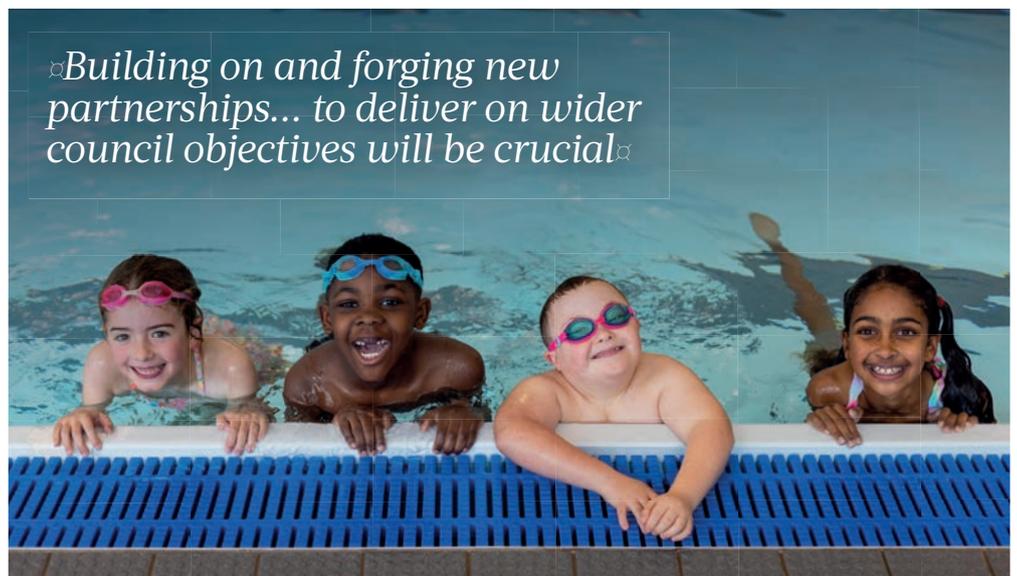
Building on and forging new partnerships with integrated care systems (ICSs), social prescribing link workers and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, as well as internal stakeholders, such as planning departments, to integrate services to deliver on wider council objectives, will be crucial.

It is also a chance to pause and identify the behaviour changes residents are making because of the cost-of-living crisis, such as switching from cars to cycling and walking, and translating these into strategic investments in bike loan schemes, walking and cycling routes, parks and playgrounds to help sustain and encourage new, healthier and climate-friendly behaviours.

We will be discussing these issues further with leading experts and councils at the LGA's annual hybrid culture, tourism and sport conference on 15 March in London, where delegates will also have the chance to quiz the funders, if attending in-person.



Visit www.local.gov.uk/events to book your place at the LGA's annual culture, tourism and sport conference on 15 March. **Sport England is offering consultancy support to help manage the impact of higher energy costs** on community leisure provision. Applications for funding close on 28 February, see bit.ly/3IX0Ryt





Neil Isaacson, CEO, Liberty Charge, the charge point operator (CPO) on a mission to deliver the UK's most reliable, publicly accessible EV charging network.

Get set, the time is now



As the Government prepares to roll out its Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund, local authorities may have a renewed focus on delivering their EV plans. This is essential if we are to achieve the Government target of 300,000 EV charge points by 2030, when the sale of new petrol and diesel cars will be banned.

It is vital this renewed focus comes with an understanding of the timescales involved.

With just 12% of the 300,000 charge points currently installed, the roll-out pace of EV infrastructure is glacial and suggests the industry has been lacking urgency, in part, because of a lack of understanding that it can take as long as two and a half

years to get a charge point in the ground.

Before any works can begin, a local authority needs to have a charge point strategy in place. Creating and obtaining wider council support for, and implementing this strategy is made significantly easier by having a dedicated lead officer for EV infrastructure. The recruitment process plus the strategy development, often takes up to nine months.

Our Local Authority Insight Report found one-third (31%) of local authorities have no formal EV infrastructure plan in place, and almost half (44%) do not expect to complete one within the next three years. More worrying still, only 14% have dedicated EV infrastructure resources, and 3% have none.

If local authorities want to use the LEVI fund, experience of the pilot scheme has shown it can take 12 months for the funding decision. The Office for Zero Emission Vehicle (OZEV) says it will release the fund in two tranches: in the financial year 23/24, and another in 24/25 – suggesting there will be another year to wait if the initial application is unsuccessful. Six months is then required to identify the most appropriate sites, and a further three for deployment – taking the total to 30 months. This process can be reduced to fewer than 15 months by going directly to a charge point operator (CPO), such as Liberty Charge. Our end-to-end solution removes almost all the management, administration and planning burdens, to deliver (post-strategy creation) within six months, with zero reliance on LEVI or any other public funding.

The UK will not create the infrastructure needed to serve EV demand without significantly ramping up the installation pace. And local authorities need to have greater visibility of the timescales involved to appreciate the required urgency. It is also important that if LEVI fund applications are rejected, there are CPOs, such as Liberty Charge, that provide a privately funded, end-to-end service at zero cost to the council or the tax-payer.



i For more information on timescales, please contact hello@libertycharge.co.uk libertycharge.com

Mission zero

Local government is intrinsic to tackling climate change



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

Councils want to work as partners with central government to tackle climate change, with a focus on transitioning to a strong net-zero economy.

Councils are well-placed to do this as place-shapers, convenors of communities and partners, delivery agents, commissioners, and owners of assets.

Net zero can only be achieved with decarbonisation happening in every place across the country and this will require local leadership.

So, it was refreshing to see some recognition of this in 'Mission zero', the final report of former Energy Minister Chris Skidmore's independent review of net zero, published in January.

The LGA submitted evidence to the review in October, and this was followed by a meeting between its Climate Change Task Group and Mr Skidmore, and LGA officer meetings with the review team.

The final report references the importance of local government in tackling climate change on multiple points, including the need for funding reform, and makes recommendations reflecting the LGA's input.

It recognises that local authorities are a key partner in delivering net zero and that there must be more place-based, locally led action on net zero; and that decarbonising the public sector estate can reduce energy demand significantly, build workforce capacity



and stimulate supply chains – as local government has already demonstrated.

'Mission zero' also calls for wholesale simplification of local net zero funding, including the consolidation of existing pots and a reduction in competitive bidding, as well as significant reforms of 'viability' within the planning system, to ensure local ambitions for sustainable growth cannot be avoided by developers.

The review's focus on policy and funding stability over the long term is important for councils, and so is giving them the flexibility to respond to the different opportunities and challenges in places.

There are areas of concern – for example, the review recommends a new, broad 'net-zero duty' on councils, but does not set out what it is for and how to pay for it.

The LGA's view is that this duty is not necessary: councils do not lack will and leadership on this issue, they lack backing from government in policy and funding.

While it argues for consolidating funding, the review does not go far enough on the devolution of funding through place-based allocations.

It also should go further in explaining how funds that councils

have no access to, such as large amounts of skills funding, should be devolved.

'Mission zero' includes a focused chapter on local government but there is more to be said about how critical councils are – within transport, housing, energy projects, nature recovery and community leadership.

The need to engage differently with councils does not stand alone from these critical delivery issues.

Finally, a recommendation for relevant ministers from across government to attend the Local Net Zero Forum on a regular basis does not go far enough. A forum of senior councillors and ministers should be established with the objective of driving delivery.

Public concern for the environment is high and opinion polling continues to show significant support for net zero.

More than 300 local authorities have declared climate emergencies and are developing plans to deliver against ambitious targets.

As local leaders, we know that only councils can mobilise and join-up the local action in our towns, cities and rural areas that will reduce emissions and help us all adapt to climate change.

i See www.local.gov.uk/topics/climate-environment-and-waste for more on the LGA's work on climate change and net zero

Let's connect' is the theme of this year's Children's Mental Health Week, organised by Place2Be and which is taking place from 6-12 February.

The theme asks and encourages us to help children and young people and their families to make meaningful connections with others to support their mental health.

'Let's connect' is also one of the pillars in the 'five ways to wellbeing' approach that explores different ways to make life better for everyone.

We can do this by providing counselling and mental health support in schools and education, and helping children develop strategies for coping before mental health problems escalate.

We know that through early support and prevention services, councils can help more children to avoid reaching crisis point.

But we already know that the need for effective and timely mental health services grows every day.

NHS figures show that one in six children aged seven to 16 have a mental health disorder, and this is even higher for 17 to 19-year-olds, at one in four.

Further research shows that half of all mental health problems are established by the age of 14.

When we have healthy connections – to family, friends, and others – this can support our mental health and our sense of wellbeing.

Without rewarding social connections, we can sometimes feel isolated and lonely – an additional negative impact on mental health.

The LGA shares Place2Be's vision: for all children to have the support they need to build lifelong coping skills and to thrive. Children should not have to face mental health problems alone.

But with growing pressures on budgets, and an emphasis on treatment rather than early intervention, the support that struggling children need isn't always made available in a timely, effective manner.

This is having a significant impact on social care services, with a record number of children with mental health problems seen by social workers in 2022, up more than half since 2018 to 87,750.

The LGA called on the Government to adequately fund children's social care in last November's Autumn Statement, and to meet the £1.6 billion of current cost pressures to help stabilise the social care system to ensure children are safe, and families receive the support they need.



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

Making connections

Early support and prevention can help more children avoid mental health crises

While the additional funding for adult and children's social care announced in the Autumn Statement and confirmed in December's provisional local government finance settlement is welcome, it isn't sufficient, and the scale of current pressures means that councils need a long-term, sustainable funding solution for children's social care.

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 increase reflects not only a rise in costs for providing vital support to record numbers of children in care, but also to managing the increasing complexity of children's needs, including the emergence of increasingly severe mental health needs requiring more intensive support packages.

Further support from the NHS alongside additional funding is vital to provide the wraparound support needed by children, including community services, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and inpatient provision.

Even before the devastating impact of COVID-19 and its successive lockdowns and school closures, the number of children with mental health problems was rising rapidly.

With the current cost-of-living crisis likely to push more families into poverty, the LGA is concerned that even more children will require support.

Greater investment in early intervention support such as counselling, youth services, early support hubs and mental health support services in schools and the community is needed. Together with training for staff, this could make the difference between a child or young person being supported to cope, or an escalating spiral of anxiety and negative thinking that ultimately becomes more difficult to help.

We know that later intervention can have a much poorer outcome for the young person and their families and the people who look after them.

Councils are committed to helping children live happy, healthy lives.

We know that preventing poor mental health is key, as are the services that support this – for example, providing green, safe spaces where



children can play with friends and family, quality housing and an inclusive education system.

With mental health needs higher among some ethnic minority communities and LGBTQ+ people, tackling inequalities is also important.

Early intervention can help to prevent life-long mental health issues. Providing support early on to spot mental health problems before they develop can help children cope with challenges throughout their lives.

However, children are being driven into clinical NHS services because the system and funding prioritise treatment rather than the holistic early support and preventative services that help children have mentally healthy childhoods.

Turning this around requires a national shift away from treating children only once they are diagnosed with a mental illness, towards helping them and their families cope with challenges before they escalate.

If any proof were needed of the cost-benefits of this approach, Place2Be estimates that for every £1 invested, its counselling service in primary schools has the potential to return £8. Evidence shows that early intervention and prevention makes a real difference to children's lives.

Waltham Forest: social prescribing in the early years

Through close working with Waltham Forest Council and the NHS, Lloyd Park Children's Charity has, since April 2022, piloted an early years' social prescribing service that has supported 53 families in need of mental health support.

So far, all participants report improved mental health and wellbeing at the end of the programme.

The council funds the charity to deliver children and family centre services in the borough and it received additional funding to develop one of the first social prescribing programmes for families with young children.

The service adopts a similar model to, and works alongside, the core social prescribing service in Waltham Forest, which supports residents to improve their wellbeing by connecting them to community services and support.

Families are referred by partners such as GPs, social care and mental health teams, and support is offered to people with many different needs, including both mild or long-term mental health

issues, people who are socially isolated, new parents, and families who frequently attend primary healthcare provision.

Through developing close relationships with practitioners at the charity, parents have felt confident and been supported to set up their own support groups, including a young parents' group, SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) and siblings, support for autism diagnosis, wellbeing yoga, and 'Ready for school'.

A further 75 families have accessed support through these co-produced services.

Keri Cooper, Lloyd Park Children's Charity's early years social prescribing project manager, said: "We see social prescribing as an alternative to a medical response to problems families with children may be facing.

"It is about helping people to look and connect to the community for support. This felt like the missing link when we spoke to 450 of our borough's families."

Those referred work directly with

the centre's link worker to identify the support they need to overcome the issues they feel they are facing. Help is offered through key agencies and support groups.

Keri says many parents feel they are listened to and have a voice for the first time. Focus is always brought back to the children in the family, with parents supported to understand how their stresses may impact their children.

The prescribing programme has enabled the charity and council to strengthen and streamline partnership working to make support easier for families – with a straightforward referral process set up between partners.

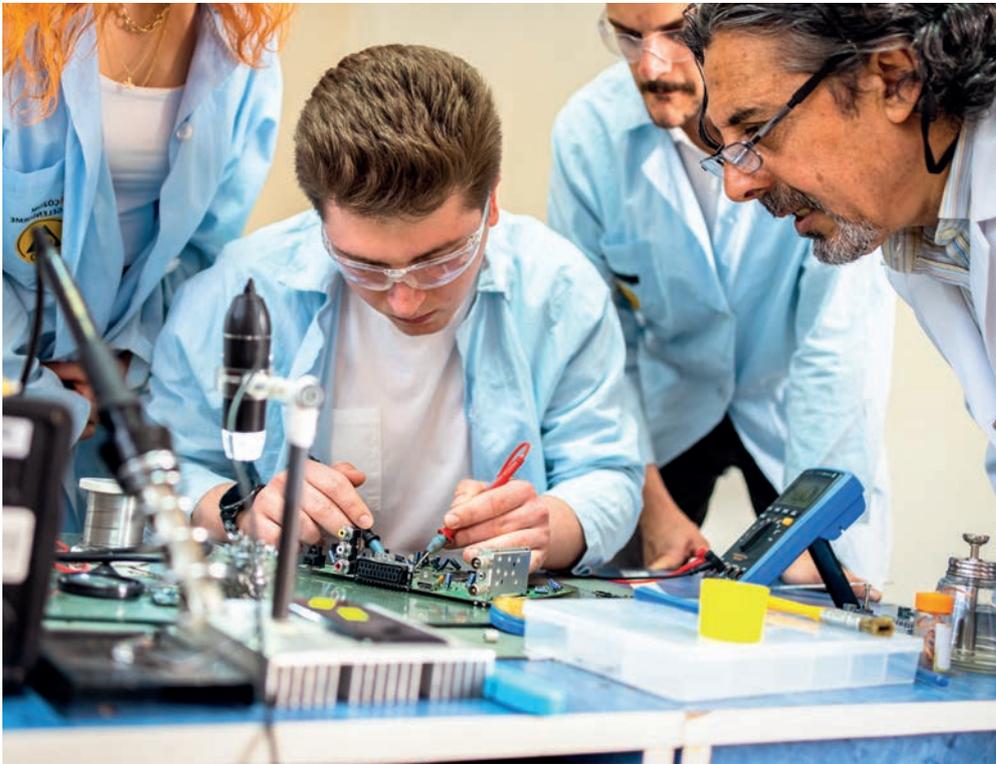
The charity would like to see statutory services involve communities in service planning more often.



To find out more about this initiative, please visit www.tlpc.org.uk/early-years-social-prescribing or <https://bit.ly/3ko9KqS>

Developing skills for life

Apprenticeships and T Levels can help develop a skilled local government workforce



had 492 apprentices join its highly acclaimed programme over the past five years.

The council sees apprenticeships as an investment in developing the skills of a robust workforce for the future, with opportunities across a wide range of services such as education, horticulture, and finance.

T Levels were launched in 2020 and were developed in collaboration with employers and education providers. The qualification, equivalent to three A Levels, allows the student to develop their practical skills and knowledge, and apply it to a work setting through industry placements.

Despite the challenges brought by the pandemic, 92 per cent of the first cohort of T Level students achieved a pass or above before moving on to higher education, an apprenticeship or skilled employment.

Leicester City Council has embraced T Levels and apprenticeships as an entry to employment for young people at the start of a young person's career.

The council's T Level industry placements cover a wide range of subjects, from construction and engineering to digital and business administration.

The practical and technical skills developed through these industry placements can be later applied to a permanent post or a Level 4 apprenticeship.

This National Apprenticeship Week, let's take a moment to appreciate the success of our apprentices and T Level students, and recognise the value they bring to each and every one of our councils.

National Apprenticeship Week 2023 (6-12 February) shines a light on the excellent opportunities technical education brings to young people embarking on a career in local government.

The theme for this year's apprenticeship week is 'Skills for Life'.

The week gives local government a chance to reflect on how apprenticeships and T Levels enable young people to develop the skills and knowledge required for a rewarding career and create a workforce fit for the future.

There has been a transformation in technical education over recent years.

Many councils have incorporated apprenticeships and T Levels into their workforce development strategy as a route for young people to begin their career in local government. Councils are using technical education programmes to diversify the age range of their employees, to increase

Apprenticeships offer councils opportunities to invest in the workforce of the future

workforce capacity, and to attract local talent with innovative ideas.

Apprenticeships offer councils significant opportunities to invest in the local government workforce of the future.

Councils provide a wide range of services and apprenticeship standards, which match up with hundreds of our job roles, offering plenty of opportunities to 'grow our own'.

Through the apprenticeship levy, councils have created more than 70,000 apprenticeships since 2017, in more than 200 fields, from IT to social care and cultural services to HR.

Rochdale Borough Council – named as one of the top 100 apprenticeship employers in England (2020) – has

i The LGA provides support to councils so they can maximise the return on investment of their apprenticeship levy – see www.local.gov.uk/apprenticeship-support-programme to find out more. We also offer support to local authorities to promote their council as a career destination for young people taking T Levels, a programme funded by the Department for Education – see www.local.gov.uk/t-levels



Councillor **Peter Fleming**
 OBE is Chair of the
 Innovation Zone Working
 Group and a Member of
 the LGA's Improvement
 and Innovation Board

Learning from each other

Councils can showcase their innovative practice at the LGA's annual conference



I am delighted that the LGA's Innovation Zone will be up and running again in 2023 and applications are now open for councils to showcase their innovative and exciting ideas!

The Innovation Zone offers a vibrant, creative space and programme within the LGA's Annual Conference and Exhibition, which will take place from 4-6 July in Bournemouth.

The programme will feature wide-ranging presentations, offering new learning and inspirational ideas for all those attending, as part of the wider LGA conference.

Last year's Innovation Zone was the beating heart of the LGA's annual conference in Harrogate, and once again demonstrated the importance and value that councils place on learning from each other.

More than 30 sessions took place, giving delegates the chance to engage, learn and think about how they might do

things differently within their councils.

Previous successful applications have included ideas focused on preventing male suicide, new approaches to social housing, a tool for reporting on prejudice-related incidents in education, and 'smart tech' solutions to supporting vulnerable people and joining up places.

A full list of examples from last July's conference can be found on our website, at www.local.gov.uk/events/past-event-presentations.

© LGA / Gregg Brown Photography

i Applications to present at the Innovation Zone at the LGA's annual conference close on 27 February. To apply, please visit www.local.gov.uk/innovation-zone-2023.

If you have any additional questions or would like more information on this event, please email innovationzone@local.gov.uk. See www.local.gov.uk/events for more on the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth from 4-6 July

This year's theme for the Innovation Zone will be 'Challenge and change'.

We all know councils have managed significant challenges in recent years and, casting an eye to the future, this theme will look at how councils can, and have, continued to improve services and deliver positive outcomes for their communities.

Applications for 2023 are now open to all councils, as well as organisations working with councils. I would really encourage applications from all regions as well as internationally, ensuring a diverse range of exciting presentations to engage our audiences.

While all applications are welcome and encouraged, this year there is particular interest in projects or ideas that span one or more of the following categories:

- responses to the cost-of-living crisis
- digital and technology solutions
- innovation in people services, including adult and children's social care
- approaches to resettlement
- responses to climate change, net zero and promoting sustainability
- ideas on developing and/or upskilling workforce
- economic growth and supporting communities
- solutions to managing housing pressures.

If you are interested in applying, but unsure if your idea is relevant or applicable, please email innovationzone@local.gov.uk and LGA colleagues would be happy to provide further guidance.

Successful applicants will need to present in person and presentations should be as interactive as possible to ensure stories are told creatively and in an engaging manner. Sessions will be approximately 30-45 minutes in length, including time for audience questions.

Pride in place

Councils will be marking LGBT+ History month

Councils play a critical role in reducing inequalities and enhancing inclusion and cohesion within their communities.

That's why, across the UK, councils will be marking LGBT+ History Month in February, with community events, educational activities, film screenings, talks, walks and exhibitions highlighting and celebrating the history of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and non-binary people and raising awareness of the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ communities.

The UK's LGBT+ History Month was started in February 2005 by LGBT+ education charity Schools Out UK, to commemorate the ending of Section 28, part of the Local Government Act 1988, that prevented schools and public bodies from promoting homosexuality.

Here, Cllr Karl Love reflects on the impact of Section 28 on LGBT+ communities on the Isle of Wight in the 1990s (see right).

In last month's **first**, we previewed the LGA's second LGBTQ+ Weekender event, with Cllr Bev Craig, the first woman and first openly gay Leader of Manchester City Council, highlighting the importance of such 'spaces' for LGBTQ+ councillors to be able to support each other and help improve their councils.

The LGA has a wide range of support available to local authorities, councillors and officers, to help with their work on equalities, diversity and inclusion. This includes an equalities hub (see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/equalities-hub), workforce resources (see bit.ly/3QVEIYJ), our Be a Councillor campaign (see www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor), and our ever popular weekender events for black, Asian and minority ethnic councillors, and for young councillors, as well as for LGBTQ+ councillors (see bit.ly/3WGkQVk or email grace.collins@local.gov.uk).

i To find out more about LGBT+ History Month, please visit www.lgbtplushistorymonth.co.uk/



LGA Annual Licensing Conference

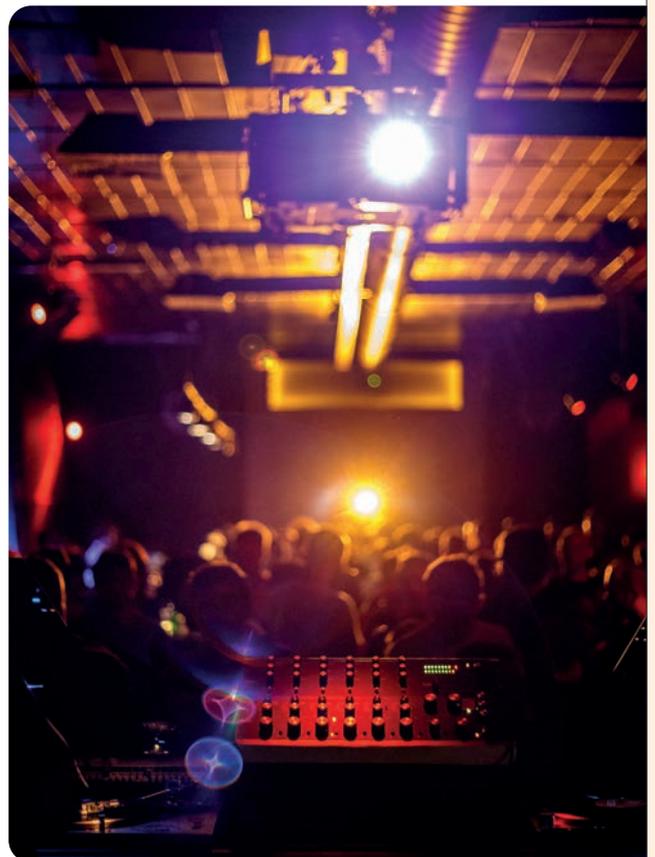
8 February 2023

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

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.

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



Out on an island



Councillor **Karl Love** (Ind) is Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health at Isle of Wight Council and a contributor to 'Out on an island', book and podcast recording the oral histories of local LGBTQ+ folk

Q Your accent is strongly northern – how did you end up on the Isle of Wight?

A For work. I'm originally from Elland, a little town in the Yorkshire Pennines. My partner, David, and I moved to the Isle of Wight in 1992, after I finished studying [youth and community] at Ilkley College.

Q That must have been quite a change of scene?

A Yes; we were used to a more inclusive way of life, northern clubs etc. Our first LGBT+ disco on the Island was held in a secret location that had three flashing lights and a glitter ball! But we made a lot of new friends and lived a fascinating life, moving through the secret revolving doors of different LGBT+ Island groups.

Q What was the job?

A I became the first detached youth worker for the Island, with a sexual health focus, later becoming the first outreach gay men's worker to be appointed anywhere on the south coast.

My LGBT+ work was largely conducted quietly, underground, because of the fear of discrimination, and my education work was complicated by Section 28. I also supported and cared for people living with HIV when others were reluctant, or fearful, to do so. I even had to drive a very ill person, in their car, to the Beacon HIV hospice at Bournemouth, because of resistance to using an NHS ambulance.



Karl campaigning for election

I'm not quite sure how I ended up doing all that work, and never imagined I could become a county councillor on our Island because of the oppression and my sexuality, let alone be married.

Q Have things changed since the 1990s?

A At that time, many LGBT+ people on the Island were afraid of coming out for fear of losing their jobs. The police also targeted people for cottaging, leaving them with criminal records.

I did help change some things and attitudes, and our Island police were the very first in the South East to introduce lesbian and gay liaison officers.

On a more positive and fantastic note, my LGBT+ job came to an end because of life-changing HIV treatment and changing attitudes, albeit it very slowly.

Our Island has come a long way, with Pride events taking place, but sadly I do suffer occasional phobic attitudes. In response, I prefer

to try to educate where possible, unless I am directly threatened.

Q Why did you become a councillor?

A I've always been a community worker. After recovering from late-stage cancer, I wanted to put something back and use my skill set to influence change – by becoming a justice of the peace or a councillor.

I was quite interested in politics, but not deeply. I wanted to make a difference, not just for the LGBT+ community, but for all the people of the Isle of Wight, and I thought I had something to bring to the table.

Q What do you want to achieve?

A I don't want to be known for my sexuality, but for what I can contribute, although the two things are very linked.

My values of equality and inclusion are fundamental to what I do. I can't be a part of a political group because I'm too much of a free spirit – and I put the people first, as I see it, not party politics, which inhibit and stifle expression and transparency.

I'm a character with lots to say. I don't see any point in being elected to sit quietly in a corner, even if others don't agree with me – I guess that's the educator in me!

We can never right the wrongs from our past, but we can learn from them and change. As Nelson Mandela said: "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world."



Karl (left) and his partner, David

i To access the oral histories recorded for 'Out on an island', visit www.outonanisland.co.uk

Driving change in the care system



Councillor **Sam Chapman-Allen** is Chairman of the District Councils' Network

The crisis across the health and care system has been the backdrop to the Hewitt review into integrated care systems, which began recently.

It is hard not to admire the work of dedicated professionals across the NHS and care system as they cope with intensifying challenges: more patients or service users than ever before, along with increasing rates of illness and complexity of cases.

The system was creaking amid rising demand even before the pandemic, and district councils acknowledge the difficulties faced by our county council and NHS colleagues as we strive to protect and support our local populations.

However, so many of the resources across the system are tied up in treating illness rather than preventing it.

While some ill health is unavoidable, a focus on eliminating preventable illness is essential, both to conserve the resources of the health and care system and to enhance wellbeing.

Much of the required integration of care and improvement of population health will happen locally, in places people live, work and access important services.

That's because the wider range of factors that affect our health and wellbeing fall under the responsibility of district councils.

It is district councils that are responsible for leisure centres and recreation; we are housing authorities charged with ensuring dwellings are safe and conducive to good health; and we oversee green open spaces – the lungs of a place.

Our benefits and welfare work supports the most disadvantaged members of society who often experience the worst health – and we run environmental health.

But it's our work beyond the provision of statutory services that is essential in a health system that prioritises



"We are on the frontline when it comes to addressing today's complex needs and preventing them from escalating"

prevention and moves towards an early intervention mindset.

We are on the frontline when it comes to addressing today's complex needs and preventing them from escalating into the social problems of tomorrow.

Examples of our early intervention work include South Norfolk and Broadland Councils' 'community connectors', who offer social prescriptions from GPs' surgeries – a non-medical solution to an array of social, emotional and practical problems that would otherwise impact on health.

My own council, Breckland, is working in partnership with the mental health charity Norfolk and Waveney MIND to develop 'mindful towns', and we've trained more than 250 mental health community champions.

The localised scale of district councils gives us a unique convening power, enabling us to work innovatively with community bodies on solutions that meet the needs of individual communities and individual people, which have not typically been provided by more remote bodies.

North West Leicestershire District

Council, for instance, works with foodbanks to provide pathways of support away from poverty, including a low-cost cookery course and support managing household budgets.

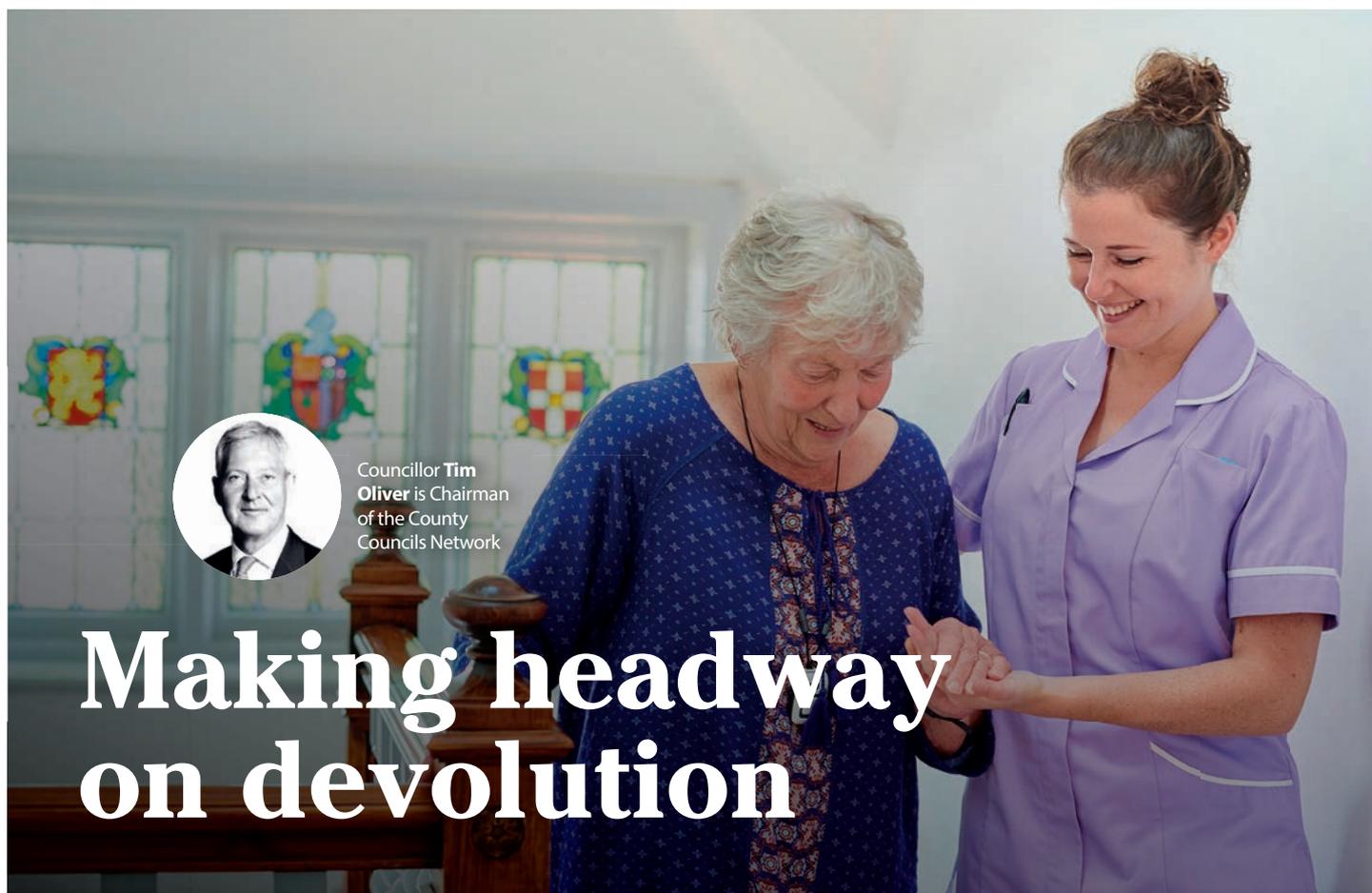
Working in partnership with GPs, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council has created new health networks, including an Asian women's group and community health champions, encouraging residents to take ownership of their health.

District councils do not have the biggest budgets or the highest profiles in the local system, but our small scale and our localised expertise gives us unique strength to focus on prevention.

Our work is integral to bringing about this desperately required shift in approach across health and care. We look forward to sharing our expertise with that of our partners as the Hewitt review charts a path to a genuinely integrated care system.



To find out more about the work of the District Councils' Network, please visit www.districtcouncils.info/



Councillor **Tim Oliver** is Chairman of the County Councils Network

Making headway on devolution

A new year provides the opportunity to reflect, and looking back at 2022 it's fair to say it has been a mixed bag for the County Councils Network's (CCN) member councils.

There have been some real advocacy successes against a backdrop of substantial financial and economic challenges, and these challenges loom large as we begin 2023.

The rise in inflation has been nothing sort of dramatic, our economy is on the brink of recession, and our health and care system remains under severe pressure.

With inflation running at almost three times the figure projected at the beginning of 2022, it has wreaked havoc on our financial planning with costs across all service and capital budgets.

The CCN's advocacy, alongside the LGA's, illustrated the scale of the financial challenge, and the Autumn Statement has helped numb the very worst of the pain we could have faced, with the Government providing us with a significant funding boost.

However, welcome though this funding is, it is not a silver bullet, and many tough decisions will have to be made this month, including potentially some reductions in services and council tax increases.

The CCN will be doing all it can to keep this issue firmly on the Government's radar throughout 2023.

Another significant policy shift that has given councils breathing space is the delay to the Government's charging reforms in social care.

CCN had led the way in outlining the financial and operational challenge of implementing these changes and by calling for their postponement because of inflationary and workforce pressures.

Again, credit needs to be given to the Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, for taking the difficult decision to postpone the reforms and, crucially, retain all earmarked funding for councils over the next two years to shore up existing services and focus on tackling winter pressures.

However, 2022 was not all doom and gloom and, thanks to the stellar work from CCN members, I can end this column on a more optimistic note.

For example, the Hewitt Review has given us the opportunity to focus on driving real system change across new integrated care systems to put the health and care system on a more effective, joined-up footing.

Separately, it is nearly a year since the Government invited nine county areas to begin negotiations on county

devolution deals as it launched its Levelling Up White Paper.

While I know many colleagues will have wished for quicker progress, if we look back there has been tangible progress.

There had not been one county devolution deal agreed since 2015, so to have six agreed since last summer shows that there is now real headway being made on this agenda, with CCN member councils working with their unitary and district colleagues to put forward ambitious and achievable proposals and showing flexibility on adopting different and new forms of governance.

CCN members are ready to open up the next round of negotiations with government, with the aim of having two-thirds of the network's members in negotiations or having agreed a deal by the end of this Parliament.

It is an ambitious target – but in challenging times we need as many levers as possible to draw on if we are to genuinely improve the lives and livelihoods of our residents.



To find out more about the work of the County Councils Network, please visit www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk/

Time to transfer power out of Whitehall



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

After being delayed by months of Tory chaos, the second phase of levelling up funding has finally been announced.

Cash-strapped councils whose bids were successful will be rightly pleased.

I'm delighted that my own council, Telford and Wrekin, was awarded £20 million to improve culture and higher education, through a remodel of our Place Theatre and a new digital skills hub.

But many other councils, of all political control, were left empty-handed.

Is pitting councils against each other to compete for short-term pots of money really the way to reduce regional inequality?

This 'Hunger Games'-style system,

which returns one-off funding of just £2.8 billion – a fraction of the £15 billion cut from council budgets every year – ensures that someone always loses.

Do the Conservatives really expect us to be grateful for this partial refund on the money they have stripped from our communities?

Questions have also been raised about fairness, with compelling need across towns, counties, boroughs and cities alike rejected, but cabinet ministers' communities winning the day.

The distribution of levelling-up funding should be led by evidence of where crucial investment is needed, rather than a system whereby ministers play judge and jury.

From West Midlands Mayor Andy Street to Shadow Levelling Up Secretary Lisa Nandy and council leaders from across the sector, we all agree this cannot continue.

The Labour Party offers a clear alternative to this 'sticking plaster' politics.

Labour Leader Keir Starmer's 'Take back control' bill would allow town halls to make decisions for themselves.

Councils would no longer be forced to go cap in hand to Whitehall, but would instead be given the tools, resources and backing to develop long-term, local growth plans.

Labour recognises that those in local government know best the powers they need to harness the skills in their area to drive growth, and is committed to the biggest ever transfer of power out of Westminster.

The current system is broken, and we need a Labour government to fix it!

"The distribution of levelling-up funding should be led by evidence of where crucial investment is needed"



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

A bid for devolution

Congratulations to the 111 areas across the UK that will benefit from a share of the latest £2.1 billion round of government funding for levelling up, announced last month.

The fund will provide investment in communities, creating new jobs and economic growth, and helping restore people's pride in the places where they live.

In our media response to the announcement of the awards, the LGA called for levelling up to be locally led by evidence of where investment needs to go, not based on costly competitive bids between areas.

The LGA has long argued that the current Whitehall funding model of bids and multiple funding streams – not just for levelling up, but other key areas, such as employment and skills, and climate change – is inefficient and ineffective.

It's not in line with the aims set out in the Levelling Up White Paper, and it is not



trusting local leaders – all of whom are ambitious for their local areas – to make the decisions that matter.

West Midlands Mayor Andy Street's comments about Whitehall's broken "bidding and begging-bowl culture" quite rightly made the headlines.

LGA Vice President Baroness Pinnock also summarised the issues succinctly in the House of Lords.

Noting that 111 out of 525 bids for levelling-up funding were successful in this round, with each bid estimated to cost £30,000, she said: "That's £12 million of hard-pressed council funding basically

wasted on a bid. Cannot the minister find a more effective way, such as devolving the money to local authorities, so this money is not wasted when it's desperately needed?"

At the LGA's annual conference last summer, Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove pledged to "reduce the number of [funding] streams and reduce the burdens" on councils, and to "give the greatest possible devolution of powers to local leaders".

With inflation also eating away at the value of those levelling-up bids that were successful, now really is the time to start doing just that.



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

In solidarity with Ukraine

On 24 February, it will be the first anniversary of the seminal event of the past 12 months – President Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

Over the past year, we have witnessed the heroic resistance of the Ukrainian people and the bravery of their armed forces as a war that was supposed to be over in days has resulted in countless setbacks for the Russian army, humiliation for Putin, and the Ukrainians regaining significant amounts of their territory.

I am proud that, at the very start of the conflict, the political groups at the LGA came together with local leaders from across Europe to endorse a statement that unequivocally condemned the violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. It also expressed our full support and solidarity to the Ukrainian people and our peers in Ukrainian local and regional government.

“Local government has been at the forefront of welcoming Ukrainian refugees”

While our government has been busy providing military support to Ukraine – with the UK being one of the leading nations in relation to this – and agreeing a range of sanctions against Russia, we, in local government, have been at the forefront of welcoming Ukrainian refugees through the ‘Homes for Ukraine’ scheme and helping them to settle into their new communities and build new lives.

A year on from Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine, we can be proud of the UK's military and humanitarian support to Ukraine and encouraged by the fortitude of the Ukrainian people and the heroism and successes of their armed forces.

Slava Ukraini!



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

The levelling-up agenda is flawed

It's very rarely that I find myself agreeing with leading Conservatives, but I couldn't agree more with West Midlands Mayor Andy Street in calling for the ‘begging bowl’ culture that forces areas to bid against each other for vital government funds to end.

A majority of the country was snubbed in the battle for levelling-up cash to fund urgent projects.

“There is a lot of wasted time, energy and money in unsuccessful bids”

Congratulations to those who were successful, including several Liberal Democrat-led councils, but there is a lot of disappointment out there, and a lot of wasted time, energy and money in unsuccessful bids which just saw neighbour set against neighbour.

Where is the feedback from ministers and MPs about why the bids had not succeeded?

If I was a sceptic, I would say the funding is being used to shore up support for the Government in marginal seats ahead of the next general election.

This was a perfect example of the urgent need for devolution, with funding decisions put in the hands of local politicians and organisations with local knowledge and expertise, not faceless civil servants in Whitehall.

Fundamentally, this episode is just another example of why Whitehall's bidding and begging-bowl culture is broken.

The sooner we can decentralise and move to proper fiscal devolution, involving all levels of local government, not a ‘top down, we know best’ attitude, the better.

It is flawed, and I cannot understand why the levelling-up funding money was not devolved for local decision-makers to decide on what's best for their areas.



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

A growing Independent voice

The movement towards Independent and smaller parties is rising to take on the huge challenge of recovering confidence and trust in democracy.

Our numbers have risen from a few hundred to more than 3,000 councillors. From running only three councils, we now run 33.

In addition, our councillors have moved from being elected in councils to leading from the opposition benches, campaigning and seriously influencing policy for the better.

The Green Party's growth in councillor numbers resembles a hockey stick curve, with plenty of signs showing the growth will continue for some time yet. Greens are well embedded in their communities with a twin focus on social justice and reducing carbon emissions.

The Climate Party, led by ex-banker Ed Gemmell, has caught the public's imagination, going head-to-head with the Conservative Party to provide a powerful voice for good.

Plaid Cymru, the Party of Wales, continues to inspire voters, with policies of responsible commitment to the Welsh environment, communities, culture and the economy, for a better Wales.

“Residents are turning to representatives focused on the local issues that matter to them”

Plaid Cymru and Independents in Wales each hold more seats than the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats combined, as well as leading a number of large unitary councils.

Residents are turning to those local representatives determined to focus on the local issues that matter to them. I look forward to seeing a much more diverse local and national government, representing the views of the electorate.

It's time to look carefully to find and support the very best candidates in all our constituencies.

? For more information about the LGA's political groups, see www.local.gov.uk



Councillor **Deborah Harries** and Councillor **Morriam Jan** are Liberal Democrat members of Birmingham City Council



Helping care leavers build a life

Improving the lives of children in care and care leavers is core to the responsibility of being a corporate parent; a promise that all councillors make when they are sworn in.

According to Birmingham Children's Trust, our care population rose to 2,094 by the end of March 2022, representing a rate of 72 per 10,000 young people – a figure that is set to increase in 2023.

Department for Education figures

suggest that most care leavers are not working or studying. Just 24 per cent of care leavers aged 19 to 21 in 2020/21 were tagged as being in education or employment.

Small wonder when you consider the overwhelming responsibility and challenge of finding somewhere to live, money to travel and work opportunities, piled onto young shoulders.

We are on a quest to help care leavers

build a life, post-care. As a starting point, we want all care leavers in jobs or apprenticeships to get free public transport and free medication up to the age of 25.

Care leavers also need access to a full package of mental health support, with specific focus on trauma and past harm, given that their experiences put them at greater risk of poor mental health.

We're delighted that, last month, Birmingham City Council passed our Liberal Democrat motion urging the council to lobby the West Midlands Combined Authority and the UK Government to deliver on these 'asks'.

We will continue to advocate for those in care and care leavers, as we seek to dismantle the barriers they face and offer solutions to provide a more equitable environment for them.

Care leavers have a lot of strengths to give to education and the job market. Many have resilience in abundance, but they also have life experience, judgement skills, problem solving, and more.

Helping these young people with travel and medical expenses, and ensuring they have good mental health support, will remove some of the barriers they experience trying to access the opportunities afforded to others.

Working together for rural communities



Minette Batters is President of the National Farmers' Union

British farmers and growers are in the midst of a historically significant transition period, as we move to a domestic agricultural policy.

As we also transition from centralised decision-making to increased devolution, local authorities will have a greater role in the future of British food production and maximising the potential of farm businesses to deliver for their local community – not least in terms of economic contribution, rural tourism, and renewable energy production.

Increased devolution provides a huge opportunity for local authorities to offer local solutions for local needs.

For farm businesses, which can be vulnerable to volatile markets, building resilience is key and this often comes in

the form of diversification. With 68 per cent of farms in England having diversified into a broad range of enterprises – from wedding venues and B&Bs to farm shops and green energy production – the importance of farm diversification is clear.

While farm diversification has previously been funded and delivered by the EU, the transition brings new forms of diversification funding, including the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

Crucially, it also brings new delivery mechanisms through local authorities.

This means they can better reflect the needs of rural communities and unleash farm businesses' potential through diversification projects, not just increasing the production of local, sustainable food, but also boosting rural tourism and the farms' contribution to the local economy.

The delivery of successful agricultural diversification projects will rely on local authorities working closely with farm businesses and industry stakeholders such as the National Farmers' Union.

Such representation on advisory boards will be a real help for local authorities in

pinpointing the unique factors impacting farming businesses and prioritising appropriate projects, while ensuring that funds aren't just swept up in larger urban projects.

If local authorities and rural businesses can work together, there are huge benefits to come from this localised way of working.

Farm businesses are the backbone of rural communities and local decision-making around funding can help them to thrive, which can only benefit and strengthen their local communities.

i For more on the National Farmers' Union, please visit www.nfuonline.com



Housing for older people



Councillor **Michael Hardware** (Con) is Cabinet Member for Strategic Growth at Harlow Council

We are failing to meet the housing needs of older people.

This is true, and we have failed to meet their needs for many years.

Local plans produced by districts, boroughs and cities across the country rarely have provision for housing for older people and, where they do, it is usually unsophisticated and limited to care homes or sheltered accommodation.

Councils are having to build homes, or modify existing properties at great expense, to meet the needs of an ageing population.



Considering the over-65s demographic is set to grow from 11.2 million today to 17.2 million by 2040, with older people accounting for between 25 and 30 per cent of the population in many areas, this is a travesty.

It is pleasing to see, however, that in a consultation launched by the Department

for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in December, on proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, specialist housing for older people is mentioned.

It suggests councils should focus on delivering more care home, retirement and assisted-living developments in their areas.

Without housing options, older people tend to stay in their family homes. This, in itself, restricts the market by blocking those homes, so they are not available for new families.

By providing more and desirable options for people aged over 55, they are more likely to move into homes that meet their needs, and the different levels of assistance or care that they require as they get older.

This will release larger homes back into the market, enabling younger families to use them. The knock-on effect will free smaller homes and so aid mobility, especially for younger generations.

Anything that improves options for older people and further frees the housing market should be supported. The DLUHC consultation concludes in March.

i The consultation on 'Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy' closes on 2 March, see www.gov.uk/government/consultations/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-reforms-to-national-planning-policy

Sustainable transport and safer roads



Councillor **Amy Foster** (Lab) is Vice-Chair of the London Road Safety Council

We know that decarbonising transport is critical to achieving net zero, but it is imperative that we do not overlook the need for safer roads as we work towards a sustainable future.

Perceptions and realities of road danger remain a significant barrier to realising sustainable development ambitions.

Greener Transport Solutions, a not-for-profit organisation, has estimated that there needs to be a 25 per cent reduction in the number of miles driven on the UK's roads for us to reach our net-zero targets – yet, each year, nearly 30,000 people are killed or seriously injured on Britain's roads.

I recall the horror I experienced when a fellow, newly qualified teacher in Southwark told me how their school community had been traumatised



following the death of one of their reception children on the way home from school, only yards from the school gate. The child lived on a local social housing estate and was from a migrant family.

This is just one example of the humanity behind the data – data that shows that our most marginalised communities, and particularly children from these groups, are most at risk.

However, as local authorities, we have considerable power to reduce road traffic fatalities in our communities by:

- designing for people, not vehicles, and using data to target disadvantaged communities and those most vulnerable to road danger
- targeting those most likely to develop dangerous driving behaviours with

education programmes – for example, young, newly qualified drivers and delivery riders

- working with partners to break down the silos that can exist between public health, planning and transport teams
- lobbying for legislative changes to deter repeat offenders through highways policing, zero-tolerance approaches to drug driving, and speeding fines linked to income.

There is no single solution. It is only by implementing a suite of measures that explicitly targets the real and perceived dangers communities face when walking and cycling that we will be able to deliver the scale of change needed to achieve our net-zero – and public health – ambitions.



Councillor **Canon Ann Easter** (Lab, Newham) is Co-Chair of Healthwatch Newham

A trusted voice

Like many councillors, I hold a number of roles, and these help me to get to know my local communities and support my work as a councillor.

One of my roles is as Co-Chair of Healthwatch Newham, one I have had for five years.

Healthwatch is the health and social care champion, covering the whole country with its local teams. Healthwatch Newham is a small team, but certainly makes a difference locally.

Although funded by the local authority (with a grant from central government), Healthwatch always makes sure that it is, and is seen as, acting independently.

This was clearly shown to me during the pandemic, when Healthwatch Newham was seen as a trusted voice by local communities.

'Vaccine hesitancy' was an issue across

the country, with some communities less willing to sign up, leading to worse health outcomes in those communities.

As a trusted independent voice, Healthwatch was able to support the vaccine rollout by giving local people the information they needed to make an informed decision.

One of Healthwatch's key strengths is that it listens to people and gives them a voice, including people who are often under-represented.

In 2021, a trend analysis report on maternity services showed high levels of dissatisfaction with maternity services.

As a result, last year Healthwatch Newham worked with other Healthwatch teams in north-east London to collect the views of people using maternity services to support the NHS's maternity equality and equity programme.

People from more deprived communities and black, Asian and minority ethnic communities are more likely to be affected by health inequalities and inequities, and it's essential that they are involved if plans are to meet their needs.

I'm pleased to say that this priority is also being reflected in Healthwatch England's work looking at maternal mental health.

Healthwatch provides connections with local communities and with the wider Healthwatch network, and the NHS that help me as a councillor. Why not find out what they can do for you?

i For more information about Healthwatch in England, please visit www.healthwatch.co.uk



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Scrutinising cyber security

It may seem like just a technical issue for IT departments, but cyber security is crucial to the functioning of local authorities and the services they provide to residents.

Over recent years, there has been an increase in the number of cyber attacks targeting councils, as they all possess information – for example, financial, personal – or infrastructure of interest to malicious actors.

The impact of those attacks can be devastating – costing millions of pounds to put right, and causing significant disruption to services, with many of these needing to be rebuilt in their entirety.

If a cyber attack does occur, your council may be subject to both legal and regulatory consequences. Residents may suffer through service disruption, or consequentially through data breach.

While cyber threats cannot be completely eradicated, the risks can be significantly minimised – and good scrutiny is one way to do this, according to new guidance from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), commissioned by the LGA.

It found that scrutiny can bring about positive change by identifying any gaps and vulnerabilities in your council's current cyber security framework, policies, and procedures.

Helpfully, members of the scrutiny committee need not be IT experts – albeit an awareness of some introductory technical information may give councillors confidence to engage with the wider

While cyber threats cannot be completely eradicated, the risks can be significantly minimised

topic in a more proactive way. They will, however, need to recognise the importance of cyber security in terms of its pervasiveness throughout the council's departments and infrastructure.

In doing so, they will be able to subject their council's plans to challenge and take action to promote changes of behaviour on cyber security within the organisation.

Because of the ever-changing nature of cyber threats, the scrutiny function ought to be both proactive and reactive on the matter of cyber security, the guidance suggests.

Scrutiny committees should operate on the basis that there is potential for an attack to impact on their organisation.

They should probe leadership, relevant officers, and the executive on what current preventative measures are in place, how these manage the risk, and whether they are reviewed regularly for efficacy as threats evolve and circumstances change.

Following an incident, scrutiny

committees should consider what lessons can be learned from it and the organisation's response, seeking assurance that risk of recurrence and associated impacts are minimised, and identifying future risks and vulnerabilities.

The guidance suggests key issues for scrutiny committees to consider pertaining to cyber security include: leadership and governance; risk management, including identification of cyber threats; policy, process, and practice development; cultural change; proactivity; training; working with experts; people management; response and recovery planning; and supply chains.

In research for the guide, the CfGS found that while many councils had a digital strategy that included cyber security, most councils had not examined cyber security through scrutiny.

Buy-in to cyber security varies from council to council, with some scrutiny committees placing a great deal of focus on the matter and reviewing their framework and procedures regularly, while others have not looked at it at all.

Unsurprisingly, real-world experience of a cyber-attack has a transformative effect on councils, their members and colleagues, generating a longer-term increased interest and proclivity to undertake work on cyber security more widely.

Specifically, members from such organisations advised that scrutiny could add meaningful value and bring about positive change, according to CfGS.



'10 questions on cyber security', a guide for councillors sitting on scrutiny committees and the officers who support them, can be downloaded for free at www.local.gov.uk/publications

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



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



ELECTIONS

Voter ID and May polls



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



Although there have been no postal strikes since Christmas with their potential impact on postal voting, a cold January has done little to persuade a seemingly unenthused electorate to turn out in numbers.

And as we approach the annual May contests, it is worth remembering that they will mark the first election in England where photographic identification will be required at the polling station.

When a similar system was introduced in Northern Ireland in 2003, it appeared to result in an up to 5 per cent decline in expected levels of turnout.

Although electors there eventually adapted well enough, it is likely that the English local elections will this year be marked by confusion about the new rules and some inconsistency in their application.

But not withstanding that – and the distraction to both the campaign and the ‘post-match analysis’ by the rival allure of HM King Charles III’s coronation – attention will be focused on what could well be the last full set of elections before Prime Minister Rishi Sunak goes to the country.

More than 8,000 seats in 230 councils fall vacant this year, with the Conservatives defending more than 4 in 10 of them.

Labour has some 2,100 councillors up for re-election, with the Liberal Democrats and a combination of assorted smaller parties and Independents each defending in excess of 1,200 seats.

Most of these were last fought in 2019 when both major parties lost councils and councillors.

This time however, with the Conservatives up to 25 points behind Labour in the opinion polls and having lost more than two-thirds of all the by-election seats they have defended since last September, there is scope for a sizeable swing to Labour.

It is likely that the English local elections will this year be marked by confusion about the new rules

An entirely plausible turnover between the Conservatives and Labour of about 800 seats would see the Conservatives surrender their position as the largest party in English local government for the first time in two decades, and with it their leadership of the LGA.

As well as the overall tally, there will be interest in how the parties are performing in different parts of the country.

The recent Redcar result, in a ward where UKIP finished a strong second in 2019, is a wake-up call for Labour that so-called ‘red wall’ voters are not yet ready to flood back to the party.

Key tests for Leader Keir Starmer will come in other parts of the Tees

i For more details on these and other recent results, please visit www.lga-first.co.uk/local-by-elections

Local by-elections

Cannock Chase, Etching Hill and The Heath

LAB GAIN FROM CON
4.6% over Con Turnout 16.2%

Plymouth, Moor View

LAB GAIN FROM CON
20.2% over Con Turnout 26.0%

Plymouth, Plympton Chaddlewood

GREEN GAIN FROM CON
15.7% over Con Turnout 23.8%

Redcar & Cleveland, Normanby

CON GAIN FROM LAB
3.1% over Lab Turnout 19.3%

Staffordshire, Biddulph North

LAB GAIN FROM CON
23.3% over Ind Turnout 19.2%

Staffordshire Moorlands, Biddulph West

LAB GAIN FROM CON
LAB GAIN FROM IND
5.9% over Ind Turnout 16.5%

Stevenage, Bedwell

LAB HELD
49.6% over Con Turnout 22.6%

Uttersford, Great Dunmow South and Barnston

CON GAIN FROM RES
16.8% over Res Turnout 16.4%

Valley such as Middlesbrough – where Labour lost control for the first time ever in 2019 – and Hartlepool, the scene of a 2021 Conservative parliamentary by-election triumph.

Labour will also want to show unambiguous progress in areas of the Midlands such as Dudley, Walsall, and North East Derbyshire, where councils and constituencies have fallen to the Conservatives in recent years.

If the Conservatives are to avoid the kind of pincer moment that so damaged them in the days of Tony Blair, they must also watch for the Liberal Democrats (and indeed the Greens) in more affluent parts of southern England.

Three of the cabinet’s big beasts – Jeremy Hunt, Michael Gove and Dominic Raab – have seats in Surrey where the Liberal Democrats have lately shown renewed local electoral strength.



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