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Going to the polls

Local elections 2023 preview

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#LGAConf23 speakers include:

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Secretary of State for Levelling Up,
Housing and Communities

Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP

Secretary of State for Education

Sir Ed Davey MP

Leader, Liberal Democrats

Chris Boardman MBE

National Active Travel Commissioner,
Active Travel England

Sir Robert Chote

Chair, UK Statistics Authority

Cllr Georgia Gould

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Local elections

Good luck to everyone who is standing for re-election on 4 May, and thank you, to you, and your colleagues who are standing down, for your service to your local communities.

If you have a moment in between canvassing and campaigning, you can read Professors Colin Rallings' and Michael Thrasher's predictions for what might happen on the day (p30).

Elsewhere in this month's **first**, we take a look at the Hewitt Review of integrated care systems (p10) and the Government's latest action plan for reforming adult social care (p12).

Our lead comment is on a report from the Institute for Government and the University of Cambridge on devolving English government. The report concludes that central government needs to sort itself out for the benefits of devolution to be realised locally (p23).

There are updates on housing Afghan families (p13), the LGA's recent Urban Summit (p15), fire and rescue services (p16), and the Local Government Challenge, which will shortly be whittling its 10 contestants down to four for the final at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth (p21).

I look forward to seeing many of you there – please visit www.local.gov.uk/conference to review the programme and book your place (p8).

Cllr Izzi Seccombe OBE
is LGA Vice-Chairman



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Circulation 16,900 (April 2023)
first is published online at
www.local.gov.uk/first at least two days
before the magazine. To unsubscribe
email first@oscar-research.co.uk

Photography Getty Images and
shutterstock.com

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Councils to retain right to buy receipts

Councils in England will be able to retain 100 per cent of receipts from the sale of homes through the Right to Buy (RTB) scheme for the next two years, the Government has announced.

The RTB scheme was introduced more than 40 years ago by the Housing Act 1980, allowing most council tenants the opportunity to buy their council home at a discount and helping thousands of families get on the housing ladder.

Since the maximum discount was significantly increased in 2012 and 2013, the average discount has risen by 150 per cent to almost £68,000 in 2021/22, leading to a quadrupling in the number of RTB sales.

The LGA has long called for reform of the scheme, with no region of the country or local authority able to provide one-for-one replacements of homes sold.

A recent report by Savills, commissioned by the LGA, the Association of Retained

Council Housing (ARCH) and the National Federation of Arms-Length Management Organisations, estimated that of the 100,000 homes expected to be sold through the RTB scheme by 2030, only 43,000 were likely to be replaced.

An LGA spokesperson said: "We are incredibly pleased to see these changes to the RTB scheme, something we have long called for, as the previous rules, alongside the significant discounts to tenants, have meant that councils have struggled to replace social homes on a one-for-one basis.

"With long waiting lists for social housing and the private sector becoming more and more unfeasible for some households, ensuring that councils have the funding to replace any homes sold through RTB quickly is crucial, and this announcement should go far in supporting this.

"This change, allowing councils to retain

100 per cent of RTB receipts for two years, must be made permanent, and councils also need the ability to be able to set discounts locally.

"The additional money that councils will now be able to keep will make it easier to replace homes sold and support an end to the prioritisation of one household's home ownership over another's access to secure, safe, social housing."

● See p13



LGA: Government should reverse cuts to active travel

The Government has reduced funding for active travel projects to local councils by nearly £200 million.

In a written ministerial statement, the Department for Transport confirmed that funding

for projects, including improved cycling infrastructure and low-traffic neighbourhoods, had been reduced by an estimated £200 million.

Previously, the Government had stated that active travel

investment would have a particular focus on boosting the number of children walking or cycling to school.

In the 2021 Spending Review, an additional £710 million was announced for segregated cycle

lanes, to provide cycle training for every child, and deliver an e-bike support programme to make cycling more accessible.

It was announced that this package would also include funding to build hundreds of miles of high-quality cycle lanes and deliver walking schemes, as well as changes to The Highway Code.

An LGA spokesperson said: "It is very disappointing that the Government is set to cut future funding for active travel by nearly £200 million.

"Councils have been at the forefront in creating new schemes, have embraced the Government's ambition that 50 per cent of all journeys in English towns and cities are walked or cycled by 2030, and for the UK to be net zero by 2050.

"Investment in cycling and walking is vital if we are to improve public health, tackle climate change and reduce congestion, and the Government should urgently restore this much-needed funding."



Next steps on social care support are 'disappointing'

The Government has set out a two-year plan for reform of the adult social care system in 'Next steps to put people at the heart of care'.

However, the LGA has said reductions in previously earmarked funding for reform, including for the care workforce and housing transformation, are "disappointing".

'Next steps' follows the Government's 2021 White Paper, which set out a vision for the next 10 years and provided information on funded proposals for three years.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board said: "This publication illustrates the complex web of different pots of funding that have been allocated to support adult social care – some allocated to councils often with specific conditions, some via the NHS, and some to be spent nationally.

"This is not the way to get best value from the available resources.

"The plan to invest in workforce skills and digitisation is necessary for the reform of social care but not sufficient to deliver the changes that are needed to invest in prevention and recovery and address low pay and unmet need.

"It is disappointing that only £700 million of the previously announced £1.7 billion has been allocated in this paper and that the investment in the workforce has been halved, and a planned allocation to housing is gone.

"This is a significant watering down of promises, which, even as they stood, would only have taken us on the first steps towards a more sustainable and refocused future for social care.

"We are calling for the £600 million that is yet to be allocated to be clearly ringfenced for social care and given to councils, without additional conditions, to help address immediate care needs in communities."

● See p12



'Overhaul safeguarding to protect children'

A national review has called for a major overhaul of essential safeguards to protect children with disabilities from abuse at children's homes.

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has set out recommendations to improve the care and welfare of children with disabilities and complex needs living in residential settings.

It follows a review last October into very serious abuse of a significant number of children with disabilities and complex health needs at three residential special schools registered as children's homes in Doncaster, operated by the Hesley Group.

Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, Deputy Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "The treatment suffered by children in settings operated by the Hesley Group is both unacceptable and deeply distressing.

"The findings of the national panel must be an urgent call to action for the entire sector to make sure that children with disabilities and complex health needs receive the support they need in settings where they are safe and well cared for.

"There are clear opportunities through planned children's social care and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) reforms to implement these recommendations, if they are adequately funded.

"As this report rightly identifies, supporting these children well requires the commitment of a range of partners.

"To help ensure this happens, councils should be given additional powers to hold local partners, including health and schools, to account for their role in supporting children with SEND."

Short-term and holiday lets – consultation

A consultation published in April will look at new rules to give communities greater control over short-term holiday lets while supporting the tourism sector.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has proposed introducing planning permission for turning an existing home into a short-term let, to ensure local people are supported in areas where large numbers of holiday homes are preventing them from finding affordable housing.

In a response to a 2022 government consultation on developing a tourist accommodation scheme in England, the LGA highlighted that councils have been raising concerns about the impact of unregulated growth in this sector for some time.

The response states that this is not an issue faced by all local authorities but is instead more prevalent in visitor "honeypot" destinations.

"We believe this indicates the need for regulation that allows local discretion and implementation, ensuring that the response is proportionate for those places without significant challenges while also enabling those places with significant impact on their communities to take action," said the LGA.

"While there is extensive and comprehensive anecdotal evidence of the growing impact of this type of accommodation, there are few opportunities to record and quantify the impact on communities and services.

"This lack of direct evidence is not a reason to do nothing, but emphasises the need to develop, as a minimum, a registration scheme to ensure that councils and emergency services are aware of how many of these properties are located in their areas and can start recording incidents related to them."



In brief

Supporting older people's housing

The Government has announced that Professor Julianne Meyer, a leading expert in care for older people, will chair the Older People's Housing Taskforce. The announcement implements one of the proposals made in the 2022 Levelling Up White Paper. The taskforce will be responsible for spearheading work to support the growth of a thriving older people's housing sector in England. It will run for 12 months

and work across housing, health and care sectors to drive an increase in the volume and range of housing options and make recommendations to government.



Changing futures

An additional £7 million has been provided for the Changing Futures programme in England, which helps local areas deliver support services to people facing multiple issues. The Government also announced that the programme will be extended to 2025. Changing Futures brings together the work of councils, charities and support services into easily accessible teams that can better cater for a person's range of issues, including mental ill health, homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse and domestic abuse.

Fly-tipping grants

Twenty-one councils across England will be allocated grants to help crack down on fly-tipping, as part of the latest allocation of £775,000 of funding by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Councils can use the grants to invest in projects such as improved CCTV, greater barriers to protect neighbourhood areas, and better waste infrastructure to provide access to correct disposal methods. This will build on the successes of the 11 councils in a previous round of funding. Councils will have six months to roll out these initiatives, before sharing how this worked in practice and helping others to develop similar schemes.

LGA: no abuse at elections

The LGA has joined forces with the Jo Cox Foundation to call for people to show respect and civility towards candidates standing in, and officers running, the local elections.

The calls come as more than 230 councils – covering around two-thirds of England – go to the polls on 4 May, and it will be the first time that photo ID is required for all voters at all local elections.

The LGA has warned that the changes come with significant practical challenges for councils and has urged people to treat hardworking local polling station staff with patience and respect.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board said: "Candidates and councillors want to engage with as many voters as possible during this election campaign.

"However, they should not have to experience abuse, threats or any kind of harmful behaviour simply because of who they are, what they look like or their background.

"As well as this, councils are working around the clock to deliver the local elections and the new voter ID requirements, which is the biggest

change to in-person voting in 150 years.

"The practical effort required to deliver this change in such a short timeframe should not be understated.

"It is vital that the implementation of voter ID in May is rigorously and transparently evaluated to ensure that lessons are learned ahead of future elections."

Su Moore, Chief Executive Officer of the Jo Cox Foundation said: "Campaigning for respectful politics is a key part of our work to make change on the issues that Jo Cox was passionate about.

"Robust debate and scrutiny are essential aspects of our democratic process; abuse and intimidation shouldn't have to be."

● See p30



ICSs 'should focus on health promotion'

An independent review of integrated care systems (ICS) has called for a shift in focus and resources from treating illness to promoting health.

The review also calls for a social care workforce strategy to complement that of the NHS; agreement on a limited number of shared priorities for ICSs; and for local leaders to be given the space and time to lead.

Integrated care systems were introduced across England in 2022.

They bring together the NHS, local government, social care providers, charities and other partners to deliver on four goals: improving outcomes in population health and healthcare; tackling inequalities in outcomes, experience and access; enhancing productivity and value for money; and helping the NHS support broader social and economic development.

Former Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt was asked to chair the review in November 2022, to consider how the oversight and governance of ICSs can best enable them to succeed.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "The LGA is grateful to Patricia Hewitt and her team for involving us and wider local government stakeholders in each of the workstreams that developed the findings and recommendations of the Hewitt Review.

"Councils look forward to continuing to work with the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that the recommendations on the autonomy and accountability of integrated care systems are implemented fully and without delay."

● See p10 for more on the Hewitt Review



Bullying allegations 'at every fire and rescue service'

Bullying, harassment and discrimination allegations have been reported by staff in every fire and rescue service in England, an inspection report has found.

Examples of racist, homophobic and misogynistic behaviour were found by inspectors in a quarter of services, with the sector called a 'boys' club'. People said they felt unable to report bad behaviour for fear of reprisals.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services is calling for appropriate background checks on all firefighters and staff and new misconduct standards to be introduced, including a national barred list and new mechanisms for staff to raise concerns.

Cllr Nick Chard, the LGA's Fire Services Management Committee's member of the Fire Standards Board, said the findings of the report were "unacceptable" and thanked the

inspectorate for this important piece of work.

"Everyone has a right to be treated with dignity and respect at work and to feel safe. There is simply no place for this kind of behaviour in our society," said Cllr Chard.

"While the majority of fire and rescue staff act with integrity and are held in high regard by the public for their tireless efforts to help save lives and prevent fires, it is clear that much more needs to be done urgently to improve the working culture in the fire and rescue service."

He added the LGA is committed to ensuring the sector has an inclusive, welcoming culture and "will work with partners to assist fire and rescue authorities in acting on the recommendations in the report and to embed the Core Code of Ethics, so staff feel able to speak out, raise any concerns they have and get the support they need".

● See p16

Councils 'remain male-dominated'

New analysis from the Fawcett Society and Democracy Club shows that 95 per cent of local authorities across the UK remain male-dominated.

Ahead of this month's local elections, their report states that fewer than 5 per cent of councils (18 of 382) had achieved at least parity of gender representation and only 36 per cent of the 19,212 elected councillors across the UK were women, a similar proportion to the number of female MPs.

The proportion of women in councils in 2022 is only two percentage points higher than in a snapshot taken in 2018. Based on the current rate of change, there will not be 50:50 representation until 2051, according to the joint report.

Cllr Izzi Seccombe, LGA Vice-Chairman, said: "We know that many prospective councillors are put off standing because of their already busy lives. We want to see more women, parents and carers stand for election and encourage them to step up to leadership roles in local government, while still being able to live their lives outside of the council chamber.

"We also know that many people are put off from standing for election because of abuse and harassment targeted at elected politicians, which particularly affects women and others who are under-represented in local government.

"Councils want to create a working environment which is attractive and supportive for people from all groups and backgrounds, to help further improve representation locally while producing the next generation of civic leaders."

● See www.local.gov.uk/debate-not-hate

Action plan for dealing with antisocial behaviour

New measures have been announced by the Government to tackle antisocial behaviour, including introducing increased fines for fly-tipping, littering and graffiti.

Under the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan, 16 areas in England and Wales will be funded to support new 'hotspot' police and enforcement patrols in areas with the highest rates of antisocial behaviour, or trial a new 'Immediate Justice' scheme to deliver swift and visible punishments.

Under the scheme, those found committing antisocial behaviour will be made to repair the damage they inflicted on victims and communities, with an ambition for them to start work as soon as 48 hours after their offence.

Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove also announced measures to reopen empty shops, by giving councils new powers to quickly take control and sell off the rental rights for empty buildings.

Cllr Nesil Caliskan, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said councils are committed to preventing antisocial behaviour and protecting residents from offenders, who can make the lives of the people they target a misery.

She added: "With much of the plan enforcement focused, councils will always take a balanced and proportionate approach to using the tools at their disposal to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour.

"However this often requires a policing or community safety officer presence to enforce the restrictions, and so it is vital government ensures this and all measures in the plan are adequately resourced."



In brief

Nutrient mitigation

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has launched a call for evidence and expression of interest on local planning authority-led nutrient mitigation schemes. The LGA has previously warned that 'nutrient' pollution of rivers – generated by agriculture and water companies – is preventing the building of thousands of new homes (see **first** 682). A Nutrient Migration Fund was announced in the Spring Budget in March, and the call for evidence will help to enable and accelerate the delivery of projects providing nutrient mitigation to support sustainable development. It closes on 24 May, see <https://bit.ly/3UPVuVU>

Smoking prevention

People will be encouraged to swap cigarettes for vapes as part of a 'swap to stop' scheme to help them stop smoking. Pregnant women will also be offered financial incentives to help them give up, and there will be a crackdown on underage and illicit vape sales to children, ministers have announced. The Department of Health and Social Care has allocated £3 million of government funding to combat the latter issue, and has issued a 'call for evidence' on ways to stop children vaping. That closes on 6 June, see www.gov.uk/government/consultations/youth-vaping-call-for-evidence



Rural funding

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has announced £110 million of funding to councils through the Rural England Prosperity Fund. Eligible local councils can invest this funding to improve community facilities, through initiatives and community infrastructure projects, or to help start local businesses to create employment opportunities in rural areas. The fund is a rural top-up to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Support to find settled housing for Afghans

Afghans living in temporary accommodation in the UK under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) will receive additional support to find settled accommodation.

A total of £35 million is being provided by the Government in new cash for local authorities, to assist in increasing the level of support available and overcoming key barriers in accessing the housing system and employment.

In addition, the Local Authority Housing Fund has been expanded by £250 million, helping councils to source homes to house Afghans currently in bridging accommodation such as hotels.

An LGA spokesperson said: "Councils share ambitions to move people from hotels and will continue to work closely with individuals and families over the coming months with local partners to help Afghan families find permanent homes.

"To ensure we do not see a further rise in

homelessness as a result of a chronic shortage of properties across the UK and increase current significant pressures on homelessness teams, councils will need sufficient resources and flexibilities to assist with finding and funding accommodation, particularly for larger families.

"A place-based approach is also needed that takes into account pressures on local services and from other programmes.

"We will continue working with government to tackle the current shortage of accommodation across local communities and on the need for coordination of local arrangements, so councils can provide families and individuals with certainty and support.

"Councils also need to be involved alongside health, schools and childcare, transport, police and their communities for any new sites for asylum seekers so these are properly planned, fairly distributed across the UK and any new arrivals kept safe and supported."

● See p13

Senior ministers at LGA conference

Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and Education Secretary Gillian Keegan, are among the headline speakers confirmed so far for the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth in July.

Liberal Democrat Leader Sir Ed Davey MP and Cllr Georgia Gould, Leader of Camden Council, will also be speaking at the event, which attracts more than 1,000 delegates and speakers from local government and beyond.

Other speakers include Chris Boardman MBE, National Active Travel Commissioner, from Active Travel England; Sir Robert Chote, Chair of the UK Statistics Authority; Dame Christine Lenehan, Director of the Council for Disabled Children; Beverley Tarka, President of the

Association of Directors of Adult Social Services; Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the NHS Confederation; Kwajo Tweneboa, housing campaigner; Alice Tai MBE, paralympic swimmer; and Richard Blakeway, Housing Ombudsman.



Conference plenaries and workshops cover the full range of local government responsibilities, from housing, economic growth, adult social care and children's services to asylum and resettlement, waste, active travel and net zero, building safety, employment and skills, culture, mental health, sector-led improvement, and special educational needs and disabilities.

Annual conference takes place from 4-6 July. To find out more and book your place, please visit www.local.gov.uk/conference

Housing solutions



The LGA has given evidence to parliamentarians on homelessness

Many councillors will be familiar with the work of select committees in the House of Commons and House of Lords and know how useful they are in scrutinising government policy, sharing the good work of councils, and the changes we want to see.

Another way the LGA seeks to influence the work of Parliament is through our engagement with all-party parliamentary groups, more commonly shortened to APPGs.

The number of APPGs has grown in recent years and the LGA is kept busy contributing to the work of groups covering the vast range of services that councils deliver, as well as the APPGs directly supported by the LGA (such as the APPG for Devolution) and our own special interest groups.

These groups bring together members of both houses to discuss issues of interest, and while these groups are informal, their meetings are frequently well attended and often hold inquiries – such as our own inquiry into the Levelling Up White Paper – that inform debates elsewhere in Parliament.

This was highlighted a few weeks ago, when the LGA gave evidence to the APPG

for Ending Homelessness and the APPG for Housing Market and Housing Delivery during a joint inquiry into housing solutions for homeless households.

As part of the inquiry, we also submitted written evidence.

Opening the session, the Co-Chair of the APPG for Ending Homelessness, LGA Vice-President Bob Blackman MP (Con, Harrow East), asked for the LGA's views on converting commercial properties into residential buildings and whether this was a viable option in addressing the current housing and homelessness crisis.

In response, we stated that councils believe there is potential scope to use commercial-to-residential conversions to deliver the affordable housing units needed across England.

However, we called for this to be done through the planning application process rather than the prior approval process through permitted development rights.

This would ensure schemes are developed in line with local policies, contribute to local infrastructure requirements – including affordable housing – and are subject to all relevant legislation and regulations

for developing sustainable, quality homes.

Asked how the negative perceptions of commercial conversions could be addressed, we called for better standards and the need to look at local factors such as access to amenities and support for vulnerable residents, all of which are critical and could be taken into consideration if conversions were subject to the planning process.

During the session, the LGA also shared the need to fully understand the impact of commercial-to-residential conversions on councils' revenue accounts, because of the loss of income from business rates.

The APPG's evidence session was an important opportunity to remind Parliament of the challenges faced with revenue accounts and will, we hope, have contributed to the LGA's recent success in persuading the Government to allow councils to retain Right to Buy receipts for a period of two years.

We continue to work on making this change permanent through direct contact with government, briefing parliamentarians, and through evidence we continue to submit to select committees and APPGs.

● See p20



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



Councillor
David Fothergill
is Chairman of the
LGA's Community
Wellbeing Board

Working to a fast and furious timescale, the former Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt published her independent review of integrated care systems in April.

The review considers the accountability, oversight and governance of integrated care systems (ICSs). It also considers the role of national government and NHS targets and priorities, for which integrated care boards are accountable.

Though the timeline was extremely tight – the Chancellor announced the review in last November's Autumn Statement – Hewitt's team took an inclusive approach in developing the findings and recommendations.

More than 1,000 leaders from across the NHS, local government, social care, the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sectors, think tanks and academics have been engaged.

More than 400 respondents, including the LGA, submitted written evidence (see www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses).

Local government has been particularly well represented, with elected members and officers on each of the workstreams tasked with developing recommendations.

Cllr Tim Oliver, Chair of the Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care Partnership Committee, and a member of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, and I were involved in working groups, as were several senior LGA officers.

Patricia Hewitt also attended a meeting of the Community Wellbeing Board, to hear the views of board members.

The result is that many of the LGA's messages from our evidence are echoed in the final report. It is not possible here to summarise the almost 40 wide-ranging recommendations, but here is my take on the key messages.

A new care model

The Hewitt Review focuses on health



A new focus on promoting health

The LGA has always strongly advocated for a far greater emphasis on, and investment in, prevention, so we are delighted that the Hewitt Review clearly reinforces this message.

It calls for an annual uplift of 1 per cent for the next five years in ICS budgets for prevention. It also calls on the Government to increase the local government public health grant.

Maximising the potential of ICSs and letting local leaders lead

Government and NHS England must give ICS leaders the time, space and appropriate support for them to get the best health outcomes for their communities.

Hewitt calls for a significant reduction in the number of national targets for integrated care boards to 'no more than 10 national priorities'.

The report also highlights the importance of ensuring that decisions are made as close as possible to the communities they affect, with a strong role for place-based partnerships.

Greater local autonomy and accountability depends on the availability of timely, transparent and high-quality data shared by all partners.

The review makes several helpful recommendations about the need to maximise the use of shared data and to reduce the reporting burdens imposed by national government and agencies on local systems.

Unlocking the potential of primary and social care and their workforce

The review recommends far closer working to plan for, recruit and train the health and care workforce, with a national social care workforce plan to complement the soon-to-be-published NHS workforce plan.

It also calls for more to be done to increase flexibility for health and care staff to move between sectors. There is welcome recognition of the urgent need for adult social care to be adequately funded.

A joined-up approach to funding across health, social care and local government

In the same way that ICSs bring together the NHS, local government, the VCSE sectors, and other partners to join up care and address the wider determinants of health and wellbeing, Hewitt calls on national government to



For the Hewitt Review, see www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-hewitt-review-an-independent-review-of-integrated-care-systems



“Local leaders need the freedom and flexibility to focus on the unique challenges of their populations”

adopt a joined-up approach between government departments.

In particular, the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and NHS England should align budgets and grant allocations for local government, including social care, public health and the NHS.

What next?

My read out of the review gives just a small glimpse of its many messages and recommendations.

The work necessary to produce the report has been substantial, but it has resulted in positive and constructive recommendations.

The LGA strongly agrees that ICSs are a real opportunity for local NHS, political, professional and community leaders to do things differently and forge a new model of health promotion, care and support to improve the health and wellbeing of their communities.

This model reaches beyond the boundaries of the NHS and social care to address the causes of poor mental and physical health. It is one that also ensures that, when people do need support, they get the right care, in the right place and at the right time.

In order to deliver, however, local leaders need the freedom and flexibility to focus on the unique challenges of their populations.

National government needs to trust NHS and local government leaders to work with their communities to set their own priorities.

We will continue to work with partners to ensure that the Government acts to implement the recommendations of the Hewitt Review.

It is important that we all make the most of this opportunity for real and lasting change in our approach to improving the health of our communities.



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Next steps on social care reform



A major reset is needed to prioritise prevention and early intervention



Councillor
David Fothergill
is Chairman of the
LGA's Community
Wellbeing Board

The LGA has long highlighted that adult social care exists to enable adults of all ages, and with a range of conditions, to live their best life – and an equal life.

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to our frontline care workforce, as well as unpaid carers, who give so much in supporting people of all ages who draw on care to live the lives they want to lead.

As well as helping people, adult social care contributes at least £50.3 billion to the economy in England and provides significant societal benefits.

Despite the clear economic and

social benefits of investing in social care, the sector has been significantly underfunded. Adult social care has had to manage a funding gap of \$6.5 billion since 2010.

The sector is now also facing soaring inflationary pressures, alongside the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, which threaten its ability to function at even the most rudimentary level.

Meanwhile, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) has reported that nearly 300,000 people are waiting for an assessment of their needs, with more than 37,000 people waiting for their care package to commence, and just over 210,000 waiting for a care review.

We are pleased that the Government went some way to addressing the financial challenges on social care and health in last year's Autumn Statement, by providing more resources over the next two years to meet inflationary

pressures. But this funding will not address the underlying gaps, unmet and under-met need, market fragility and workforce pressures across health and social care.

Neither does it provide sufficient long-term certainty for social care to invest in different models of care that prevent ill health and promote wellbeing, resilience and independence.

The Government's latest plan, 'Next steps to put people at the heart of care', published in April, sets out how it will implement longer-term transformation of the social care system over the next two years. There will be a reduction in funding from the £1.7 billion the Government committed to provide in its December 2021 'People at the heart of care' White Paper, including the removal of £300 million for housing transformation and a reduction in funding for workforce measures from £500 million to £250 million.

This is a disappointing reversal of commitments made in the White Paper.

There are huge pressures on social care capacity and workforce, and a real need to invest in new models of care, including expanding specialist housing.

Failing to address these issues will have real consequences for people who access social care, as well people's confidence in the Government's commitment to meaningful reform in this vital public service.

We need a major reset of our social care and health services, to prioritise prevention and promote independence, in line with the LGA's, ADASS's and the NHS Confederation's joint vision for a high-quality and sustainable health and care system, published earlier this year (see **first** 680 and bit.ly/416tAal).

To achieve this, the Government must invest in preventing and delaying people from developing health and social care needs, create the ability within services to plan for the long term, and deliver a long-term, fully funded workforce plan that covers health and social care – including the public health workforce. It is only by doing so that we will turn the growing tide of ill health and dependence on acute and hospital services.



Asylum and resettlement

Funding and flexibilities are needed to secure affordable accommodation for Afghan families

The Government has announced that temporary bridging accommodation for 8,000 Afghans will be closed in a staggered process.

Individuals and families housed in bridging hotels are currently being written to by government, outlining when their access to hotel accommodation will end, along with details of the further support to enter settled accommodation.

Councils will be given £35 million in new funding to support move on, integration and to minimise homelessness risks.

The existing Local Authority Housing Fund will also be increased by £250 million to help councils source homes to house Afghans.

The Government has also outlined ambitions to use two ex-military and one non-military site to accommodate just under 5,000 asylum seekers, with further sites to follow.

Councils continue to seek better planning and engagement on the use of larger sites for asylum seeker accommodation, which includes a community cohesion plan.

The LGA has pressed for councils, their local partners and their communities to be fully involved in any new sites for asylum seekers so that these are properly planned and can keep people safe and supported, and for asylum seekers to be more fairly distributed across the UK.

We are aware of the pressures on local areas from current and new programmes and continue to highlight councils' concerns around the supply and access to housing, particularly for asylum seekers, following the Government's recent announcements on resettlement and the use of hotels.

The LGA is pressing for ongoing engagement at a national, regional and local level to jointly work through the process and for a place-based

“We highlighted the need for continued joint working on asylum dispersal”

approach that takes into account pressures on all local services and from other programmes.

In a letter to ministers at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Home Office and Cabinet Office, the LGA has highlighted council concerns around the cumulative impact of new and existing asylum resettlement programmes, combined with local housing and homelessness pressures.

It also urges government to develop urgent communications materials to help explain what the recent announcements mean for communities, those families affected, as well as local partners.

The LGA has put forward a range of proposals to help with the delivery of the recent announcements, along with wider priorities on asylum and to help minimise cohesion risks – which are becoming an increasing concern across the country.

The proposals include calls for funding and flexibilities to enable councils to secure affordable accommodation for Afghan families – particularly large families – and clarity on the refusals process.

We highlighted the need for continued joint working on asylum dispersal, including early planning for the future.

We have also asked for further urgent cross-government discussions on both the implications of the temporary exemption of asylum accommodation from ‘house in multiple occupation’ licensing requirements and how local partners can work with the proposed inspection regime.

Finally, the LGA reiterated its call for a commitment to a ‘place-based approach’ that takes into account pressures on local services and pressures from other programmes.

Publicly accessible EV charging for all?

Just Believ



Perran Moon, CMO of Believ, formerly Liberty Charge, the charge point operator (CPO) on a mission to deliver cleaner air for all

The power behind the electric vehicle (EV) charging industry revolution is fast evolving, and as it changes, so too must we. Since our inception three years ago, Liberty Charge has been growing and developing to support the vital rollout of EV charging infrastructure through engagement with communities and supporting clean air targets. Today we can install, manage and maintain all speeds of publicly accessible chargepoints at zero cost to both the public sector and business sectors.

To ensure we never lose sight of our mission for 'cleaner air for all', Liberty Charge is rebranding and will be known as Believ.

Believ will accelerate the movement to

improve air quality, by reducing pollution and dependence on fossil fuels.

As Believ, we offer all speeds of charge point. Our experience has shown those delivering EV charging networks need their chargepoint operator (CPO) to behave as a business partner and review a site's total charging needs to make recommendations without any bias to charging speed or manufacturer. It is this approach that we wholeheartedly endorse to help local authorities to better serve the needs of EV drivers, and encourage more people to make the switch away from petrol and diesel vehicles.

As Believ, we also deliver our chargepoint solutions to firms as well as local authorities. This helps us to accelerate the rollout of the convenient and reliable network of publicly accessible chargepoints the UK so desperately needs. It means we're providing EV charging convenience, on-street, in residential locations, local car parks, and the retail, leisure, healthcare and educational establishment destinations that support the diverse requirements of EV drivers. This convenience

is a vital aspect to delivering cleaner air for all.

Increasing the pace of the UK's EV charging infrastructure rollout is essential because we are currently falling short in delivering the Government's ambition of installing 300,000 publicly accessible chargepoints by 2030. Speed is therefore of the essence. Believ holds large stock volumes of chargepoints capable of delivering all speeds, meaning we're able to deploy at scale and at pace.

As our Liberty Charge customers know, our end-to-end chargepoint service comes at zero cost – we manage all planning, installation and ongoing maintenance with no reliance on public or external funding. And we remain part of Liberty Global and Zouk Capital, with Virgin Media O2 as our delivery partner, so we continue to have the scale and capacity to roll out charging networks as quickly as they're needed.

i To find out more, email contactus@believ.com or visit www.believ.com

Charging forwards
to provide publicly
accessible EV
charging for all



The new  LIBERTY CHARGE



Urban futures

Cities are full of potential, waiting to be unlocked



Mayor **Marvin Rees** is
Chair of the LGA's City
Regions Board

More than 100 delegates gathered at the LGA's London offices for our second annual urban summit in March.

This event, hosted by the LGA's City Regions Board in conjunction with Core Cities, Key Cities and London Councils, brought together urban leaders, academics, policymakers and artists to discuss the future of cities.

The summit was kicked off by Andy Haldane, Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and principal architect of the Levelling Up White Paper.

He set out the initial findings of the RSA's UK Urban Futures Commission, including how UK cities lag behind their global competitors on productivity and growth, and highlighted the links between income and health disparities.

The packed agenda included: speakers from around the world sharing their international perspective on the

future of cities; urban local government leaders on their own aspirations for their areas; and Alex Norris, Shadow Levelling Up Minister, on Labour's plans to devolve more powers to cities.

There were also opportunities for our expert attendees to contribute. These conversations covered healthy cities, climate change, financing investment, and models for strong urban leadership.

These rich and in-depth conversations will feed into the next stage of the RSA's commission, and the City Regions Board's ongoing work on the future of cities.

At the summit, we launched a series of six videos, commissioned by the board to amplify the voices of those who live in our cities, so we could share their experiences of urban life and their hopes for the future.

These videos are on the LGA's Future of Cities hub – see www.local.gov.uk/future-cities.

It was important that the summit brought together city leaders, as we're never stronger than when we speak with one voice.

As Chair of the City Regions Board and Core Cities, I joined Cllr John Merry CBE, Chair of Key Cities, and Cllr Georgia Gould, Chair of London Councils, to sign an open letter to Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This set out our ambitious offer to government: that, with the right

policies, finances and space to deliver, cities can produce better outcomes, not just for urban areas, but also for the whole country.

To empower cities, there are short-term changes that could make an immediate difference.

Cities need a shift away from the current system of costly competitive bidding. The next rounds of the Levelling Up Fund should be allocated on the basis of robust evidence of where crucial investment needs to go.

Urban areas should also be given the ability to plan, commission and oversee a joined-up employment and skills service. Introducing the LGA's Work Local proposals could result in a £420 million benefit to the national economy (see www.local.gov.uk/work-local).

These short-term changes are necessary given the immediacy of the crises that cities face. However, to truly unlock the potential of our cities, we need a reset in the relationship between national and local government.

This would mean local leaders could truly level up their areas, working effectively with private and public partners to draw in vital investment.

The urban summit was the start – not the end – of a conversation about the future of cities.

Our next event – on 5 July, at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth – will explore what this new relationship with government could look like. I hope to see many of you there.



To find out more about the LGA's annual conference and to book your place, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events

Red light on bullying

The LGA is committed to helping reform fire service culture

Recent media reports and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services' (HMICFRS) spotlight report into values and culture in the fire service have highlighted some truly shocking and unacceptable behaviour.

The inspectorate's report outlined inappropriate behaviour such as bullying, harassment and discrimination towards both service staff and members of the public in all services, to varying degrees.

While the majority of fire and rescue staff act with integrity and are held in high regard by the public for their hard work saving lives and preventing fires, it is clear that much more needs to be done urgently to improve the working culture in the service.

Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect at work and to feel safe. There is simply no place for this kind of behaviour in our society and in our fire and rescue services.

HMICFRS has repeatedly found examples of poor values, culture and behaviour since starting inspections in 2018.

Its latest report highlighted how subcultures within some services can leave staff feeling the need to conform to certain behaviours and thinking, reducing their ability to challenge inappropriate behaviour.

HMICFRS also reported that a lack of workforce diversity inhibits the ability to tackle culture issues.

However, it said recruitment should not be the only focus of action. Further training is needed alongside changes to background checks, as well as ensuring that processes are trusted by staff to raise concerns.

HMICFRS stated that leadership that is visible, transparent and fair is key to creating a positive culture.

The report's 35 recommendations focus on areas such as how employees



can raise concerns regarding behaviour; background checks for those joining; misconduct handling; the leadership of the sector including management and leadership training; the recording and use of diversity data; and improving diversity.

Some recommendations are aimed at fire and rescue services themselves and others at national organisations including the Home Office, National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the LGA.

Ensuring that we have an inclusive and welcoming culture in the fire and rescue service is a priority for the LGA.

Working alongside the NFCC and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, we produced a 'Core Code of Ethics' in May 2021 to help establish a common approach towards

ethical behaviour within the fire and rescue service.

The code was developed alongside guidance to support its implementation, and the Fire Standards Board, on which the LGA sits, developed a 'Code of Ethics Fire Standard' to support services in using the code.

Our work with the NFCC and the National Employers (England) on 'Fit for the Future' – our shared view of ambitions for the future of the service – cites leadership, people and culture as some of the key pillars for improving our sector.

We will work with partners to help fire and rescue authorities act on HMICFRS' recommendations and embed the 'Core Code of Ethics', so staff feel able to speak out, raise any concerns they have and get



Transformation and change

Collaboration can help deliver a fire service of which everyone can be proud



Mark Hardingham is
Chair of the National
Fire Chiefs Council

My number one priority is to work with all fire and rescue services to provide an open, inclusive, and welcoming culture for everyone.

Recent reports in the media – along with the findings in HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services' (HMICFRS) recent spotlight report on culture – have been shocking.

The allegations of bullying, harassment and discrimination paint a stark and damning picture of the cultural issues across fire and rescue services.

Any form of discrimination, bullying or harassment is completely unacceptable in a modern-day fire and rescue service and must not be tolerated. These behaviours need to stop – and stop now.

Now is the time to act together – and quickly – to deliver transformation and culture change.

The change will also need to build on some of the fantastic culture and inclusion work that fire services and their staff are already delivering for their staff and local communities.

Just a few weeks ago, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) held a culture and inclusion event that brought together almost 200 people from across fire and rescue services, the LGA, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and other stakeholders.

This was one of the best attended events we have ever held, highlighting everyone's commitment and ambition for change.

It was clear there was a determined focus on improving culture and inclusion, and acknowledging the issues we must face head on.

The NFCC is also establishing an

independent external expert advisory panel which can provide challenge to ensure we deliver against our culture commitments.

At the conference, I committed to publishing a new plan within a month, setting out clear actions and milestones.

This includes a commitment to ensuring every fire service has an independent, confidential reporting line, meaning staff and the public can report concerns with the confidence that they will be heard, and action will be taken.

Work on culture and inclusion has been under way for a long time.

The NFCC has a longstanding relationship with the LGA and National Employers. A key piece of work is 'Fit for the Future' that sets out our ambitions for a 21st century fire and rescue service.

One of the improvement objectives states: "An inclusive culture is at the heart of every fire and rescue service. They are a welcoming and supportive place to work for the widest variety of people from all backgrounds."

This work is continuing and is at the heart of our work – not just on culture but further reforms.

In addition, NFCC has produced a range of leadership development and other culture and inclusion products for fire and rescue services to use as they continue to improve.

Fire service leaders know that cultural change is critical and there is a wealth of collective intelligence and perspectives inside and outside of the fire service that we are drawing upon.

By harnessing learning and addressing difficult issues together, we can work to ensure we have a fire and rescue service that everyone is proud to be part of.

I want the public and every member of staff to see and experience a service that values diversity, equality, inclusion, aspiration and fair challenge.

the support they need. We will also assist authorities in delivering the improvement strategies they developed as a result of the work of the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Service's Inclusive Fire Service Group.

We recognise that we need to improve the fire service's culture and are committed to working with partners on these issues.



This is a joint, cross-party statement from the four lead members of the LGA's Fire Services Management Committee. For the 'Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services – England'; see www.local.gov.uk/publications/core-code-ethics-fire-and-rescue-services-england.



For more about the work of the National Fire Chiefs Council, please visit www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk



Freya Roberts is Project Manager at University College London's Climate Action Unit

Partners in grime

How a council and a researcher built a climate change tool for the waste sector

In 2019, Cambridgeshire County Council identified that 93 per cent of its carbon emissions came from the goods and services it procured.

Its climate team promptly set a target to halve this by 2030. But they immediately uncovered an obstacle to their goal: there was no standard way of measuring emissions across all their suppliers and sectors.

Measuring and reducing carbon is a major, urgent and complex challenge for local authorities.

Of all the emissions within any council's remit, the 'scope 3 emissions' – those indirect emissions that occur in the upstream and downstream activities of an organisation – are toughest to tackle. Tough. But not impossible.

This is how one council and a researcher built a carbon-counting tool to drive down emissions from the waste sector across England.

Innovative partnerships

Isabela Butnar is a Cambridgeshire resident. She is also a researcher who models greenhouse gas emissions at University College London (UCL).

While volunteering on climate projects in her area, Isabela

crossed paths with Emily Bolton, a climate change officer working for Cambridgeshire County Council.

In summer 2020, they spotted an opportunity to work together properly.

The Net Zero Innovation Programme – funded by the LGA and delivered in collaboration with UCL – had an open call for councils wanting to form partnerships with university researchers to tackle local climate challenges.

Emily and Isabela signed up, with a bold aim to tackle all scope 3 emissions.

The partner team decided to create a carbon calculator, using Isabela's modelling expertise and applying it to Cambridgeshire County Council's data.

A few months into the programme, however, it became apparent that they would quickly run into opposition if they tried to include all sectors and suppliers at once. Instead, they decided to focus on one sector at a time.

"We had done a carbon footprint for the whole organisation," said Emily. "We already knew where the hotspots were: waste and highways construction."

There were several reasons that they, ultimately, chose to focus on waste.

First, they considered the need; unlike in the construction sector, no free tools existed for measuring emissions from the waste sector.

Second, they knew that, for a tool to actually be used, it would need to be developed with the sector.

Cambridgeshire councils' waste services are handled by a small number of suppliers, who are engaged through long-term contracts. They were prime candidates for a collaborative effort.

Over the following months, the partner team took many steps to create a well-informed and easy-to-use tool.

They mapped out the stakeholders who would use or be impacted by the tool and engaged with them. They created a project plan, agreed delivery timelines, and established a regular timeslot to work together.

They used mentoring sessions to hone their engagement skills and held meetings with their collaborators (the suppliers) to iteratively make improvements to the calculator.

By the summer of 2021, the partners had built and implemented a carbon calculator for scope 3 emissions from the waste sector in Cambridgeshire.

They then secured further funding and training in 2022 to scale up their tool and make it accessible for all local authorities in England.



i **The Net Zero Innovation Programme is an initiative of the LGA and University College London's Climate Action Unit.** It provides training to develop partnerships of researchers and climate change officers from councils, as well as mentoring and dedicated funding to deliver a project. Visit www.local.gov.uk/net-zero-innovation-programme or watch this YouTube video to find out more: www.youtube.com/watch?v=drQZB-nQgDw

“Measuring and reducing carbon is a major challenge”

In January 2023, having spent a year engaging with other councils, they launched the free-to-use tool on the Local Partnerships website, where it now lives.

The launch event was attended by 260 delegates and, by the end of March 2023, the tool had been downloaded by 60 local authorities.

The ingredients for success

Projects such as the one undertaken by Cambridgeshire to build its emissions calculator are vulnerable to failure – up against the usual suspects: budget cuts, overstretched staff and competing priorities.

Yet this council-research

partnership succeeded, and their example offers lessons for others eager to take on local climate challenges.

The team delivering the Net Zero Innovation Programme identified several ingredients in Cambridgeshire’s recipe for success:

- **Personal commitment.** Neither party came with the ‘I’m the expert’ mentality – instead, they genuinely valued each other’s knowledge. They were both personally interested in climate change and took clear ownership of the project from the outset. They set aside a regular time to work together, and stuck to it.
- **Starting small(er).** The team recognised that, to achieve its grand ambitions, it would need to begin by focusing on one, carefully targeted sector. They chose an area with the potential for big emissions savings, but where there were only a few suppliers to work with.
- **With the sector, for the sector.** By inviting suppliers to help develop the calculator, the project team avoided simply forcing a new tool upon end users. That step-by-step approach also gave the team multiple opportunities to identify improvements, and increased the likelihood that the tool would ultimately get used.
- **Engaging for scaling.** During their first year working together, the council and researcher built a functioning tool. But they continued working together for another year to engage other councils so they could develop, validate and scale the tool. They used the programme’s mentoring support to design workshops to maximise engagement from other councils.

A tool for tackling emissions

The waste emissions calculator helps local authorities understand the carbon emissions from their waste management and treatment operations.

This includes the transportation of waste, mechanical and biological treatment, composting, incineration, landfill and recycling.

The calculator can be used to estimate the current carbon footprint per contractor (where a local authority has several suppliers), per treatment process, or for the whole authority’s waste services combined.

It also allows local authorities to investigate the potential carbon savings that can be achieved by using different treatment processes in the future.

The tool is free to use, and can be downloaded from the Local Partnerships website at localpartnerships.org.uk/download_waste_emissions_calculator



Preventing homelessness

Local interventions are effective, both for people and the public purse



Jenny Coombs is Senior Director – Place at Local Partnerships

In 2022, Local Partnerships worked with two councils to build a case for investment in homelessness prevention.

The two – one a northern city, one a southern county – were selected as they are both active in homelessness prevention, keen to build on their own good practice and interested in a tool that could demonstrate the impact of the work they do.

Local Partnerships developed the investment case by: reviewing available data and interviewing key participants; exploring the inputs, activities, outputs and impact of homelessness prevention work in the two councils; and developing a simple cost-benefit model. There were several, high-level conclusions.

First, intervention is effective,

both in human terms, and for the public purse.

All the services we modelled were effective in helping vulnerable people to turn around their lives and gave positive cost-to-outcome benefit ratios.

While these benefits accrued across a local system (not just to councils), they do represent a significant opportunity for using limited resource differently and more efficiently.

Second, relatively small amounts of council investment can lead to significant benefits for the public purse.

Consultants PwC estimated that approximately 50 per cent of the ‘in system’ benefits of preventing someone from rough sleeping will accrue to the local authority.

Third, projects offering wraparound services, as well as housing support, and with a person-centred approach, can be particularly effective.

We know that the causes of homelessness are complex and a person-centred approach, offering help to individuals with their specific, articulated needs, is more likely to be successful than a one-size-fits-all intervention.

Fourth, the results point to the merits of joint commissioning.

Different individuals need help from different agencies, so beginning to understand the benefits of a system of support to prevent homelessness can strengthen partnerships, lead to a more nuanced commissioning process, and maximise the benefits achieved through the use of the combined resources.

Finally, the success of the ‘Housing

“Monitoring, data collection and analysis across the system will be time and capacity well spent”

options’ service in promoting prevention and limiting the use of temporary accommodation frees up further resource to be used in prevention. Compared with other core cities, our city was much more effective at preventing homelessness once a person has presented at the front door. Other councils can learn much from this approach.

There are some inevitable caveats to the conclusions drawn.

Data that is easily accessible has been used and some, not all, benefits have been monetised.

The benefits are high-level estimates and, while coming from reputable, published sources, do not purport to express cashable savings for the local authority or other agencies.

The model built is a starting point and can be developed over time with the councils’ partners.

Robustness will increase as assumptions can be refined and data is collected and used to analyse the mechanics of the system.

Gaining a better understanding of effective levers to prevent homelessness, along with the skills and resources residing in partner organisations, will lead to a more refined and accurate view of which partners are best placed to operate which levers.

Monitoring, data collection and analysis across the system will be time and capacity well spent, as this will feed into the joint commissioning process and enable a more agile use of combined resources – potentially supporting reallocation of some resource between organisations to relieve pressure points, remove any duplication and get the most benefit out of resources available.



See www.local.gov.uk/publications for ‘**Making the case for investing in homelessness prevention**’ and a version of the model available for all local authorities. Local Partnerships LLP is a joint venture between HM Treasury, the LGA and Welsh Government, helping the public sector deliver projects and change at the local level, see www.localpartnerships.org.uk

Finding top talent

Vying for a place in the
LGA's officer challenge final



Teams Thrive and Catalyst await the judges' decision at Cheltenham

Back in January (**first** 679), we announced that the LGA-run Local Government Challenge was back.

We had again recruited 10 ambitious council officers to work in teams to face a series of tough, real-life local government challenges designed to develop their leadership skills – all while providing valuable fresh perspectives to host local councils.

As of late April, our 10 contestants were partway through the competition.

With the prestigious £10,000 Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship up for grabs for the winner, to fund a project of their own design, the contestants are looking determined as they compete to make it to the final.

Local Government Challenge 2023 began in February, in the heart of the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership – the first partnership to host a challenge.

Held at Boston Borough Council, the contestants were tasked with developing an action plan for the partnership to lead the way on flood resilience in the sub-region,

and maximise the benefit for communities and businesses across all coastal economies.

Clearly enthused by such a complex and technical challenge, both teams offered impressive responses.

Team Thrive's idea focused on creating one local voice to lobby at national level and build local skills through a centre of excellence.

Team Catalyst's proposal centred on skills and innovation, and diversifying the economy through green tourism.

Team Thrive edged it, to become the winners of the first challenge of 2023.

For challenge two, the contestants travelled to Cheltenham Borough Council, where they were given a unique task to develop a plan that would ensure all of Cheltenham's communities prosper from the town's Golden Valley Development – a pioneering garden community integrating hi-tech business, residential and leisure uses.

Team Catalyst presented a three-year action plan focused on how Cheltenham could meaningfully engage with residents, and considered how the council can reduce some of the barriers

to people getting access to technology and obtaining the skills they need to work on the new development.

Team Thrive's proposal centred on 'The GVD Way', a formula for businesses to follow so that they, and the borough, succeed. This involved 'The GVD Pledge', a commitment for businesses to build a pipeline of local talent, use buying power to support local businesses, and become proud members of the community, with the ability to create positive difference.

The judges' deliberation again went down to the wire as they pored over the teams' complex and ambitious suggestions. Gareth Edmundson, Chief Executive of Cheltenham Borough Council, announced the eventual victor: Team Catalyst!

More recently, the contestants have completed their third challenge, at Cherwell District Council, where they were asked to design a future model for waste services that factors in the significant changes on the horizon for waste services across the country.

Thrive's suggestion of lobbying government to pilot a digital approach to the deposit return scheme and Catalyst's idea of a new Bicester Eco Station both went down well. Council Leader Cllr Barry Wood announced that Team Thrive were the winners after another tough decision.

At the end of the fifth challenge, the contestants will be whittled down to four finalists, who will be at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth (4-6 July), pitching their proposals to delegates and a panel of judges before the winner is announced.



Contestants visiting the Golden Valley site on Challenge 2

i To find out more about the Local Government Challenge, please visit www.local.gov.uk/lg-challenge. You can book your place at the LGA's annual conference at www.local.gov.uk/conference

Listening to social workers

Annual survey shows caseloads and paperwork remain concerns

The social care workforce faces increasing challenges – not least from high vacancy rates and rising numbers of agency workers.

Giving everyone who works in social care a voice is vital to understanding the key issues, so they can shape and adapt to changes.

The employer standards for social workers set out the shared core expectations of employers, to enable social workers in all settings to work effectively and safely.

The eight standards consist of: a strong and clear social work framework; effective workforce planning systems; safe workloads and case allocation; wellbeing; supervision; continuing professional development; professional registration; and strategic partnerships.

Every year, the LGA carries out an

employer standards survey, also known as the 'health check'.

The survey gives a voice to registered children's, adults' and mental health social workers, occupational therapists, and non-registered social care professionals, and allows them to feel listened to, and that their employer is proactive in tackling challenges.

The survey's purpose is to better understand a number of critical questions about staff experiences – including how well their employers are delivering the standards, how they perceive their working environment, and what factors influence them to remain engaged with their work and minded to stay with their organisations.

More than 16,000 responses for this year's survey – up almost 60 per cent on 2021. This included more than 7,000 responses from registered social workers, who contributed to 49 per cent of the total survey.

Social workers strongly agreed that they feel they are treated fairly and respectfully by all staff, and that their supervisors or line managers encourage and motivate their career development.

Similarly, social workers feel that they can access the training and development needed to carry out their role well and understand how their role fits into the organisational structure – although mental health social workers responded less positively

in respect of understanding how their role fits in.

Social workers do not feel entirely satisfied that they have the dedicated time, resources, and opportunities to carry out their continuing professional development (CPD), and do not feel that they have an up-to-date plan of their professional development needs and how their employer will contribute to them.

There has also been very little change to how social workers perceive the allocation of their workload and ability to balance their case work with the resources they have.

They also agree that their role involves burdensome paperwork that has little or no impact on outcomes for families, which may limit the effectiveness of their work.

Employers should continue to ensure work is allocated fairly and transparently and that social workers' workload is assessed regularly to take account of work complexity, individual worker capacity and time needed for supervision and CPD.

Notably, permanently employed social workers feel less satisfied with their employment package than agency staff, and respond less positively across every work experience question.

Overall, the data shows that while there has been a slight improvement in responses to some of the employer standards, for others – such as supervision, safe caseloads and work allocation and professional registration – there has been no change.

It is important to ensure these standards improve and that others are maintained and do not affect the volume and quality of social work.

i **'National summary report of the employer standards survey for registered social workers 2022/23'** – see www.local.gov.uk/publications. Each council that took part will receive individual reports, as well as the national results and regional breakdowns



COMMENT



Dr Jack Newman (I) is a Research Associate at the University of Manchester, and Professor **Michael Kenny** is Director of the Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge



The challenges of devolving English government

England is governed by an over-centralised and incoherent tangle of institutional structures.

It is administered in Whitehall by departments that are simultaneously attending to the UK, while local accountability faces upwards to ministers rather than downwards to local people.

Our new report – ‘Devolving English government’ – lays bare some of the main weaknesses of England’s political structures and the challenges this creates for devolution.

Part of a wider review of the UK constitution by the Bennett Institute for Public Policy and the Institute for Government, the report assesses the current state of English governance and identifies three fundamental problems that are holding back devolution and undermining the effectiveness of local and devolved government.

First, England’s administration is over-centralised.

Drawing on three different indices of decentralisation across OECD and European countries, we show that England is an outlier compared with most others with a similar population size and levels of economic output.

This characteristic is linked to a cluster of other problems: the geographic concentration of economic and cultural power in the capital; a London-centric civil service; top-down control over public spending; a half-developed layer of city-regional government; and a notable lack of autonomy for local councils.

Second, the complicated map of local government does not align with the vast array of policy geographies used by Whitehall, making it almost impossible to know who is accountable for many outcomes in a given territory.

The failure to conceive of an English territory is linked to the confusing way in which England and the UK are repeatedly conflated within the culture and structures of British government.

These features contribute to a widespread feeling among the public that England’s administration is opaque and unaccountable.

Third, there are major problems with how democratic accountability works in England.

There is a strong ‘upward’ line of accountability from local and devolved government to Whitehall, with ministers considering themselves responsible for issues that are often local or regional in character.

People in England are less likely to turn out to vote in local elections than in other comparable countries, weakening local accountability.

Polling suggests that the public trust councillors more than MPs, but they struggle to understand local

government and feel very disengaged with local democracy. Additionally, England faces a reform paradox: there is a palpable need to address long-standing institutional weakness but there has been a seemingly unending stream of reforming initiatives since the late 1960s.

The problems we identify are interlinked and complex; they require an integrated and considered response. But in the past few decades there have been repeated, unfinished attempts to reform local government.

If the emerging model of English devolution is to be given the chance to bed in and progress, new structures in Whitehall are needed to oversee and protect the devolution process.

We therefore propose a new institutional framework, comprising:

- a new independent commission on English governance
- a cross-party commitment to devolution by 2030
- the codification of existing legislation on local and regional government
- an English Devolution Council to represent local government at the centre
- the creation of an England Office and an England-focused cabinet committee.

It is not sufficient to offer a new blueprint for local government reform. A key part of the problem of English governance is rooted in the organisation and culture of central government.

To unlock the potential benefits of devolved government, change is also needed at the centre.



i To find out more about the work of the Bennett Institute and Institute for Government, please visit www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/ and www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/, respectively

How not to implement policy



Councillor **Baroness O'Neill of Bexley**
OBE is a Conservative
Deputy Chairman of
the LGA

Ninety per cent of cab drivers opposed, 80 per cent of outer London businesses opposed and 80 per cent of outer London employees opposed.

One would think that these statistics demonstrate a clear lack of public support for the capital's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ), yet the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has decided to plough ahead with his plans to add another stealth tax on people across London and the home counties.

I want to pay tribute to the Conservative councils in outer London and the home counties that have joined

together to seek a judicial review against the decision of Mayor Khan to introduce ULEZ.

We continually hear Labour talk about the situation we face with the cost of living, yet when it comes to bringing forward practicable solutions, the answer seems to be introducing further taxation on the most vulnerable.

Indeed, Transport for London's (TfL) own data supports the fact that those who are most likely to be penalised by ULEZ are the most vulnerable residents in London.

Is the issue of air pollution important? Yes, of course. But ULEZ is simply not the answer.

Data from TfL suggests that in my own London Borough of Bexley, pollution would fall by a mere 0.3 per cent and this seems to be the trend across most of the outer London boroughs.

With the Mayor of London ploughing £400 million of taxpayers' money into this vanity project, this money would

be better spent improving public transport connectivity in outer London.

Evidently, the Mayor has failed to bring the communities he represents along with his policies. Across London, we have seen mass protests and outcry over the lack of consultation for residents.

When talking to people on the doorstep, you can feel the genuine sense of anger.

ULEZ is the perfect case study for local government to use on how not to implement policy. My message to councillors is this: public opinion must always be at the heart of decision-making in local authorities.

"Those who are most likely to be penalised by ULEZ are the most vulnerable residents in London"



Councillor **Izzi Secombe OBE**
is Vice-Chairman of the LGA

Electoral counts and coronations

Early May looks like being a particularly busy period for local government (as if there is ever a quiet moment!).

Many councils in England will be gearing up for local elections on 4 May, with more than 8,000 seats – around half of all seats – up for grabs, across 230 district, unitary and metropolitan councils (see p30).

About 70 per cent of the electorate will have the opportunity to vote, in what will be the first British elections requiring voters to present photo identification at polling stations.

The LGA and other organisations, including the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Electoral Commission, the Government, and councils themselves, have been working hard to publicise the new requirements.

We are pleased to see awareness levels rising, with most voters knowing



they need to bring ID with them on 4 May.

We have also urged people to treat all polling station staff with respect and patience as these new changes are implemented, and I know councils will be working around the clock to ensure the election day goes smoothly.

I know you have also been very busy preparing for HM King Charles III's and the Queen Consort's Coronation, just two days after polling day.

This will be a historic day for us all, with the eyes of the world on the pageantry and celebrations.

Councils around the country will be marking this unique occasion by facilitating road closures for street parties; running local events such as parades, thanksgiving services and celebratory lunches; lighting up local landmarks in red, white and blue; and encouraging volunteering through the Big Help Out on the Bank Holiday Monday (see p26).

The LGA has a range of resources to help councils support community events of all kinds to mark the pomp and pageantry of the Coronation (see <https://bit.ly/3L9FniM>).



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

Making a choice on who runs services

We are now just days away from the local elections, where voters face a choice at the ballot box over who runs vital local public services.

Of course, the irony of every local election is that national issues often dominate.

Many voters will use it as an opportunity to punish a government that crashed the economy and is forcing hard-working families to pay the price through higher mortgages and record inflation.

And Labour will certainly want voters to be thinking about their positive offer to help families deal with the cost-of-living crisis.

Council tax is a good example of a local issue that is largely driven by national factors, with most councils forced to increase it by 5 per cent because of an ongoing government squeeze on national funding.

But despite being hit hardest by reductions, Labour-controlled councils have a proud record of charging on average £345 less than Conservative councils.

"The irony of every local election is that national issues often dominate"

Labour Leader Sir Keir Starmer has announced that he would have introduced a one-year freeze for all council tax bills, paid for with a proper windfall tax on oil and gas giants.

Finally, while I obviously hope voters elect many more Labour councillors on 4 May, I nevertheless want to offer my best wishes and good luck to councillors of all parties and none that are standing for re-election.

All councillors deserve recognition for the work they put in for their communities, so, whatever your result, a big thank you for your service.



Councillor **Bridget Smith** is Deputy Leader of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group

The most trusted form of government

Can I send a big thank you to those standing down as councillors this May. You have made a real difference to thousands of people across the country.

And let's remind ourselves that local government is the most trusted form of government in this country.

A special thank you in particular to Liberal Democrat councillors who are standing again, and for delivering the largest number of Liberal Democrat candidates for years. Operation 'stand a slate' worked, so everyone should get a chance to vote for us.

"Operation 'stand a slate' worked, so everyone should get a chance to vote for us"

The Liberal Democrats and the wider Liberal Democrat local government family salutes you and your hard work.

Between January and March, we scored an impressive six by-election gains – and increased our vote share across all wards contested by 6.4 per cent.

That's the biggest vote share rise of any party – and by some margin too!

As the results in Gloucester, Edinburgh, Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Cheltenham and North Yorkshire show us, we scored some stunning wins – great building blocks for the local elections.

Our local elections campaign was launched by Ed Davey in Dacorum, Hertfordshire.

It was great to hear him taking the battle to the Tories' heartlands: the so-called 'blue wall' is crumbling, and Labour's record of mismanagement across many of our towns and cities speaks for itself.

We look forward to welcoming many more Liberal Democrat councillors to the local government family and wish all those standing again this May the best of luck.

Remember, it is not over until the polls close at 10pm!



Councillor **Neil Prior** is the Independent Deputy Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board

Bringing impartiality to sector-led support

The recent Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) on the LGA (see **first** 682) highlighted the value of its sector support offer.

The challenge recommended the LGA lead on "the design of a reshaped sector support and assurance framework for local government, reflecting the different needs seen across the sector".

In my time on the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, I've seen close-up the focus and effort on sector-led improvement. I think it's right that the CPC goes on to say that the proposed framework should "build and add to the strengths that already exist, with separate offers for 'assurance' and 'improvement'".

I welcome the focus on assurance as we all, whether in administration or opposition, have an important governance role in overseeing and challenging our respective councils' performance, and getting the right levels of assurance is a necessity.

"We all have an important governance role in overseeing and challenging our councils"

Independents make great member peers, bringing real impartiality to any sector-led support offer. It's more about your skills than status, so whether innovation and improvement 'floats your boat', or whether you're someone who's more at home with the essential assurance elements of good governance, you can have a part to play.

Working alongside our new national peer, Cllr Adam Paynter, myself and the LGA Independent Group's office will be focusing heavily on our Independent peer offer over the next few months, so please get in touch and see what you can bring by emailing independent.groupLGA@local.gov.uk

Good luck to everyone standing in May and don't forget, soon afterwards will be our own LGA Independent Group elections, with more details to come.

The power of volunteering



Emma Bowkett is a Researcher at Neighbourly Lab

At Neighbourly Lab, we have become increasingly focused on the topic of volunteering.

We know that volunteering is hugely powerful – it's the giving of our own time to a cause, community or interest that we care about, and it can make us happier, more connected to our communities, and enhance our own skills and knowledge.

Through this lens, we have been starting to think about how volunteering can be enhanced and even innovated so that more people can experience its benefits.

We all saw that during the pandemic volunteering rates shot up and millions of people who had never volunteered before were getting involved.

We saw people volunteering for formal organisations like the NHS or big charities like the British Red Cross, but we also saw the rise of something a little bit

different – informal volunteering: people volunteering or helping out in their local community by supporting friends, family, neighbours or even strangers who were in need of support.

Regularly we heard stories of people picking up prescriptions for their neighbours, creating street WhatsApp groups to support each other, or reaching out to isolated community members.

The rise of this type of helping out in the local community still resonates with us, but it has become less common and it is something that has not been looked into much.

So, at Neighbourly Lab, we are seeking to explore volunteering both from the perspective of the people taking part in these activities and the institutions/organisations that can encourage people to take part.

We are currently working with the Big Help Out, an initiative to celebrate and encourage people to lend a hand for their local community and charities on 8 May as part of the Coronation weekend celebrations.

We are supporting local councils to use it as a launch pad to facilitate and convene volunteering in their local

community, and to encourage residents to lend a helping hand to community members who might be in need.

We believe that local councils can play a central role in sustaining volunteering rates.

As part of this, we will be developing a toolkit for councils to use that seeks to understand the role that they play in accelerating volunteering from the perspective of the Big Help Out, and how they can use the learning from it for their longer-term volunteering goals.

We also want to understand what it is like to help out in your local community from the perspective of the people who are actually doing so, or contemplating doing so.

This type of research is vital, to allow volunteers to play a huge role in shaping and building volunteering opportunities, and because we will also be discovering what motivates people to help out, what barriers they face, and what they would like to see change to enable others to get involved in their local community.

We know that there is a huge amount to learn about informal volunteering and it is something that is often below the radar, so we can't wait to bring it to the forefront.

We believe this is a truly exciting time to be looking at and encouraging more people to get involved in both formal and informal volunteering, and we hope to share more about this soon.



To find out more about the council toolkit or our research, please email me at emma@neighbourlylab.com or visit www.neighbourlylab.com/



“Drones potentially pose a considerable headache for unprepared local authorities”



We are engaged with the key government departments and our member workshops have featured sessions by

ARPAS-UK, the drone industry trade association and professional body; UK Research and Innovation, which is leading a Future Flight Challenge; the Civil Aviation Authority, the Airspace Change Organising Group, and other interested parties.

As SASIG Chairman, I also recently presented a paper at a Westminster Business Forum conference on ‘Where next for drone regulation in the UK?’

This brought to the sector’s attention the need to engage with local government, for example on how to assess where and how drones can be used beneficially, and a clear regulatory framework (under which councils would take on additional responsibilities and liabilities).

Engagement is also needed on a development pathway to deliver the requisite training and expertise needed by all types of local authorities and their suppliers, on drone management, the interface with planning policy, and the health and safety and environmental issues associated, for instance, with ground handling facilities and emergency planning.

Our input has generated considerable interest among our existing 30-plus local authority members with airports in their areas.

However, drones will have an impact on all 317 local authorities in England and the 65 others that cover the devolved administrations.

For this reason, we have formed the Drone Advisory Bureau. It is open to all authorities to join and benefit from our work with government and industry.

It will also represent all local authorities in helping to define and communicate the regulatory and responsibility pathways that are likely to emerge over the next two to three years.

Are you drone aware?



Keith Artus is Chairman of the Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group

In the very near future, all local authorities are going to need to be drone aware – and a lot sooner than is probably realised!

Drones, and their larger electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft (e-VTOL) derivatives, are rapidly going to become an important new technology that local authorities will wish to take advantage of – to save costs and improve service delivery – but will also have responsibility to regulate.

By 2030, the professional services network PwC forecasts more than 900,000 drones will be flying in the UK, generating a range of substantive impacts including net cost savings of £22 billion, and a £45 billion contribution to our economy, encompassing some 650,000 jobs

and carbon emission reductions of 2.4 million tonnes.

In addition to the many commercial applications that are being envisaged (especially for last mile deliveries), there are also likely to be many applications of drones that can benefit local authorities: blue light services, healthcare and social services, traffic and environmental monitoring, infrastructure inspections, coastal management and land surveying, to mention just a few.

With so many drones prospectively in operation, it is anticipated there could be considerable pressures on the regulation and management of airspace, the availability of landing facilities, and ground infrastructure for recharging, low-level flight management, value assessment, control and monitoring interfaces, training, knowledge and resourcing.

Taken together, drones potentially pose a considerable headache for unprepared local authorities.

As your LGA special interest group on aviation, SASIG has been working on drone issues for a while now.



For a copy of our Westminster Forum presentation or for details on how to join the Drone Advisory Bureau, an introductory pack and more, please contact the SASIG secretariat on secretariat@sasig.org.uk

60 SECONDS WITH...



A happy backbencher

Councillor David Pugsley, 79, a former Chairman and Leader of Mid Devon District Council, is standing down at this May's local elections after 40 years

Cllr David Pugsley was first elected in a by-election in 1975, a year after local government reorganisation saw the creation of county and district councils in England. He served as an Independent for an unbroken 32 years to 2007, and a total of 40 years after twice losing and then regaining his seat between 2007 and 2023.

Q Why did you first decide to stand as a councillor?

A I'm a local boy, born in Tiverton. I cycled over a large patch of the district and was annoyed at some of the decisions being taken, particularly in respect of planning (planning is the real 'hot potato' for districts). I thought: "It's no good being annoyed, get yourself elected and try to do something about it."

Q Why did you stand as an Independent?

A I've always thought of myself as an Independent because I'm local and I know the area and I don't see that party politics has much to do with it. But also, in mid-1970s mid Devon, we were very rural, and most of the other councillors were Independents.

We are now seeing it go almost totally the other way. The first party political group was in 1995. Looking at candidates for May's elections, the serious candidates are all party political.

In the old days, the ballot paper had just names and no political allegiances – you voted

for individuals then. An Independent can represent your ward regardless of what anyone says – you haven't got a party whip saying 'this is what you have got to do'.

Q What are the advantages of long service?

A You see things go round, and what happens when common sense isn't followed. For example, allowing people to dump waste in old mine shafts – it's got to come out somewhere and, 25 years later, it did.

Thirty years ago, farmers were trying to do up old farm buildings and planners tended to be opposed. Now most of those buildings have been done up very nicely. There is increasing pressure on housing, so it makes sense.

Q Have you enjoyed being a councillor?

A I enjoy canvassing very much – although for many people, it's a chore – just going around and finding nooks and corners of the district, who's living there and having a chat, interacting with residents...

There's less of that nowadays. A lot of contact between councils and residents has gone. I'm struck by how rarely I see other councillors at events or other things around the district.

Forty years ago, councillors were much more involved in small local decisions affecting their wards. We are getting on with climate change and other things, but there is an awful

lot more committees and talking shop. Everything takes longer than when I started.

Q What about being chairman and leader?

A Being chairman was great fun but very, very busy going around all over the place. I didn't enjoy being leader – we were in a transition phase, we didn't have a cabinet, it's a lot of pressure, so I stopped. I'm a pretty happy backbencher!

Q Would you recommend being a councillor?

A I would say to anyone who is complaining about local services – get in there and see if you can do it better. It does take an enormous amount of time now – originally, I just had housing committee and full council every six weeks – but it's satisfying to be making a contribution and seeing what you can do for the local area.

I recommend going to council meetings before standing; I went for six months before I did. It gives you a very good idea of what's happening, the spread of business and decisions the council covers, and an idea of what the district does and what the county functions are.

Q Why have you decided to stand down now?

A We are taking decisions that will take effect over the next five to 10 years: I don't think I should be taking those decisions.

ELECTIONS



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



Patterns of party competition



There are just four by-elections to report but three may offer clues about the May elections.

In Ynys Môn (Isle of Anglesey), Plaid Cymru headed the poll in the council's Aethwy ward in 2013 but one of its three candidates trailed behind an Independent.

Four years later, all three seats were won with an increased majority and in 2022 the party won more than half the votes cast – making it, by any standards, a safe seat. Sonia Williams, also a town councillor for Menai Bridge, safely defended the vacancy and increased Plaid's majority.

North Northamptonshire provided a

third by-election in a Conservative seat in just over a year.

Following a resignation in Oundle ward, the Liberal Democrats in February 2022 overturned a 19 percentage point majority. This was followed by a Labour victory in Northall ward, although this had been a marginal seat.

It proved third time lucky for the Conservatives when defending Rushden South.

This was the safest of the three vacancies, a 27 per cent majority proving more than enough to thwart Labour ambitions.

It provides a rare example where the Conservative vote share increased from the 2021 election. Labour's vote also rose, with sharp reductions for both the Greens and Liberal Democrats.

Labour easily held Heath ward in Barking and Dagenham but here too the Conservative vote showed a six-point recovery from the 2022 election, with Labour's share falling by twice that amount.

While these two results offer some comfort to Conservatives about to defend their council seats, another by-election – this time for Gloucester's Westgate ward – saw the party lose to the Liberal Democrats.

Westgate saw a Conservative

13-point majority replaced with the same for the Liberal Democrats. The Conservative share fell by 10 percentage points, similar to that of the Greens who chose not to contest the vacancy.

The conclusion to be drawn from these examples is that the Conservatives remain under threat and the party looks set to lose both seats and council control in May.

The pattern in by-elections over the past three years shows Conservatives struggling to defend majorities averaging 14 per cent; larger majorities can be defended.

Much will depend on patterns of party competition in wards the Conservatives are defending and here there is a glimmer of hope. Examining more than 25,000 nominations in the 8,000 seats up for election shows the Conservatives are contesting 93 per cent of the available seats.

They face strong competition from Labour who are contesting 77 per cent of vacancies. The Liberal Democrats are present in 60 per cent, up from 53 per cent in 2019, and the Greens in 41 per cent, up on 31 per cent in 2019.

There is a rise too for Independents and smaller parties who performed so well in 2019.

Local by-elections	
Barking and Dagenham, Heath	
LAB HELD	
29.5% over Con	Turnout 21.8%
Gloucester, Westgate	
LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON	
13.3% over Con	Turnout 23.5%
North Northamptonshire, Rushden South	
CON HELD	
25.8% over Lab	Turnout 19.3%
Ynys Môn, Aethwy	
PLAID CYMRU HELD	
35.1% over Lab	Turnout 29.9%



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

CORRECTION/APOLOGY

Last month's elections column (first 682) referred to "calls being made by Liberal Democrat Leader Sir Ed Davey for electoral pacts against the Conservatives in May and beyond". This is wrong and we are happy to confirm that Sir Ed Davey and the Liberal Democrats have not called for electoral pacts of any kind. We apologise for any distress or confusion caused.

Going to the polls



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



This year's local elections in England encompass more than 8,000 seats in 230 councils, with 49 of them having undergone a boundary review.

Very nearly half of all councillors face re-election, with about 70 per cent of the English electorate having the opportunity to vote.

The Conservatives currently have about 1,300 more councillors than Labour, but that advantage will be observed closely on 4 May – not least because any significant change could possibly have implications for the LGA's political leadership.

In most cases, the elections reprise contests last held in 2019.

At that election, both Labour and the Conservatives lost ground – though Labour's net loss of fewer than 100 seats and control of five councils paled into insignificance compared with Conservative losses of 1,300 and 47 respectively.

The evidence of opinion polls and recent local by-elections alike is that a clear swing to Labour is to be expected this time.

The Liberal Democrats and Greens have also registered consistent gains in recent local elections, and the rise of Independents and localist groups is indicative of a politics where mainstream

parties are often seen as insufficiently engaged with local concerns.

As always, too, there will be results against the run of play, where incumbent administrations of whatever stripe have managed to upset their electorate.

An additional and unique factor this year is that HM King Charles III's Coronation, on the Saturday following polling day, may dampen – for good or ill – media coverage of election post-mortems.

The elections in the metropolitan boroughs will mark a further unravelling of their once common electoral cycle.

Liverpool and Wirral are joining the ranks of those with four-yearly whole council contests, leaving 30 of the 36 boroughs with the traditional pattern of election by thirds.

In Wirral and in Bolton, where boundary changes mean that every seat falls vacant as a one-off, Labour will be hoping to seize overall control.

In Stockport, where new boundaries also come into effect, Labour and the Liberal Democrats effectively go head to head in a council that has been 'hung' for more than a decade.

In all three cases, though, recent successes for Greens and Independents suggest that the arithmetic could be complicated.

"As always, there will be results against the run of play"

The scope for radical change is much reduced in places where a third of the council falls vacant, but the only three Conservative-controlled boroughs (all in the West Midlands) will repay attention.

The party currently enjoys solid majorities in both Dudley and Walsall, but Labour now needs to make clear inroads if it is to claim that the marginal parliamentary seats there are within its grasp.

In Solihull, the Greens are the official opposition. However, at recent local elections they haven't managed to widen their base of support and break down some very large Conservative majorities in individual wards.

Much attention in the unitary councils will focus on the so-called 'red wall'.

Five years ago, Labour controlled four of the five councils in the Tees Valley and was the largest party in the remaining one. All were lost in 2019, with Independents performing particularly strongly.

It would be of symbolic significance for Labour to regain Middlesbrough,

“HM King Charles III’s coronation may dampen – for good or ill – media coverage of election post-mortems”

seats vulnerable to a 3 per cent swing since 2019.

Among the unitary councils with elections by thirds, it is no coincidence that Labour Leader Sir Keir Starmer chose to launch Labour’s campaign in Swindon.

The Conservatives currently have a majority of 11, but would see that sink to a single seat if last year’s results, when Labour won 12 seats to the Conservatives’ seven, are repeated.

A further gain for Labour, on a swing of nearly 10 per cent since 2019, would lead to a change in control.

Plymouth is another council where elections tend to be dominated by the two main parties.

The Conservatives who, like the Government nationally, have had three leaders in the past three years, run the council as a minority, with Labour as the largest party. No fewer than seven councillors now also sit with a label other than that on which they were elected.

Labour needs four gains and a better performance than last year to get over the line. Starmer also called in here on his tour of the South West.

Districts make up the bulk of councils with elections this year. In 2019, the Conservatives were rocked by a surge in support for Independents and local party candidates in some rural areas, where they had effectively run a one-party state.

In East Devon, North Kesteven and Uttlesford, control flipped directly and the Conservatives must now try to rebuild. They can take some heart from a local by-election gain from the Residents’ group in Uttlesford earlier this year.

There will be a more traditional contest in North East Derbyshire, the only council the Conservatives won straight from Labour in 2019.

The Conservatives built up some

impressive majorities in individual wards last time, but Labour will be keen to regain a district where it had been at least the largest party for nearly half a century.

In neighbouring Bolsover, another former coal mining area, by-elections have restored Labour’s overall majority, but a clear victory here would be significant as the party looks to win back the eponymous constituency too at the next General Election.

Further south, Kent is again in the spotlight, with Gravesham on a knife edge between Labour and the Conservatives.

Conservative control of Great Yarmouth is vulnerable to just a 2 per cent swing to Labour since 2019. A bad result for Labour could see Crawley, gained only last year, slip from the party’s grasp.

When the Liberal Democrats were in their local government pomp at the turn of the century, much of their progress was made through a ripple effect, whereby their support spread outwards from a particular ward or authority.

That tactic seems to have been resurrected: after convincing majorities in South Cambridgeshire and St Albans last year, they now have their eyes on East Cambridgeshire and Dacorum in Hertfordshire.

A similar pattern is potentially in play in Surrey, too, where the Liberal Democrats control Mole Valley and Woking – although the strength of Independents in both Guildford and Waverley could prove an obstacle to their winning outright majorities.

There are just a handful of districts where the number of Green councillors reaches double figures. In Mid Suffolk in 2019, the Greens polled nearly a third of the vote and are well placed to become the largest party.

for example, especially if that is allied with defeat for the Independent mayor, who won with an absolute majority of the vote last time.

The Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, was present at a campaign event in Darlington – adjacent to his own North Yorkshire constituency, and the one Tees council where the Conservatives are the largest party and form the administration.

There is interest at the other end of the country, too.

Kent had several Labour-controlled councils during the Blair years. It now has none.

Medway, though, could switch straight to Labour, with nine Conservative

England local elections 2023

8,057* seats in 230 councils (49 with boundary changes) comprising 32 metropolitan boroughs, 46 unitary councils and 152 shire districts.

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Ind/other	No overall control
Current control	85	50	16	5	74
Seats being defended*	3,365	2,131	1,223	1,338	

*accounting for boundary changes but not casual vacancies/defections

We're **charging up** to provide publicly accessible EV charging for all



Liberty Charge has changed to Believ.

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Find out more about our mission to ensure cleaner air for all at believ.com

