

13

*“To tackle the challenges we face and deliver priorities for the public, this and every successive government needs to **Make It Local**”*

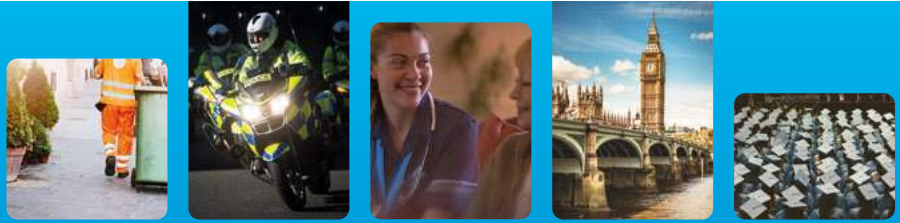
**Councillor
Shaun Davies,
LGA Chair**

14 **Under pressure**
Councils in England face a funding gap of almost £3 billion

18 **Innovation zone**
A platform for driving improvement and demonstrating ideas

22 **Data transparency**
Co-production is key to the success of new Oflog data tool

24 **The challenge of SEND**
Providing seamless support that promotes good outcomes



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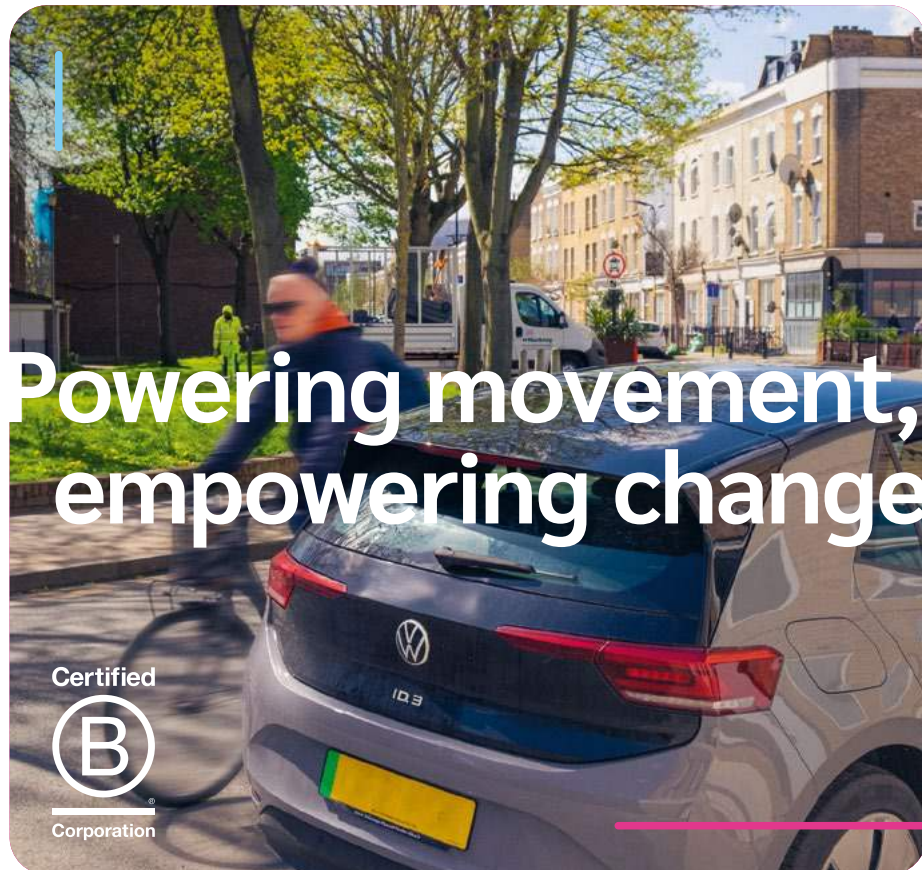


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CONTENTS



Inspiring and informing

It was my great honour to be confirmed as Chair of the LGA at its annual conference in early July.

I had the pleasure of meeting some of you in Bournemouth and look forward to meeting many more of you from across the political spectrum during my term of office.

This month's edition of **first** is packed with conference news and photos (p9-21).

We launched our Make It Local campaign (p13), published analysis showing that councils in England face a funding gap of almost £3 billion over the next two years (p14), and drew energy and inspiration from conference's biggest ever Innovation Zone (p18).

Elsewhere in the magazine, we hear about Hartlepool's local area inspection for special educational needs and disabilities (p24), and mark Disability Pride Month with a blog about becoming a disability-confident employer (p29).

Don't forget to complete the **first** readership survey, which closes shortly, to let us know how we can improve the magazine and its e-versions to better meet your needs – see www.local.gov.uk/first if you have not received a personal email link.

Please note that **first** is taking a summer break – the next edition will be out in late September.

Councillor Shaun Davies
is LGA Chair

12



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INTERVIEW

12 Meet the new chair
Cllr Shaun Davies on corporate parenting

FEATURES

13 Make it local
Resetting the relationship with national government

14 Under pressure
Councils in England face a £3 billion funding gap

16 Annual conference
The LGA in Bournemouth

18 Inspiring & informing
A platform for ideas and driving improvement

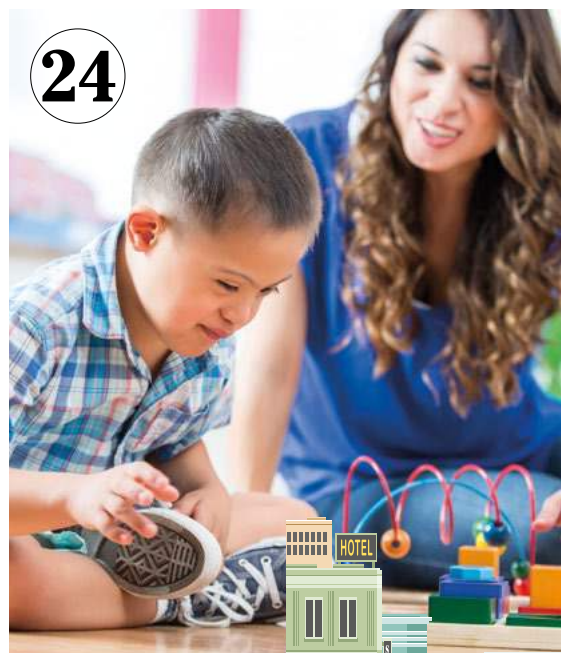
21 Active travel
Encouraging people to cycle, walk and wheel

22 Data transparency
Co-production is key to the success of new Oflog tool

23 Sector support
Mapping an assurance framework for councils

24 Inspecting SEND
Providing seamless support to promote good outcomes

24



COMMENT

25 Evidence challenge
Using research to inform local policy delivery

28 Population statistics
Consultation on improving local data

28 Heat networks
Improving performance and reducing costs

29 Disability confident
Employer support to recruit and retain disabled staff

11

REGULARS

04 News

11 Parliament – business rates

26 LGA chair and group leaders

30 Letters

31 Local by-elections

25



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Concerns raised on homeless Afghans

The LGA and councils continue to raise significant concerns around Afghan families presenting as homeless, with thousands due to be evicted from hotels in late July and August.

As of March, around 8,000 Afghans remained in temporary accommodation – 18 months after being evacuated when Western powers withdrew from Afghanistan.

The Government announced then that it would be serving notice on people still in hotels and has provided additional funding to councils to help them find settled accommodation.

In late July, Veterans' Minister Johnny Mercer MP confirmed that a small number of bridging hotels will remain open for Afghans with medical needs, or those who have been 'pre-matched' by councils to properties that are not yet ready to move into.

LGA Chair Cllr Shaun Davies said it was good that some certainty had been provided for these families.

However, he warned that increased demand for, and the acute shortage of, housing "will make it extremely challenging" for Afghans to find homes before their hotels close.

"Councils remain hugely concerned that large numbers of families – some of whom are particularly vulnerable – may have to end up presenting as homeless," he said.

"This will mean them having to move into high-cost temporary accommodation rather than permanent homes.

"Councils will do all they can to minimise multiple moves and disruption for families in the remaining time before the hotel closures start, and to secure places in schools for any children moving to new areas when these start again in the autumn."



Councils warn of skills shortages

Local skills shortages could last longer just as demand increases and dedicated European funding ends, the LGA has warned.

A survey of its member councils revealed demand is increasing for skills in new industries such as renewables, green technology, digital and cyber, while firms are struggling to fill essential roles such as hospitality, care work and logistics.

The number of people who are economically inactive or not in employment, education or training is also on the rise in many areas, according to the survey, partly because of post-pandemic health issues, and a lack of career options and apprenticeships.

The LGA also highlighted concerns about an average seven-month gap between the imminent ending of the European Social Fund – a key source of investment into skills training and jobs creation, which must be spent by the end of this year – and its replacement, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the employment and skills element of which, for most areas, is due to start in 2024.

Mayor Marvin Rees, Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board, said: "Our survey reveals councils' deep concerns about being able to

meet demand and plug urgent skills gaps, whether it be for growing green jobs to meet net zero targets, or for filling essential vacancies in our health and care workforce.

"The Government needs to match this urgency by giving councils and combined authorities the vital, long-term and consistent funding they need, on time, to encourage people back into the workforce, match jobseekers with employers and safeguard the future of our local economies."



'Scrap single-word ratings for adult social care'

Plans to introduce 'single word' inspection ratings for adult social care services should be dropped, as they set local councils up "to fail".

The LGA said single-word ratings for local authorities will "not do justice to the complex and parlous state that adult social care is in".

The Care Quality Commission has been instructed by the Department of Health and Social Care to implement single-word ratings as part of a new assurance process for adult social care departments from September.

After inspection, the regulator will give each council an overall score – 'inadequate', 'requires improvement', 'good', or 'outstanding'.

The LGA is asking for a U-turn on the plans, instead calling for narrative reports, which it says will provide a more "useful and balanced picture of the quality of services".

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "It is clear that most councils are struggling to meet all of their legal duties under the Care Act 2014.

"Given that, it seems absurd to push ahead with single-word ratings for adult social care departments, which would oversimplify what are very complex services to deliver. As it stands, councils are being set up to fail.

"The Government must ensure that the assurance process is, and remains, productive and supportive for councils."

LGA to produce local government white paper

The LGA has begun work to develop firm proposals for a Local Government White Paper, to be published before the next General Election.

Cllr Shaun Davies, in his first speech as LGA Chair at its recent annual conference, set out an ambition to develop a plan for a new local deal in the first King's Speech after the election.

He also wants to secure a central-local partnership in which local government can work to its full potential for local people, places and the planet.

The LGA's White Paper will present a clear vision for the future of local government, based on priorities from the public, councils and local communities.

It will assess how local government can deliver the best for communities and set out a series of recommendations for whoever forms the next government.

The work will be underpinned by the LGA's Make It Local campaign, which outlines how local government is key to delivering solutions to the biggest issues for the public (see www.local.gov.uk/make-it-local).

Cllr Davies told conference delegates: "Over the summer, throughout party conference season, and right up to the next General Election, we will be making the case to Make It Local.

"I want to see a Local Government Act from local government for local communities. And I want to work with a Westminster government that values a trusted, respectful and equal relationship with local government."

The LGA will look to consult with its member councils, professional associations, stakeholders and the public in the autumn, to inform the White Paper.

● See p12, p13 and p26

'System reset' to tackle audit backlog

A 'system reset' of local audit has been proposed by the Government to tackle the backlog of unaudited accounts dating back up to seven years.

Local Government Minister Lee Rowley told MPs that statutory deadlines would be announced in the autumn, with ongoing talks with local government and the audit sector due to be concluded in the summer.

He told the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee that it was "possible that there will be qualifications and disclaimers that are required for earlier accounts that haven't been signed off".

Mr Rowley also said missed deadlines were a "symptom rather than a cause" and that he wanted to focus on the cause.

In response, LGA Resources Board Chair Cllr Pete Marland said councils shared the commitment and resolve to tackling the backlog, and wanted to return to a timely delivery of published audited accounts.

He said: "It also needs to be recognised that this will be a lengthy process and that the steps outlined will mean significant



progress on the backlog itself is unlikely before 2024.

"We therefore renew our call on government to set out a detailed timetable by which it expects to restore timely audited accounts."

Cllr Marland said ensuring the measures succeed will require compromise by all parties, including by councils who may need to have older accounts qualified or disclaimed in order for audit efforts to be concentrated on more recent years.

In brief

Social care workforce

Following the announcement of an NHS workforce plan, healthcare leaders in England have called for an urgent plan to tackle the social care crisis, warning Prime Minister Rishi Sunak that there is "clear concern" over an ongoing failure to tackle staff shortages. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Social care still faces a huge recruitment and retention crisis, and needs parity of esteem with the NHS, the demands on which will only increase unless care vacancies are filled."

Housing targets

The Government will struggle to achieve its 300,000 new homes per year target in England by the mid-2020s if mandatory local housing targets are dropped, MPs have said. The Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee said there was insufficient evidence to show how scrapping targets will directly lead to more housebuilding. LGA Housing Spokesperson Cllr Darren Rodwell said councils are committed to working with government and developers to build the housing the country needs. He added: "As this report highlights, local council planning departments face significant challenges in recruitment and retention, and we need an urgent and comprehensive planning skills strategy to address this."

COVID preparedness

A barrister representing the LGA and Welsh LGA said the two organisations "simply do not understand" evidence the ex-Health Secretary Matt Hancock gave to the COVID-19 inquiry. In late June, Mr Hancock said that adult social care was in a "terrible" state of pandemic preparedness and that, while he was accountable, he "didn't have the levers to act". On the final day of the inquiry's module one hearings, which are focused on resilience and preparedness, Robin Allen KC said Mr Hancock's department "had and has far more levers to understand, oversee and to shape social care provision than his evidence suggested" – not least, through the Care Quality Commission. LGA Chief Executive Mark Lloyd also gave evidence, highlighting the need for government to treat councils as trusted partners, and the impact of funding reductions on councils' capacity and resilience.

In brief

Economic inactivity

More employment support is needed to address economic inactivity, including widening support to help people who are not on benefits into work, according to a Commons Work and Pensions Committee report. Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said: "Everyone deserves the opportunity to fulfil their potential by upskilling or retraining to find and progress in jobs, with local councils best placed to connect them, working alongside businesses and our vital training organisations. As this report recognises, each area has its own unique labour market, including a mix of jobs, qualification levels, unemployment and vacancies, therefore it makes sense to devolve responsibilities for addressing these to local authorities."

Climate change

The Government has published a five-year Climate Change Adaptation Plan, which includes measures to tackle overheating and flooding and to construct public buildings designed to deal with higher temperatures. As part of the plan, councils will be offered advice and information from a new climate advice data service to help them tailor their response locally. Cllr Linda Taylor, LGA Environment Spokesperson, said: "While access to data could provide some good learning and understanding for councils, they crucially need the resources and money to take action on their findings."

Digital champions

The UK's rollout of gigabit-capable broadband and 5G connectivity would benefit from improvements in communication, collaboration and consistency between local authorities and the telecoms industry, says a report from the Digital Connectivity Forum. Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE, LGA Digital Connectivity Spokesperson, said: "We have been calling for a local digital champion in every local area, to act as a central point of contact to help extend gigabit-capable broadband and mobile coverage across the country as quickly as possible. Given the right funding and opportunity to work in partnership with government and providers, councils can play a far greater role targeting communities most in need, driving up demand and providing digital upskilling to support the rollout."

Nursery closures threaten free childcare

Nearly nine in 10 councils fear that nursery closures will undermine capacity ahead of the extension of the 30-hours free childcare scheme, research for the LGA shows.

Councils are supportive of the Government's reforms, but are concerned that improved funding rates will not be enough to ensure universal implementation of the scheme in England and Wales.

The Chancellor announced in March that every child aged from nine months to five years, in an eligible working family, would be entitled to 30 hours of free childcare each week by September 2025.



The LGA's research, by Isos Partnership, found 88 per cent of councils are concerned that nursery closures in 2023 will be significant and undermine sufficiency, while 40 per cent of councils saw a spike in nurseries closing in 2022. The report also found a lack of appropriate staff has forced nurseries to close temporarily for days or weeks, and that recruitment and retention challenges were greater in disadvantaged communities.

Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "The extension of free childcare is a positive step towards helping working parents.

"However, we have serious concerns about the ability of local areas to secure nursery places, with capacity issues providing challenges.

"Nurseries and childcare providers are already under massive pressure, grappling with severe financial and workforce challenges.

"Alongside the improved funding rates, it is vital the Government's planned recruitment drive tackles the staffing shortages.

"Councils will also need to manage local childcare markets, given the significant rise in government-funded places local areas will see."

Wider benefits of adult learning recognised

The Government has reversed its decision to focus adult education courses in England purely on employment outcomes, which could have resulted in courses such as family learning and household budgeting being cut.

The LGA's submission to a government consultation on the plans last year recommended reinserting the wider benefits of adult learning, so these courses could continue to help people cope with life's challenges and act as a stepping stone into further learning and work.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said the Government's decision is a recognition of the wider benefits that community learning brings.

"These vital courses help people to develop some of life's essentials, such

as building confidence, how to manage household budgets, family learning, studying English, and gaining digital skills," he said.

"They are also first steps that lead to further learning and help to fill gaps in in-demand roles, including teaching, social care, nursing and many others.

"This is especially important for those out of work for a long time, including because of health conditions, or who need more support to update their skills and qualifications."

Cllr Bentley also said government plans to streamline adult education funding and make it more long-term are positive, but, for these to have impact, efforts must be accelerated for a local adult learning offer, coordinated by councils working with education providers and employers.



'Ban single-use vapes' – LGA

Single-use vapes should be banned on environmental and health grounds, councils and the LGA have said for the first time.

The LGA is calling on the Government to ban the sale and manufacture of single-use vapes by 2024.

Councils say it is crucial that a ban comes into effect rapidly, as the EU is proposing a ban in 2026 and France is rolling out a ban in December 2023, so disposable vapes will flood into the UK.

Single-use vapes are designed as one unit, making them almost impossible to recycle without going through special treatment.

The lithium batteries inside the plastic can become flammable when crushed. This comes at a cost to the council taxpayer through fire damage and the treatment needed to deal with hazardous waste.

With 1.3 million disposable vapes thrown away every week, they have

become a regular item of litter on local streets. Councils are also concerned by the marketing of vapes with designs and flavours that appeal to children, resulting in more children vaping.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Councils are not anti-vapes, which are shown to be less harmful than smoking.

"However, disposable vapes are fundamentally flawed in their design and inherently unsustainable products, meaning an outright ban will prove more effective.

"Single-use vapes blight our streets as litter, are a hazard in our bin lorries, and are expensive to deal with in our recycling centres. Their colours, flavours and advertising are appealing to children.

"Councils urge the Government to take this action to protect our planet, keep children safe and save taxpayers' money."

Bus pass scheme costing councils £452 million

Councils had to spend £452 million last year to support the Government's national concessionary bus fares scheme, LGA analysis shows.

It has warned that the way the concessionary travel scheme is funded by Whitehall is unfit for purpose and prevents councils from investing in reliable bus services.

LGA analysis reveals there was a £452 million gap in the funding councils received from government for the scheme compared with the actual number of journeys made last year, forcing councils to plug the gap from their own stretched budgets.

The LGA said the Government needs to fully fund the concessionary fare scheme to ease budget pressures and help people

travel during the cost-of-living crisis. This would allow councils and operators to introduce new routes, keep fares down and make our air cleaner.

Cllr Linda Taylor, LGA Transport Spokesperson, said: "The free bus pass is a lifeline for many in our communities. It allows vulnerable residents to go shopping, pick up medication, and attend doctors' appointments.

"Our analysis shows that the scheme is not being adequately funded, leaving councils to try to find nearly half a billion pounds every year from their own overstretched budgets to keep it running. This is completely unsustainable.

"It is vital this scheme is properly funded so councils can reinvest in local networks."

Grid connections 'delaying' solar and wind farms

Around 1,300 clean-energy projects with planning permission are waiting to be built because of delays connecting them to the National Grid, the LGA has warned.

Councils are calling on the Government to step up the pace in connecting energy schemes to the grid, and to resource councils to develop local energy plans to share investments and develop local grids.

There has been a sharp increase in clean power schemes granted permission by councils in recent years, with the number doubling almost every year since 2018.

Local communities have agreed to more than 1,300 renewable energy schemes, but just 150 of these projects are currently under construction.

The solar schemes awaiting construction would alone generate around 15,000 megawatts a day, enough to power 1.9 million homes.

Challenges in connecting new energy power projects to the National Grid are often cited as being the main obstacle to getting projects off the ground.

For example, plans have been submitted for a solar farm in Coventry, but the earliest it can be connected to the grid is 2028.

Cllr Linda Taylor, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson, said: "Our transition to a secure and sustainable future relies on continued growth in renewable energy.

"It's fantastic to see a rapid rise in planning permissions for green energy projects. However, the numbers awaiting construction is concerning, with many pointing to delays in securing the grid infrastructure."



In brief first survey

The deadline for completing the 2023 first readership survey has been extended to 2 August – so don't miss your chance to let us know what you think of the LGA's membership magazine and its online versions, ahead of a redesign next year. If you haven't received a personal email with a link to the survey, you can complete it online instead at bit.ly/436lwXN or www.local.gov.uk/first. Please email karen.thornton@local.gov.uk with any queries about the content of the survey, and keiron.watt@local.gov.uk for any technical problems completing it.

Litter fines

Fines for littering, fly-tipping and graffiti have all increased as part of a government crackdown on antisocial behaviour. The current maximum penalty of £150 for littering or spraying graffiti will increase to £500, while the maximum fine for fly-tipping will rise from £400 to £1,000. The LGA said the additional flexibility is positive, but the new rules don't go far enough, and that the cap on fines should be removed. Cllr Darren Rodwell, LGA Environment Spokesperson, said: "We want to work with government on reviewing guidance to the courts to ensure the worst offenders face tougher fines, and to ensure councils have the funding needed to investigate and prosecute fly-tippers."

Swimming pools

The Government has launched a £60 million Swimming Pool Support Fund to help public pools with increased cost pressures and investment to improve their energy efficiency. Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "Public swimming pools are vitally important to the health of our communities and in teaching people how to swim, so this extra funding will be a lifeline in keeping them open. There remains a continuing challenge in keeping our much-loved public swimming pools open and we need a long-term strategy to match it, including the need to transform our pools to an energy efficient, sustainable future."

Record numbers of councillors feel 'at risk'

The number of councillors who reported feeling at risk in their role because of rising levels of abuse and intimidation has increased to a new high.

Responding to an LGA survey about their experiences of abuse, 82 per cent said they felt at risk some of the time while fulfilling their role.

The survey found that 54 per cent of councillors have seen an increase in abuse aimed at them since they were first elected, while 81 per cent reported experiencing intimidation and/or abuse in their role as a councillor over the past 12 months.

The number of councillors who said they had experienced abuse has doubled since last year.

Respondents also highlighted that the use of social media has increased the level of abuse aimed at councillors.

The LGA has warned that a rise in abuse is preventing councillors from representing the communities they serve and deterring individuals from standing for election.

Councils are calling on the Government to work with the police to set out guidance to help address abuse and harassment of councillors.



Cllr Marianne Overton and Cllr Shabir Pandor, Co-Chairs of the LGA's Civility in Public Life Programme Steering Group, said: "Abuse and intimidation aimed at local councillors is completely unacceptable and it is deeply concerning.

"Robust debate and scrutiny are critical parts of a healthy democracy. However, there is a clear line between debate and abuse, which should not be crossed.

"The Government and Ofcom should take steps to ensure that abusive behaviour does not continue unrestricted online, and the police should develop clearer guidance."

Councils 'want power to hold hybrid meetings'

The recruitment and retention of councillors – particularly those balancing career or care commitments – will be hampered if councils are not allowed to hold hybrid meetings, the LGA has warned.

The overwhelming majority of councils in England (95 per cent) want to reintroduce virtual and hybrid technology for statutory council meetings, according to an LGA survey. One in 10 councils surveyed had a councillor who had stepped down since May 2021, following the post-pandemic reintroduction of the requirement for such meetings to be in-person.

No council wanted to hold fully virtual meetings, but the vast majority wanted hybrid options for those councillors who needed it, including those with disabilities, work or childcare commitments.

Cllr Joe Harris, LGA Vice-Chair, said:

"Good decision-making needs people who reflect the range of experiences, background and insight that exist in their communities.

"However, councillors are restricted by law to attend council meetings in person, which can deter a range of people – including full-time professionals, parents of young children, carers, workers and disabled people – from stepping forward to represent their communities.

"Many people now use hybrid meeting technologies every day in their work life, so there should be no reason why this cannot be used by councils across the country. This will help to drive up engagement in local democracy and ensure that we have a diverse range of councillors throughout our communities."

Gove promises simpler funding system

A plan to simplify aspects of the funding landscape for councils and tackle multiple funding pots for local growth was announced at the LGA's annual conference.

The plan includes simplifying some existing levelling-up funds, the introduction of a 'funding simplification doctrine' that will apply to new grants, and a cross-Whitehall commitment to consider allocating new funds rather than inviting competitive bids.

Ten pilot local authorities will be able to spend existing funding from the Towns, Levelling Up and Future High Streets programmes more flexibly, and all councils with such funding will be able to

make output, outcome and funding changes up to a 30 per cent threshold without needing government approval.

Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove told delegates: "If councils are to be empowered to deliver, then we need to help make funding simpler, more rational and predictable."

Mr Gove also launched the new Office for Local Government (Oflog), to "improve accountability and transparency" and help "identify where councils need targeted support to deliver".

Oflog has developed a new data dashboard, called the Local Authority Data Explorer (see p22).

Responding to Oflog's launch, Cllr Shaun Davies, LGA Chair, said: "Local government has a very strong record of transparency.

"This includes our award-winning data tool, LG Inform, which is freely available to councils and the public, and contains much of the existing data that is already collected and published (see www.local.gov.uk/lginform).

"Councils continue to do incredible things every day to provide vital local services, despite the huge financial pressures they are under, and a continued focus on supporting the vast majority of high-performing councils will be the best use of resources."

● See p14, p22



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'Devo requires change in mindset'

A change in mindset and culture in Whitehall and Westminster is needed for councils to get real devolution, according to the Leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Speaking at the LGA's annual conference, Sir Ed Davey highlighted the value of decentralisation and called for a localist approach across government.

"It's still far too top-down... local authorities have to earn autonomy and, if they are good, they get more powers every so often," he said.

Local government is part of the solution to the many crises we face, from the cost of living and climate change to health and care, but needs to be involved from the start, and not as an "after-thought", he told delegates.

"I want to create the solution with local government. I won't tell you what the solution is because that's the problem."



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Labour focuses on housing and devolution

Labour will "take the housing crisis head on" and deliver on devolution if it forms the next government, according to its deputy leader.

Addressing the LGA's annual conference, Angela Rayner MP reiterated her party's pledge to ensure a bill devolving power locally is in the first King's Speech of a Labour government.

"We have a politics that won't hand over power and an economy that doesn't hand out potential," she told delegates in Bournemouth.

"I say: let's give people all of the nationwide standards they expect. But let's also give them the control, the chance to direct their community – a bigger stake in the future of their neighbourhood, their town, their city, their country.

"We say: the decisions that create wealth in

our communities, economic wealth and civic wealth, should be taken by local people with skin in the game."

Warning of a "total collapse" in housebuilding, Ms Rayner also promised that Labour would "start building things... more windfarms, more laboratories, and more homes". It would bring back national housebuilding targets, but also reform planning laws to "empower" councils to build more homes, and more affordable homes.

This would include on land designated as green belt "that isn't protecting environmental heritage", such as car parks, abandoned petrol stations and old rubbish tips.

"Surely these places can be put to better use, and what better use than providing the security of a home," she said.

Speakers' corner

A head of the next General Election, new Independent and Green council leaders set out their asks and messages at a 'speakers' corner' session at the LGA's annual conference.

Onshore wind power, competing demands on rural land for energy and food production, social providers pulling out of housing provision, "overstretched" public services, low trust in politicians, the new infrastructure levy, "prescriptive" plans for waste collection, and local government funding and finance were among the issues they raised with delegates.

The session was chaired by Cllr Marianne Overton, Leader of the LGA's Independent Group, who said its members were "getting local government to think differently", to focus on residents and to work collaboratively – all things that "make for successful councils".



Four-day working week 'on trial'

Councils should be free to pilot innovative solutions to local challenges, the LGA has said, in response to ministerial demands for a council to abandon its trial of a four-day working week.

Local Government Minister Lee Rowley has written to South Cambridgeshire District Council asking it to "end your experiment immediately" amid concerns about value for money for local taxpayers.

Questioned by delegates at the LGA's annual conference, Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove said a five-day working week "should be what we expect" of people in public service, paid for by taxpayers.

Speaking at a later conference session on workforce capacity challenges, Cllr Bridget Smith, Leader of South Cambridgeshire, said the trial was "not about shutting our offices one day a week – we are open five days a week".

She said the pilot had already made a difference to long-standing recruitment and retention problems, with the council filling key posts that had been empty for years and saving hundreds of thousands of pounds on its £2 million agency staff bill.

The council has written to Mr Rowley asking for a meeting to discuss his concerns.

Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "More than nine in 10 councils are experiencing staff recruitment and retention difficulties.

"It is councils who know what works best for their community, workforce and in their wider labour market conditions.

"Local voters should be the ones making a judgement on whether local council leaders have made good choices and delivered value for local taxpayers."

Call for 'step change' in council housebuilding

Every area in England should be handed a new local housing deal by 2025 that combines funding from multiple national housing programmes into a single pot to spark a "generational step change" in council housebuilding.

At the LGA's recent annual conference, former LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson set out a six-point plan that could support the delivery of 100 more council homes in every local authority each year.

In addition to local housing deals, the plan calls for a new national council housebuilding delivery taskforce, continued access to preferential borrowing rates through the Public Works Loan Board, further reforms to Right to Buy, certainty on future social rents, and a review of the Affordable Homes Programme's grant levels.

Cllr Jamieson said: "Housing is too often unavailable, unaffordable, and is not appropriate for everyone that needs it.

"The right homes in the right areas can have significant wider benefits for people and communities, and prevent future public service challenges and costs.

"Our six-point plan would lead to a generational step change in council housebuilding and give local government the powers and funding to deliver thousands of social homes a year – at scale and fast.

"A genuine renaissance in council housebuilding would unlock local government's historic role as a major builder of affordable homes, support strong and healthy communities, and help to build prosperous places."

Over recent decades, construction of new homes has failed to keep pace with population growth and social changes.

There are not enough affordable homes to meet demand, with more than 1.2 million households on council waiting lists in England and more than 100,000 households living in temporary accommodation.

Meeting the challenge



This year's Local Government Challenge has been won by Lewis Sheldrake, Lead Commissioner at Barking & Dagenham Council, with a project on AI Labs.

"Standing out amid a group of exceptionally skilled local government officers is a genuine honour," he said.

"Particular thanks go to the wider LGA team for their support and guidance throughout the programme, and for facilitating such a valuable development

offer of which I can't speak highly enough."

The LG Challenge helps to develop new local government leaders by giving talented officers real-life challenges in councils across the country.

For his project, Lewis received the £10,000 Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship, presented by Cllr Kevin Bentley, Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group, and Cllr Shaun Davies, LGA Chair, at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth.

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Business rates bill

Non-domestic rates help fund local priorities

Business rates are an important source of revenue for local government – accounting for around a quarter of all council spending power and helping towards the Government’s levelling up ambition.

Money raised is used to pay for vital local services, such as caring for older and disabled people, protecting children, fixing potholes and collecting bins.

It is imperative, however, that local government has a system that raises sufficient resources for local priorities in a way that is fair for residents and gives local politicians all the tools they need to be the leaders of their communities.

For councils, it is also important that the tax system, including business rates, provides as much certainty as possible.

The LGA has been steadfast in its support for a sustainable local government finance system that conforms to principles of sufficiency, buoyancy, fairness, efficiency of collection, predictability, transparency and incentive.

The Non-Domestic Rating Bill, currently making its way through Parliament, makes a number of technical alterations and changes to non-domestic (business) rates in England and Wales that will aid in enhancing some of those principles.

For instance, we have welcomed the Government legislating for a package of measures alongside revaluations once every three years, and support measures to improve valuation accuracy and timeliness – including new duties for ratepayers to notify the Valuation Office Agency of information on the calculation of their rateable value.

We have also supported reforms to ‘material changes of circumstances’ because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and support the changes in the Bill that will mean material changes of circumstances should relate to physical changes only.

Significantly, the LGA is also in favour of the Government’s promise to consult on business rates avoidance and evasion.

We have suggested that this could include a review of exemptions (such as where businesses happen to be located on farms), and further clampdowns on business rates avoidance along the lines of those introduced in Wales and Scotland. This would ensure that the rules on reliefs, such as empty property and charitable relief, are applied fairly.

We will continue to support more fundamental changes to business rates.

We have been pleased to see our recommendations repeated by MPs and Peers in debates on the Bill in Parliament – including giving councils more flexibility on business rates reliefs, giving councils the ability to set their own business rates multiplier, and consideration of alternative forms of income for local government.

With this area being so complex, we are also encouraging the Government to bring forward changes in the basis of liability so that more is defined in statute.

How this is framed should be the subject of a further consultation involving the LGA and councils, as many fundamental concepts such as ‘beneficial occupation’ have been set by case law. This has led to results that may seem puzzling to the public, such as the fact that large, vacant sites may not pay business rates.

i To find out more about the work of the LGA in Parliament, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament





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Meet the new LGA chair

Local government is in his DNA, says Councillor Shaun Davies, the LGA's youngest ever Chair

When Shaun Davies graduated in law from Aberystwyth University, he made a “conscious decision” to go home to Telford, to live and work locally.

“It sounds a bit cheesy, but I genuinely thought that the area I was brought up in could be better,” he says.

“I was talking to people and they said, ‘if you think you can do better, why don’t you get involved?’”

He did – and was instrumental in the local election campaign that took Labour from opposition to power in Telford & Wrekin Council in 2011 and saw him elected for the first time, aged 24.

He was immediately put in a cabinet position, taking on a variety of roles and becoming England’s youngest council leader in 2016.

Now 37, the stepfather and father of three children, aged 14, 10 and 6, says that his passion and desire to make the area better is even stronger now his family is using the services the council provides.

“That friends and family test is really important to me,” he says.

“What really motivated me to become a councillor was the ability to get things done in a way that you just can’t if you are in any other area of politics.

“Even though it’s challenging, the ability to set out a plan, deliver against it, and see the tangible benefits and results really excites me.”

After some time with his “head down” in his local area, he started to “look out” more across the sector, and undertook the LGA’s “first-class” Leaders development programme in 2019/20.

He progressed to positions on the LGA’s policy-making boards, including a stint as Chair of the LGA’s Resources Board, and was elected LGA Labour Group Leader in June 2022.

Cllr Davies is also a massive fan of the LGA’s improvement work – having been lead member of countless

peer reviews across England and Wales.

His three priorities are: for the LGA to be the best membership organisation it can (see p26); to be ready for the next General Election (see p13, right); and to focus on care leavers and children in care.

“Councils have a unique relationship with children in their care, as corporate parents,” he says.

“I want the LGA to be the corporate aunty or uncle of children in care. If you had a family member with the resources, connections and influences that the LGA has, you would absolutely want to tap into it.”

Cllr Davies identifies the biggest challenge facing councils as in-year financial pressures, with demand for services rising as the cost-of-living crisis adds to councils’ own energy costs, contractual inflation, and staff wages.

“We need to make the case to government, as we have been doing, that there is a £3 billion challenge just for us to stand still,” he says.

“When we look across the country, so many things aren’t working; we can’t afford for local government not to be working right now.”

Cllr Davies is also Labour’s prospective parliamentary candidate for Telford, and excited, but frustrated, that the two opportunities have come so close together.

“The LGA Chair is a dream job for me. It is the biggest gig in local government for an elected member – but, equally, representing my home town in Parliament would also be amazing,” he says.

“Whatever the result, local government will always be in my DNA.”

“There is a £3 billion challenge just for us to stand still”



Councillor **Shaun Davies**
is Chair of the LGA

Make it **local**

Public services can be delivered faster, better and more efficiently locally

I am truly honoured, humbled and excited to become Chair of your LGA.

As custodian of this national cross-party role, I will work tirelessly to champion local authorities of all shapes, sizes and colours.

It is my mission to represent our amazing, hardworking, and absolutely vital sector, and the 'can do' attitude of all who work in it.

We work together, united in our passion and belief that every local area should be a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Creating the conditions – and sparking the innovation and ambition for us to get the very best deal for councils and our communities – will be my central mission as LGA Chair.

I want to focus on the challenges we face – and the solutions we have – through the lens of three Ps.

Not parking permits, pest control or potholes, but what more we can do for our people, places and planet.

Everything we do is, ultimately, about the people we serve. As leaders of place, we know our areas inside out – better than someone at a Whitehall desk ever could.

There are big challenges ahead for us all – in housing, health, looked-after children, asylum and resettlement, and climate change.

But in the LGA, and in our councils, we have ideas and solutions.

Whether the next General Election is 18 months or 18 weeks away, this period is a moment of opportunity for local government.

We want to make all the parties an offer we hope they can't refuse.

Simplify our funding, cut out wasteful and unnecessary bidding for resources, and give us long-term certainty and stability – and we can get on with improving people's lives in our villages, towns and cities.

We have a compelling story – and evidence – about how public services can be delivered faster, better and more efficiently.

And I am happy to share the secret with ministers and ministers-in-waiting as they draft their manifesto pledges. It is: make it local.

For example, our Work Local approach gives more people skills that help them find a job, for less than the cost of national schemes.

The COVID-19 pandemic gave government all the clues it needed. When people were in need, they turned to councils.

And when you need something delivering on the ground, give councils the resources and we will get it done.

Over the summer, throughout party conference season, and right up to the next General Election, we will be making the case to make it local.

I say to whoever holds the keys to Number 10 – take us up on our offer. Work with us to build a brand new central-local partnership in which local government can work to its full potential for our people, places and planet.

After the General Election, my ambition is that the LGA will hand over a plan for the first King's Speech, setting out a new local deal.

I want to see a Local Government Act from local government, for local communities.

And I want to work with a Westminster government that values a trusted, respectful and equal relationship with local government.

Public services

can be delivered faster, better and more efficiently at a local level.

To tackle the challenges we face and deliver priorities for the public, this government, the next government, and every successive government needs to Make It Local.

i This article is based on LGA Chair Cllr Shaun Davies' 4 July speech to the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth. Read it in full at www.local.gov.uk/news. The LGA's conference report and new campaign, Make It Local, outlining how local government is key to delivering solutions to the biggest issues for the public, is available at www.local.gov.uk/make-it-local



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Councillor **Pete Marland** is Chair of the LGA's Resources Board



Kate Ogden, of the Institute for Fiscal Studies

Under pressure

Councils in England face a funding gap of almost £3 billion

© LGA/ GREGG BROWN PHOTOGRAPHY



Many councils are still grappling with significant challenges when setting their budgets, and trying to protect services from cutbacks because of the deep underlying and existing pressures they face.

Inflation, the National Living Wage, energy costs and increasing demand for services are all adding billions of extra costs onto councils just to keep services standing still.

New analysis by the LGA, published at our annual conference, shows councils in England face a funding gap of almost £3 billion over the next two years.

Taking into account increases in estimated core council funding, the LGA estimates that councils need a further £2 billion in 2023/24 and \$900 million in 2024/25 to deliver services at their current levels in each year.

These calculations assume that all councils will increase their council tax rates in each year by the maximum

allowed before a referendum is required.

If inflation fails to fall in line with the forecast at the March 2023 Budget – and instead is in line with more recent inflation projections from the Bank of England – this would add an extra £740 million in cost pressures in this financial year, and an extra £1.5 billion in 2024/25.

Our analysis of funding pressures relates solely to the funding needed to maintain services at their current levels. It does not include addressing existing

'Tough choices' on spending for local services

National growth forecasts are growing increasingly uncertain, with the Bank of England projecting £100 billion less growth by 2026 than the Office for Budget Responsibility, the LGA's annual conference was told.

David Phillips, Associate Director at the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), speaking at a 'Forward look on finance' plenary session (pictured, above), said stubbornly high inflation, slow growth and rising interest rates have negatively impacted the public finances.

As a result, whoever forms the next

government faces "tough choices" on spending for local services.

Assuming NHS spending grows in line with recent averages, schools spending remains flat, and defence and childcare spending grows as expected, the IFS estimates that all other unprotected government departments would need to find £18 billion of cuts.

Kate Ogden, IFS Senior Research Economist, said councils had some certainty in their finances in the next few years – for example, with council tax levels already confirmed, alongside increases in adult social care grants.

However, uncertainty remains around the timings of the 'extended producer responsibility' packaging reforms – due in 2024/25, but widely expected to be delayed further.

Political parties will also need to provide clarity on their plans for key local government funding reforms, such as the fair funding review, when they publish their election manifestos.

After 2024/25, Ms Ogden predicted a "tighter funding settlement" for councils if pessimistic economic forecasts come to pass, with even more reliance on council tax rises.

David Phillips, of the IFS, addresses a plenary session on finance



Section 114s 'a sign of control'

A council issuing a section 114 notice when it is struggling to balance its budget is a “sign of control, not failure”.

That was the view of Rob Whiteman, Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), at a fringe session at the LGA’s annual conference in Bournemouth.

Councils unable to finance their budgets must issue a section 114 notice, which restricts all new spending except for on protecting vulnerable people, statutory services and pre-existing commitments.

They are the last resort for local authorities in financial difficulty, but, in the past three years, an increasing number have had to issue them – including, most recently, Woking, Thurrock and Slough.

Mr Whiteman told the session he was concerned by the number of section 114 notices, and that recent commercial and investment decisions by the likes of Woking and Thurrock risked “damaging the whole sector”, and could lead to greater national controls.

But he added: “A section 114 notice is a sign of control where there’s corporate support to issue it. The best way to avoid a section 114 notice is to have a corporate culture and will to issue it if necessary.”

Also speaking at the CIPFA fringe, on ‘Learning the lessons of 114s’, was Brendan Arnold, Woking’s recently appointed Interim Finance Director.

Mr Arnold warned that “there are probably more councils out there” that will end up with section 114 notices, but that it has been a “key step” on the road to financial recovery for Woking.

Councillors and officers are united by their determination to move forward and make improvements, he said, adding: “It’s easy to demonise councils in this position. It isn’t a badge of shame – it’s a means of finding the solution.”

Mr Arnold also pointed out that Woking has not had an auditor’s opinion on its accounts since 2018/19. Had that happened, the “size and value” of Woking’s borrowing would have been “significantly smaller”.

Mr Whiteman also said the Public Works Loans Board, which lent Woking huge sums in relation to its annual budget, had questions to answer about why it did not query the level of borrowing.

underfunding in areas such as the adult social care provider market, children’s social care and homelessness, nor does it include funding to improve or expand council services.

Councils’ ability to mitigate the stark pressures we face are being continuously hampered by one-year funding settlements, one-off funding pots and uncertainty because of repeated delays to funding reforms.

The Government also needs to come up with a long-term plan to sufficiently fund local services.

This must include greater funding certainty for councils through multi-year settlements and more clarity on financial reform so they can plan effectively, balance competing pressures across different service areas, and maximise the impact of their spending.

Councils will need to consider options such as making cutbacks to services or using reserves to meet their legal duty to balance the books this year.

Reserves can only be spent once and we have long warned that using them to plug funding gaps is not a solution to the long-term financial pressures that councils face.

While the Government has confirmed some funding streams for councils for next year, this does not include everything: significant uncertainties

*“Competitive funds are
not a strategic way to
fund local services”*

remain about the level of funding they will have in 2024/25, which is hampering financial planning and their financial sustainability.

Alongside falling government funding, councils have also become locked into a system that relies heavily on competing against each other for additional government funding.

Competitive funds, often with short timescales, are not a strategic way to fund local services. Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove’s conference announcement of plans to reform and streamline the local funding system will help, especially if this approach is replicated across all Whitehall departments (see p9).

However, we also need to simplify council funding, cut out wasteful and unnecessary bidding for resources and give councils the long-term certainty and stability they desperately need.

With this, we can meet demand pressures and get on with working to improve people’s lives in our villages, towns and cities.



Alice Tai, Paralympic Swimmer, talked about the importance of local leisure centres



Conference delegates in the main hall



Lisa Nandy with Cllr Nesil Caliskan and Cllr Shaun Davies



Former LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson



LGA Annual Conference and Exhibition 2023

More than 1,650 people from the local government family and other public and voluntary sectors came together in Bournemouth in early July for the LGA's annual conference.

It was an exciting three days with a packed programme of speeches and breakout sessions, running alongside our biggest and busiest ever Innovation Zone (see p18).

Conference began with speakers from across the political spectrum paying tribute to the late Lord Kerslake, who was LGA President between 2015 and 2021.

Lord Kerslake was a passionate champion of councils and a friend and mentor to many in the sector. The LGA has opened an online book of condolence for local government to pay tribute to Bob (see www.local.gov.uk/lord-kerslake-28-february-1955-1-july-2023).

The start of conference saw the election of our new Chair, Cllr Shaun

Davies, who outlined his ambition to make the LGA the best member organisation possible and launched our Make It Local campaign (see www.local.gov.uk/make-it-local).

Key political speakers included Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; Angela Rayner, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party; and Sir Ed Davey, Leader of the Liberal Democrats. A 'speakers' corner' event highlighted the asks and offers for the next government from a range of Independent Group council leaders.

If you joined us in Bournemouth, we hope this year's annual conference lived up to your expectations and we look forward to continuing to engage with local government on the many issues discussed.

We look forward to seeing you at next year's conference in Harrogate, from 2-4 July 2024.

Lincoln's Emily Holmes signs the LGA's Debate Not Hate pledge





Actress Katherine Parkinson discusses culture



Cllr Kevin Bentley with Education Secretary Gillian Keegan



Delegates register for the conference



LGA Lib Dem Leader Cllr Joe Harris introduces Sir Ed Davey MP



Cllr Marianne Overton and speaker Joel Semakula at the LGA Independent Group dinner



Speaker Kathy Peach from Nesta with delegates



Dominic Thompson, unmasked as Birmingham's Bordesley Bear



LGA Chief Executive Mark Lloyd



Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Angela Rayner



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Inspiring and informing

From bears to the All-Blacks, this year's Innovation Zone had it all



Cllr **Abi Brown** (l) is Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board and **Peter Fleming** OBE is Chair of the Innovation Zone Working Group



The LGA's Innovation Zone at our 2023 annual conference was the biggest ever, and once again provided a huge platform for councils to demonstrate their ideas to drive improvement in the sector.

We were thrilled that so many councils were able to share their innovations with such a large and engaged audience.

And we were delighted to launch a programme full of great ideas with an inspirational session delivered by Claire McColgan CBE, Director of Culture Liverpool, who

highlighted the importance of culture and how it helped the city secure and deliver the Eurovision song contest in May.

Across the country, councils are supporting vulnerable individuals and communities to mitigate the impacts of the current cost-of-living crisis.

The Innovation Zone (IZ) was proud to include ideas for others to use, including the excellent South Tyneside Pledge that demonstrated effective ways to build local partnerships to promote economic growth.

Leadership is critical to ensuring local government has the vision and

momentum to deliver effective services and drive improvement.

The IZ had several sessions devoted to building leadership at all levels. These included an opportunity to learn about the LGA's National Graduate Development Programme directly from graduates on the scheme; and a session, sponsored by Newton, led by author James Kerr on the secrets to success behind New Zealand's All Blacks rugby team and the learnings that can be taken from their approach.

Meaningful engagement with residents is a top concern for local authorities, and the IZ hosted multiple sessions devoted to this issue.

The theatre company Stan's Café, with Birmingham City Council, showcased 'All our money', its nationally praised play featuring a six-foot teddy bear called Bordesley. The play is an excellent example of an alternative way



Delegates in the Innovation Zone



Claire McColgan CBE, Director of Culture Liverpool



Author James Kerr

to engage with and inform the public – in this case, about the council's budget.

Nesta, the UK innovation agency for social good, presented its 'Strategy Room' with Southend-on-Sea City Council, representing a new approach to policy and decision-making.

Finally, the IZ was again host to many interesting climate change ideas.

Our Climate Change Panel was the most popular session across the three days, demonstrating the Centre for Alternative Technology's innovation labs, Local Partnerships' greenhouse gas accounting tool, and Westminster's environmental justice measure (see right).

We also hosted fantastic ideas on helping councils meet net zero, adapt to climate change and tangibly ensure environmental benefits are incorporated into strategy.

The IZ continues to be a huge success, providing a hive of ideas and energy at the LGA's annual conference; one session saw all 200-plus headsets in use, highlighting the sheer demand for learning.

"Meaningful engagement with residents is a top concern for local authorities"

The IZ featured 50-plus presentations, more than 100 speakers and over 40 different councils. It's a credit to the many local authorities and organisations that contributed – including our sponsor Newton – just how popular, engaging and energetic the IZ was.

Our sincere thanks go to the team at the LGA who made this year's IZ possible and such a success.

For those who missed out or want to revisit some of the learning from the IZ, PowerPoint presentations will be available on the LGA website shortly; some annual conference sessions are already available at www.local.gov.uk/events/past-event-presentations

The climate tools of the future

As the climate emergency continues, understanding where your organisation is in terms of its impact on the planet and the ways it can improve is going to be critical to reaching local and national net zero goals.

The Innovation Zone's climate change panel at the LGA's recent annual conference highlighted the exciting new array of tools and training available for councils to help understand their current position, measure their emissions, and review how climate change impacts their communities.

The panel discussed the value of accurate tools when developing plans to tackle the climate emergency, and how drilling down into the detail on carbon emissions means resources can be used more effectively.

Many of the tools are free for councils to use or try developing for themselves.

For example, Local Partnerships and the LGA have created a greenhouse gas accounting tool to help local authorities understand their most significant sources of emissions, which can then be used to prioritise actions to reduce them (see www.localpartnerships.org.uk/greenhouse-gas-accounting-tool/).

Also featured is a waste emissions calculator, developed by Cambridgeshire County Council and University College London through the LGA's Net Zero Innovation Programme (see www.localpartnerships.org.uk/waste-emissions-calculator/).

The Centre for Alternative Technology in Powys, Wales, has developed carbon literacy training specifically designed for local authorities (see www.cat.org.uk/). The training covers the science of climate change, local and global impacts and how these will affect the work and duties of local authorities.

Carbon literacy is an awareness of the carbon costs and impacts of everyday activities and the ability and motivation to reduce emissions, on an individual, community and organisational basis.

The climate change panel also heard from officers at Westminster City Council, who have created an 'environmental justice measure' – a tool that maps 10 environmental indicators, including air quality, building standards, proximity to green spaces and flood risk. This data is then combined with existing information about social, economic, educational and health outcomes.

Using this data, the council found that families living in some of its more deprived communities face the largest number of environmental risks.

The council has used its findings to identify priority areas for environmental improvements, from retrofitting inefficient buildings to informing air quality monitoring and green space improvements.

Councils can contact Westminster for the blueprint of its tool.

As Pedro Wrobel, Executive Director, Innovation and Change, at Westminster City Council, concluded: "We're all in this fight together, and we need to share our knowledge."

i To find out more about the LGA's support offer for councils, please visit www.local.gov.uk/our-support and/or contact the principal adviser for your region – see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-principal-advisers-and-regional-teams



Do you want to enhance employee wellbeing?
Fulfil your duty of care as an employer?
And save your organisation money?

AVC Wise can help you.

LGPS MEMBERS are entitled to Shared Cost AVCs, but it's up to you, the employer, to give them access.

By implementing a Shared Cost AVC scheme, you can:

- ✓ Provide a cost-efficient and flexible saving method for your employees - AVC contributions are exempt from Income Tax and NIC.
- ✓ Give your staff the chance to fully understand the benefits of their pension scheme and how best to grow their retirement savings with educational webinars.
- ✓ Allow your staff access to financial planning tools such as calculators or 1-to-1 meetings with retirement experts.
- ✓ Create valuable organisational savings through National Insurance exemptions on employee contributions.

To learn more about Shared Cost AVCs, visit www.avcwise.co.uk or email us at info@avcwise.co.uk.

Digital is now the channel of choice

Durham County Council drives channel shift for £250k in savings

Durham County Council is transforming to meet the needs of residents while saving significant time and money with a self-service portal powered by Granicus technology. The council is able to deliver outstanding customer service, streamline their processes, and drive down costs. They are reaping the rewards associated with channel shift and achieving the aims set out in Altogether Better Durham.



£250K
Annual savings



100K+
Users



90
Online forms

Future-proofing your organisation by preparing for emerging digital-native generations will help strengthen every essential government service. Using technology that is built for the public sector will ensure that while you reinvent citizen interactions, it remains an intuitive self-service experience and saves your organisation time and money.

Learn more about how Granicus technology could transform
how you deliver your services, visit granicus.uk

Avoid, shift, improve

Changing the
way we travel



Olympic cycling
gold medallist
Chris Boardman

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How do we encourage more people to get out of their cars and choose to cycle, walk and wheel instead?

This is a challenge all councils are facing as they look to encourage more 'active travel' in their communities.

Councils are best placed to make active travel easier, but encouraging a long-term change in behaviour comes with challenges and councils can face resistance from some, according to speakers at the LGA's annual conference.

Chris Boardman, National Active Travel Commissioner and Olympic cycling gold medallist, told delegates that we should be building our streets for young people.

At a session on active travel, he said: "We have so over-used the car that there is no space for anything else."

"What space do you want for your kids? Do you think you are doing what is right for your kids and for future generations?"

Mr Boardman was clear that active travel measures were not about "getting tough on cars", but instead about "creating a choice".

He added: "It is absolutely essential to give people options so they can reduce

their car usage and not using the car becomes a practical thing to do."

Other speakers urged councils not to give in to "a noisy minority" opposed to some active travel measures.

Dame Jane Roberts, Chair of the charity Living Streets, said: "If you are used to a place as it is, you can't imagine it can be anything different. It is very easy to assume that it has always been like this and can't change."

"It is a misnomer that car journeys are made by trades people with heavy tools. Many are private journeys."

"We should be tougher on unnecessary journeys and shift that dial. There's so much that we can do and political choices make a lot of difference."

Steve Golding, Director of the RAC, told delegates to think of those who live in rural communities and how their experiences of active travel are different from those who live in cities.

He called for greater investment in public transport in suburbs, which are "densely populated but don't fit the vision of a 15-minute neighbourhood".

He also described the logic behind the introduction of road pricing as "economic claptrap", preferring a congestion charge, which was "relatively straightforward" to introduce.

Local engines of growth

Should ensuring economic growth become a statutory responsibility?

Addressing delegates at the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth, Local Government Minister Lee Rowley MP said "engines of growth are local and, ultimately, councils do not need a statutory basis to do that".

He told senior councillors and chief executives that "you know your communities best, you know where your gaps are and where your skills are", and although "government could create the conditions for growth", it was councils who were best placed to drive this.

Other speakers in the same conference session noted that councils have to balance an array of competing priorities when it comes to supporting growth.

Antony Lockley, Blackpool Council's Assistant Chief Executive, said that, in 2010, 36 per cent of the council's budget was spent on social care, but now 80 per cent is.

Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe, Leader of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, reported that "20 per cent of my week is spent managing transport and infrastructure that drives growth locally".

She urged the Government "to end the 'beauty contest' concept of delivery of funding to local areas", and called for "mutual respect in the way central and local government operate".

She also highlighted to delegates that the LGA's Work Local plan "sets out a clear and urgent ambition to deliver skills at local level".

"Local delivery is simply more cost-effective and gets results," she said.

Data transparency

Co-production will be key to the success of a new government data tool



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

The Government's new Office for Local Government (Oflog) was formally launched at the LGA's annual conference by Secretary of State Michael Gove MP.

It is intended to provide 'authoritative and accessible data and analysis about the performance of local government and support its improvement'.

Oflog is an office of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), with a stated ambition of starting small and being developed iteratively, and eventually becoming independent.

To start, Oflog has brought together some existing data into its newly created 'Local Authority Data Explorer', alongside a policy paper setting out the context, rationale and approach to setting up the organisation, including its scope and future functions.

With other senior LGA colleagues, I have been lobbying on behalf of local government since Oflog was first announced in the Levelling Up White Paper last year.

Local Government Minister Lee Rowley MP attended an LGA councillors' forum earlier this year to talk about the organisation, and we have met separately; LGA officers and I meet regularly with DLUHC officials; and I have provided further feedback as a member of the Oflog political leaders' group, meeting regularly with the minister.

I have also met Lord Amyas Morse (pictured), the interim Chair of Oflog, and interim Chief Executive Josh Goodman, to pass on our views.



Lord Amyas Morse, Interim Chair of Oflog, at the LGA's annual conference

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Given local government already has a very strong record of data transparency, supported by LG Inform, the LGA's freely available, award-winning data platform, I questioned the need for the Local Authority Data Explorer.

I also underlined the importance of co-production with the sector in future iterations of the dashboard, to make it more meaningful locally; and the need for clarity around how this platform fits together with other dashboards proposed by the Department for Education and work on indicators being undertaken by the Department of Health and Social Care.

The Government needs to deepen its engagement with councils to identify and define future sets of metrics.

Importantly, the dashboard should include a wider set of metrics, not just about council performance, but about the activity and spend of the rest of the public sector, including central government, that is happening in each local authority area.

This will help councillors with their

place-shaping role, working with those public sector partners.

Looking carefully at the data, we have some questions and observations about some of the metrics officials have chosen, which we will be raising directly with government.

Given Oflog remains an ongoing project, we will continue to work to ensure the sector's voice informs the next stages of development and future iterations of the tool.

Some commentators have suggested the Oflog dashboard is 'dreary and uninviting', and therefore colleagues at the LGA have created a new report in LG Inform that contains all the metrics, which I hope you find more visually appealing (see <http://bit.ly/3JWLGW0>)

You can choose your authority at the top of the report, and change your comparison group; and the reports contain wider contextual information.

If you have views on which metrics and themes the Local Authority Data Explorer might contain in future, to better support your service area or local authority, please let me know.

I can feed this back to officials, to ensure the dashboard develops in a way that is useful to councils in the future.



To find out more about LG Inform, please visit www.local.gov.uk/lginform

Sector support

The LGA is mapping the improvement and assurance framework for local government



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

Councils are responsible for their own performance and improvement.

This is recognised in the 'sector-led improvement' approach, underpinned by the key principles that councils:

- are accountable locally, not nationally
- have a sense of collective responsibility for the performance of the local government sector.

Sector-led improvement has always played a part in providing local authorities with assurance of their own performance. Increasingly, it is contributing to the assurance of councils' performance for the wider public and central government.

The LGA provides councils with tools and resources to respond to opportunities, address complex challenges and facilitate continuous improvement. We also maintain an overview of the performance of the sector.

Our free data benchmarking platform – LG Inform – enables any council's performance to be compared with any other council or group of councils.

Corporate peer challenge reports are all published: we have made this work more robust by requiring councils to produce action plans, with a progress review in the following 12 months.

Sector-led support shines a light on issues such as governance, financial planning and performance, enabling councils to take action before they become more serious.

There are many opportunities for councils to be held to account.

Councils conduct their business in the most open and transparent way of all public authorities.

The structures that reinforce this accountability include:

- free and fair elections for councillors responsible for making public decisions

- independent external audit
- independent regulation of service standards and practice
- opportunities for individuals and their advocates to complain and seek redress for service and ethical failures.

All councils have internal controls, challenges and practices in place to ensure that they adhere to good governance principles.

These include councillor scrutiny, audit and risk controls, annual governance statements, actions taken by officers with statutory roles, propriety in decision-making, and responsibility for management arrangements.

Additionally, councils challenge and support each other to continuously improve, supported by the LGA's improvement programmes and resources.

Councils exist to improve the quality of life of – and the quality of places for – the communities they serve. Therefore, the focus of councils' assurance work is on the assurance they provide to local communities.

However, currently, there is no document or framework that sets out, in one place, the various required elements of council assurance and how they all fit together.

We believe that mapping such a framework would be useful – both for councils and the public.

So, we are convening discussions with councils in every region, representatives of professional associations and others, and engaging with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, to map out the various elements that provide assurance of council performance and are used to hold the sector to account.

Our aim is to describe the assurance framework for councils that currently exists but is not yet written down; improve understanding of how the various elements of assurance work together; and increase clarity and transparency.

Since the scope and objectives are so wide-ranging, we will mainly focus on corporate, rather than service-specific sources of assurance.

Once we've completed the system-wide mapping, there will be opportunities for stakeholders to consider whether any of the current checks and balances could be simplified, improved, or enhanced, and if any further action is required to ensure that support and assurance for those requiring a higher level of assurance are used suitably and in the timeliest way possible.



To find out more and to give your views, please visit <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/council-assurance-and-peer-support/improvement-and-assurance-framework-local-government>



Challenging ourselves on SEND

Providing seamless support that promotes good outcomes



Sally Robinson is Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services at Hartlepool Borough Council

Hartlepool is often one of the first authorities to be inspected under new frameworks, and we were the fourth to be visited by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission for a local area special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) inspection.

SEND is a far-reaching, complex and challenging area, requiring a whole system to work together effectively so that children and young people with SEND receive responsive, person-centred, seamless support that meets their needs and promotes good outcomes.

This is no easy task, but it is the minimum we should deliver for the most vulnerable children in our communities.

Children with SEND need schools, local authorities, health commissioners, providers and partners to work in harmony to support them, to collaborate and challenge themselves on quality, and deliver continuous improvement in education, care and health provision.

Our journey of improvement has been a long one and we are far from where we ideally want to be.

The most recent inspection is the culmination of several years of

improvement activity where we have relentlessly focused on challenging ourselves around what our strategic objectives are and how we will achieve them.

Underpinning our judgement is the quality of the local area's partnership with our Parent Carer Forum and its pivotal role in articulating our vision for children with SEND and where we want to be by 2027.

Parents and children are our experts by experience, and we make sure that they are the strongest voices that shape local arrangements.

The heart of our partnership is based on the child and their family at the centre of everything we do. We seek feedback on what they want and need from us and develop services in response to this.

We continuously check out what is working well and what needs to change, and review services through this lens.

Sometimes change takes longer than we want, but nevertheless, our focus remains on moving forward and driving improvement.

We are not without challenges and the inspection identified areas where the local area needs to make improvements at pace.

We knew this before the inspection

and outlined in our self-evaluation where improvement was needed. Knowing ourselves well and being honest was important in the inspection process.

Looking forward, we want to review our education, health and care plans (EHCPs), making the documents more accessible and timelier for children and families.

Like many areas in the country, access to some services is taking longer than we want and to tackle this we are implementing initiatives to ensure needs are identified and met earlier. Finally, we use data and intelligence to predict need and inform strategic planning, but we need to do more of this to be future ready, with a greater understanding of what will be needed and commissioning for this.

Hartlepool local area will not rest on its laurels.

There is much still to do, and since our inspection visit, we have maintained momentum in delivering our strategy. Our ambitious plan outlines how we intend to reshape local provision to meet more need within Hartlepool.

We will soon be working with the Department for Education to pilot the proposals in its 'SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time'.

Participating in this work will benefit our children and families in Hartlepool and help us lead system change to deliver on our vision.



For more information, please visit www.hartlepool.gov.uk

COMMENT



Charlotte Lester (I) is Head of Public Policy Research and Place-based Strategy at the Economic and Social Research Council, and **Rebecca Riley** is Associate Professor of Enterprise, Engagement and Impact at the University of Birmingham



Solving the local policy evidence challenge

Local government faces substantial challenges meeting UK and devolved government policy ambitions to address regional disparities.

It does not help that local resources, research capacity and expertise vary from postcode to postcode.

The research and innovation system is playing an increasingly active role engaging with and informing local policy development and delivery.

By collaborating across universities, local government, industry and community groups, it's possible to identify and trial new approaches to address the challenges faced by communities across the UK.

At UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), the country's largest national science and research funding agency, we have announced the first phase of our £23 million Local Policy Innovation Partnerships programme (LPIPs).

This programme will help local policymakers tackle levelling up challenges, drive sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and reduce regional disparities.

It will bring together local policymakers, industry, researchers and community groups to forge strong partnerships to co-produce a research agenda to address the challenges that matter to local communities.

Over the next few months, 10 phase one 'seed-corn' projects will work with local partners to develop full-stage proposals to host multimillion-pound LPIPs in their local areas from late 2023.

The local challenges being explored during phase one include addressing skills gaps in Northern Ireland and the West Midlands, and boosting innovation in new green technologies in South Yorkshire's supply chains.

The partnerships themselves are supported by the LPIP Hub, which plays a strategic coordination role across the LPIP network.

Local partnership working is vital in responding and building resilience to shocks and inequalities caused by world events and significant policy change.

When policy is designed with local places and their unique circumstances in mind, it is more likely to succeed and lead to better outcomes.

Currently, policy capability is struggling to keep up with the pace of change with limited resources, and pressures for immediate responses and resistance to change create barriers.

The LPIP Hub will work with LPIPs to help overcome these barriers and enable change through a collaborative structure, sharing knowledge and expertise, and responding to the place capacity gap.

It will enable LPIPs to access data, evidence and expertise from the broader research and innovation system to address local need.

The hub will also act as a gateway for national policymakers and government bodies to gain insights and evidence from the LPIPs into local challenges and opportunities.

Our vision is to create a network of place partnerships with the capability to deliver real-world change at local and regional level.

Our guiding principles start with the needs of the users, bringing the best of intellectual ambition alongside engagement and delivery expertise to address levelling up.

In phase two, four partnerships will receive up to £4.8 million each to deliver insights and solutions that drive inclusive sustainable local growth by tackling a range of priorities, including innovation, skills, communities in their places, felt experiences and pride in place, cultural recovery, and living and working sustainably in a greener economy

The LPIPs programme will contribute to a better-connected local research and development and policy system. It will build increased capacity and capability that can deliver effectively for local partnerships.

We see this network as a foundation that we can build on with partners to support high-quality, evidence-informed policy that understands local needs, creates new opportunities, and makes a real difference to people's lives.

i To find out **more about local policy innovation partnerships**, please visit www.ukri.org/news/ukri-invests-in-policy-innovation-partnerships-for-local-growth



Acting as a family



Councillor **Kevin Bentley**
is Leader of the LGA's
Conservative Group

In my first column for **first**, I want to reiterate my thanks to the Conservative local government family for supporting my nomination to be the new Leader of the Conservative Group at the LGA.

As I made clear in my remarks following my election at the LGA's annual conference in early July, alongside our new Deputy Leader, Cllr Abi Brown, we will work tirelessly to rebuild the Conservative local government family.

We will act as a family, work as a family, and win as a family.

All those great Conservative councillors whom we lost in May – we will simply get them back and add to their number.

Acting as a family means working with our partners in government on an equal footing.

The LGA Conservative Group has, for many years, been lobbying hard for funding for local government to be more streamlined, recognising that applying for separate pots of grant funding is becoming a resource and capacity issue for several local authorities.

We very much welcome, therefore, the decision to implement some of our calls.

The plans, which were released by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and confirmed by Secretary of State Michael Gove MP at the LGA's conference, include the creation of a new 'simplification pathfinder pilot' to test capital funding delivery across some local authorities.

In addition, there will be changes to the Levelling Up Fund, Town Deals and Future High Streets Fund, which will give councils

more flexibility around altering projects.

When the Conservatives work together as a family, irrespective of roles and positions, we can achieve great things for the communities that we were elected to serve.

As your new group leaders at the LGA, Abi and I will be making it clear that councillors are instrumental to many MPs being in the positions they are in and, therefore, we want to see a more defined relationship between MPs and local councillors.

If you have any issues you would like to discuss with me, my door is always open.

"All those great Conservative councillors we lost in May – we will get them back and add to their number"



Councillor **Shaun Davies** is
Chair of the LGA

Challenging ourselves to be even better

It is a true honour to become Chair of the LGA, building on the legacy of my predecessors while setting out our future priorities.

Reflecting on our annual conference in Bournemouth, I was delighted to meet and catch up with so many local government colleagues from across the country, a powerful reminder of our shared purpose to work in the best interests of our residents.

We sometimes describe ourselves as a local government family. And just like a family, when one member is struggling others step in to help, and we look to our strongest family members to lead the way.

The LGA is a vital part of that support system. We are here for you, with the tools, training and expertise to support you and your teams – so please use it.

We will work with you to promote your successes. We will share your ideas and good practice with others. We will



LGA Chair Cllr Shaun Davies
meeting conference delegates

help you to be the very best and to provide the very best to your residents.

As LGA Chair, to be able to advocate not just for the residents of Telford and Wrekin – or, indeed, my party – but on behalf of the whole local government family means the world to me, because local government is personal to me, as it is for many of you.

My council provided my parents with their first home, in which I was brought up, and gave me a park to play in as a child. My council was there at the

happiest of times as I registered the birth of my son, and the hardest of times when it provided social care to my nan in the final years of her life.

It is local government – not national government – that is responsible for more than 800 services that make a difference to people's lives, day in, day out.

That's why I want the LGA to be the best member organisation it can be, and for us to challenge ourselves every day to be even better.



Councillor **Nesil Caliskan** is Leader of the LGA's Labour Group

Making the future local

It is a huge honour to have been elected as the new Leader of the LGA's Labour Group.

I'm proud to be the first woman to lead it and am thankful for the support I received from across the country.

It was great to see so many Labour councillors attending the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth.

Our strength is a reminder that, after the fantastic local election results, Labour now has more councillors than any other party for the first time in 20 years.

Many of our new Labour council leaders were keen to share how they are already making a difference to their communities and ready to show the difference Labour makes in power.

We welcomed Deputy Leader Angela Rayner MP and Shadow Levelling Up Secretary Lisa Nandy, who emphasised the Labour Party's commitment to shifting power and resources out of Westminster and into communities.

"Labour's five missions can only be delivered through a partnership with local government"

Labour's Take Back Control Act, a central plank of Leader Sir Keir Starmer's first King's Speech, will give councils and metro mayors more responsibility for areas crucial to the nation's future, including housing, economic development, net zero, and skills.

Keir has made it clear that Labour's five missions – to secure the highest sustained growth in the G7, make Britain a clean energy superpower, build an NHS fit for the future, make Britain's streets safe and break down barriers to opportunity – can only be delivered through a partnership with local government.

We're all looking forward to the chance to make the future local.



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

Oflog isn't the answer

It was great to catch up with colleagues and friends from across the local government family at the LGA's annual conference.

However, I came away fearing that our biggest problems risk being left on the shelf in the long run-up to the General Election.

Local government is facing some daunting, if not existential, challenges: not least, local government funding, adult social care, and the workforce crisis.

"Local government's biggest problems risk being left on the shelf"

There is a big risk that our challenges will be sidelined while all political parties address issues higher up the public agenda, as happened with Brexit, a hung parliament, the COVID-19 pandemic and, more recently, the cost-of-living crisis.

Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove's conference offering was all detail and no strategic vision, and the creation of the Office for Local Government (Oflog) isn't the answer either – it's a distraction and won't solve a single problem we face.

Conversely, Labour Deputy Leader Angela Rayner offered warm words but no detail.

The offer of "true devolution" didn't reassure me that Labour's instinct for top-down control has been erased.

We saw that in the aftermath of the local elections, when Labour HQ quashed proposals for 'progressive alliance' administrations when it didn't think it would be in its political interest.

It is our job to alert all political leaders nationally to the dire state of local government finances.

When it came to funding, conference was understandably pessimistic.

There was no optimism that local government will receive any meaningful increase in funding from this government, or the next.



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

A vibrant and inspiring conference

Thanks to so many people who attended the LGA's recent annual conference, an especially vibrant and inspiring event.

Our group enjoyed special sessions on the main stage, with council leaders from across the country, on asylum seekers and on planning.

Huge thanks to you all for re-electing me as Leader of the LGA's Independent Group. I look forward to working with you to help you do a great job for your councils and your residents.

Congratulations to Cllr Caroline Jackson on being elected as my Deputy. Caroline is a former Leader of Lancaster City Council, now Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness.

"Cross-party working is important if we are to get a better deal for local government"

Congratulations also to Cllr Andrew Cooper, from Kirklees Council, our elected Treasurer. Thanks to our group executive who continue to do a great job supporting our members.

Former Deputy Leader Cllr Hannah Dalton served on our executive, and the LGA's Board, Executive Advisory Forum and Councillors Forum, and supported the Next Generation training and Candidate School.

On behalf of all Independents, thanks to Hannah for her excellent service and we look forward to working with her in her other roles.

It was a joy to speak at the LGA's staff conference, where I took the opportunity to thank and congratulate our hardworking LGA staff and emphasise the importance of cross-party working if we are to get a better deal for local government.

The LGA continues to play a vital role in voicing our concerns and lobbying on behalf of all councils in England and Wales.



Jen Woolford is
Director of Population
Statistics at the Office
for National Statistics

The future of population statistics

High-quality, timely and accurate population statistics are essential to make sure people get the services and support they need, both within their communities and nationwide.

Whether they provide evidence for policies and public services or help businesses and investors to deliver economic growth at a local level, it is vitally important our population statistics reflect the requirements of everyone in society.

Currently, the census provides the backbone of these statistics, with a rich

picture of our society at national and local levels every 10 years.

However, these statistics become less accurate over the decade and local detail on important topics becomes increasingly out of date between census years.

This summer, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has launched a public consultation on our proposals to create a sustainable system for producing essential statistics on the population of England and Wales that is flexible and responsive to unexpected change.

I welcome views from across local government on your priorities for the future of population and migration statistics, so they can best meet the needs of everyone over the coming years.

Timely administrative data – information that we all provide when we access public services such as the tax, benefits, health, and education systems – could be at the heart of the new system.

This could be complemented by survey data, a wider range of other data sources, and statistical modelling.

If implemented, the proposed system would provide high-quality population statistics each year, and offer new and additional insights into the changes and movement of our population across different seasons or times of day.

For many topics, it would provide



much more local information every year, exploring them in new detail and covering areas not recorded by the census, such as income.

The ONS is gathering feedback on how far the proposals are likely to meet user needs and where it should be prioritising future research.

Your input will be essential evidence for the National Statistician's recommendations on the future of population and migration statistics, and the census.

i To take part in the ONS consultation (available in English and Welsh), please visit <https://consultations.ons.gov.uk/>. It closes on 26 October

Delivering on the promise of heat networks



Louise Singleton
is Principal Consultant
at Gemserv

In an era of energy efficiency and decarbonisation, heat networks offer a promising solution for the UK's net zero aspirations.

Heat networks, also known as district heating, supply heat from a central source to consumers via a network of underground pipes carrying hot water – avoiding the need for individual boilers or electric heaters in every building.

They can efficiently tap into wasted energy, balance grid demands, and deliver low-carbon heat at competitive prices to homes and businesses. However, realising their benefits requires expanding their presence across the country, alongside ensuring their optimal performance.

Unfortunately, some customers have faced sub-par outcomes in terms of price and service, highlighting the need for operational excellence.

This issue is particularly critical with the energy crisis and rising costs, as inefficient networks pass on increasing fuel costs to consumers.

Hackney Council rectified a poorly performing heat network by leveraging funding from the Government's Heat Network Efficiency Scheme (HNES).

The council conducted optimisation studies to understand its networks' efficiency and performance, which will lead to decarbonisation, cost recovery, reduced administrative burdens, and shared learnings across its heat network portfolio.

Through data gathering and site visits, in collaboration with an expert commercial partner, Hackney Council identified 18 efficiency measures that could make a real difference. If implemented, these could save £3,000 annually in energy costs and reduce carbon emissions by 676 tonnes over 20 years.

HNES funding enabled a comprehensive health check on the council's heat networks, providing a thorough understanding of what could be done, without significant capital investment.

Since February 2023, HNES has provided grant support to enhance heat network performance and mitigate customer detriment.

The scheme offers up to 50 per cent of eligible project costs for capital grants and up to 100 per cent for revenue grants to fund optimisation studies.

Leveraging this opportunity allows eligible projects to optimise heat networks, reduce costs, and contribute to a greener, more efficient UK heating infrastructure.

i Gemserv is the Government's appointed delivery partner for the Heat Network Efficiency Scheme. To express an interest in the scheme, please email HNES@gemserv.com



How to be disability confident



Grant Neems is Stakeholder Engagement Director at Ingeus

Did you know that disabled people in the UK are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled people?

Disability Confident is a government initiative that supports employers to attract, recruit and retain disabled workers.

It provides advice on how to think differently about disability and offers free mentoring from companies that have already embraced the scheme, like Ingeus.

Employers provide evidence to progress through the 'Disability Confident Committed' and 'Disability Confident Employer' levels.

Moving to the final tier and becoming a 'Disability Confident Leader' involves validation from a mentor.

As the Department for Work and

Pensions' provider of choice to deliver these validations, Ingeus has worked with many companies, government departments and local authorities.

I've learned that disability confidence doesn't mean being certain, expert, or experienced in every aspect of disability. It's about having the right motivations, support and processes to make meaningful changes – think small, progressive steps rather than expensive kit or office refurbishments.

I have yet to find an employer that can't make some simple improvements to their recruitment processes.

More than 70 per cent of employers that make work-related adjustments say it is easy to do so.

My own disability journey saw me

unemployed for three years with severe osteoarthritis until I was supported into a short spell of volunteering, which led to a full-time job.

That was 19 years ago.

I now lead Ingeus's work as a Disability Confident Leader, passionately encouraging other employers to support opportunities for disabled people.

Along with 20,000 other Disability Confident-registered employers, we haven't looked back since joining the scheme five years ago.

Eleven per cent of our workforce is disabled, and we actively share our own inclusion processes.

Recently, I've addressed MPs, alongside Tom Pursglove, Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work; explored neurodiversity with Jobcentre Plus staff in Wigan; shared our work supporting the Valuation Office Agency for Employability Day; and delivered a webinar with the LGA.

Ingeus has just completed the first holistic research project in the UK looking at disability diversity and inclusivity in British workplaces. The key findings indicate significant work is needed to expand the availability of suitable and accessible roles.

It is frustrating and worrying that people with disabilities are scared they will never find a job. One in five feel hopeless, believing finding work they love is out of reach.

Connecting with this available source of talent is surely important for addressing recruitment challenges, and we'll be publishing our 2023 Disability Diversity and Inclusivity Index soon.

We believe that Disability Confident is a movement, not just the right thing to do.

As a result, our employment support activity is provided free of charge to match jobseekers experiencing barriers to work and employers struggling to find the perfect fit for their vacancies. For example, we developed a programme with a London borough to recruit, train and support applicants with diverse and first-hand lived experience into sustainable roles as case workers for the council.

We also deliver the Work and Health Programme and Restart Scheme across Greater Manchester, the North West and London, where we are funded to support employers to access tens of thousands of people who have experienced barriers to work.

Please join the movement: becoming Disability Confident is simple and the right thing to do for your organisation and your communities.



For LGA workforce advice on supporting employees with disabilities, see <https://bit.ly/3O4sVRu> To find out more about Disability Confident, please visit <https://bit.ly/44Ctvgs>

LETTERS

A vital part of English local government

On 1 April 1997, the LGA opened for business, and I walked through the door!

Ever since then I have been an office holder of some sort within the LGA, in addition to being a retained peer for a while.

I think that I am the only person, officer or member, who has been involved from day one.

My jobs have included being LGA Vice-Chair and Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, and chair, vice-chair, or deputy chair of committees and executives ranging from the housing board and the urban commission to environment.

A particularly tough role for an internationalist was being the international spokesperson for UK local government for 10 years. Well, someone had to do it!

I have done all this work because I enjoyed it and welcomed the ability it gave me to see so many good things being done by mayors and councillors that I could bring back home to Liverpool.

More importantly than that, I have been involved because I believe the LGA is a vital part of the English local government fabric.

Having one organisation instead of the three that existed before the LGA was formed means we have punched our weight when dealing with the Government and national partners, such as the NHS.

I am not leaving entirely, because I am still doing some peer-support work and will continue to chair the Local Authorities' Mutual Investment Trust (LAMIT) for a couple of years. LAMIT looks after more than £3 billion of local



The LGA's Smith Square Headquarters

government funds in short, medium and long-term deposits.

Like many before me, I am doing the 'mayoral escape route' and have become Deputy Lord Mayor of Liverpool and next year's Lord Mayor.

When some councillors sneer at you and laugh about you being 'off to London again', look them in the eye and stand up for what the LGA does. You will certainly have my support in doing that.

Cllr Richard Kemp CBE (Lib Dem),
Deputy Lord Mayor of Liverpool



Do you have any views you want to share about any aspect of local government? Please email your letters to karen.thornton@local.gov.uk. Letters may be edited and published online.

Covering the costs of planning

It's good to read (**first** 685) that Cllr Izzi Seccombe now believes government should actively consider allowing local authorities to set planning and licensing fees.

What's there to consider?

I stepped down from Teignbridge District Council in May, after 28 years and serving twice as Leader.

I recall that Teignbridge 'subsidises' the planning function by \$700,000 a year.

If the Government allowed councils to charge planning fees to at least cover costs, then Teignbridge would have \$700,000 available to invest in improving planning functions and frontline services – such as street scene, environmental health, community wardens, leisure, and so on – or to develop innovative projects to support communities, for example.

As Leader, I wrote to the two local MPs serving Teignbridge – the Newton Abbot and Central Devon constituencies.

The MP for Central Devon is Mel Stride, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, who kindly took up the issue with the Treasury.

We need change, and we need it fast. It's difficult to understand why government is dragging its feet on this issue.

Cllr Alan Connett (Lib Dem), Devon County Council and former Leader of Teignbridge District Council



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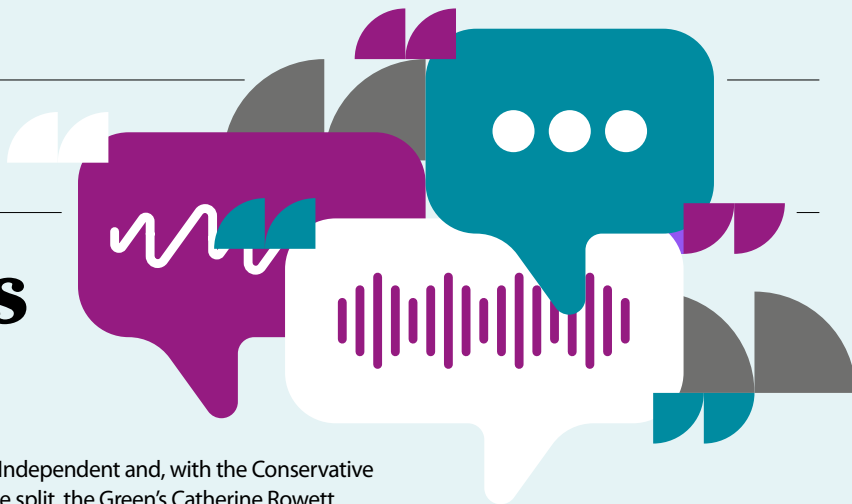
[www.wlga.cymru/
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WLGA Annual Conference
14 September 2023
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ELECTIONS

Giving electors a voice



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



In the latest batch of by-elections, the Greens continued to make gains, one each from Labour and Conservative, but lost a seat of their own.

The Conservatives made a rare gain from Labour in Cambridge, while Labour also suffered a setback in one of its strongest councils.

The Green Party's Terry Wheeler was forced to resign his Tavistock North seat in West Devon – won only last May – when he had to leave his rented home and was unable to find an affordable alternative.

His replacement, Annabel Martin, performed well, but fell just short of retaining the seat. The two candidates ahead of her tied on 233 votes. Independent Ursula Mann and Liberal Democrat Holly Greenbury-Pullen then drew lots to settle the matter, which went in Mann's favour.

Better news for the Greens came a week later with a gain from Labour in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole's East Cliff and Sherbourne ward.

The result last May saw a close finish in the three-member ward, with Labour taking two seats and the Conservatives one. The leading Green candidate, Sara Armstrong, fell 13 votes short of taking the third seat.

But five days after being elected, Labour's Martin Bedford resigned, citing health reasons, giving a second opportunity to Armstrong, which she duly took.

The Green's second gain came courtesy of a split within Conservative ranks in Norfolk.

Conservative Beverley Spratt had represented the West Depwade county division, regularly re-elected by large margins. Before the 2021 elections, however, he was de-selected.

Undaunted, he stood again, this time as an Independent, but lost heavily. The by-election, caused by the incumbent Barry Duffin's death, saw Spratt return as

an Independent and, with the Conservative vote split, the Green's Catherine Rowett, a former Member of the European Parliament, eased to victory.

Many councils are considering schemes for traffic regulation and Labour-run Cambridge is one. The plan is to implement a congestion charge for vehicles between 7am and 7pm.

These schemes often divide local communities and opposition parties provide a means of giving electors a voice.

The Conservatives campaigned against the charge in last May's elections and saw their vote rise. The vacancy in King's Hedges came after recently elected Alex Collis, at odds with the Labour administration, not only resigned her seat, but also party membership. The Conservatives won by just 24 votes, providing its first council victory here since 2012.

Council by-elections continue to focus strong feelings about local issues.

The Conservative hold in Rotherham's Dinnington ward proved easier than expected given the vacancy arose from the sitting councillor's disqualification under

the six-month rule. Despite this, Julia Hall defended the seat and, afterwards, referenced a controversial housing development plan proposed for the ward as a factor in her win.

A disappointing set of elections for Labour culminated in the party losing a seat in Newham, one of its strongest councils.

Although it easily retained the Wall End seat, there was a different outcome in Boleyn ward.

Here, Mehmood Mirza, standing as an Independent, produced an upset, overturning a large Labour majority and winning by almost 300 votes.

Mirza contested Newham's 2022 mayoral contest, finishing fourth on that occasion, and is clearly establishing a local campaigning base.



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

Local by-elections

Bedford, Wyboston

CON HELD
29.7% over Lib Dem Turnout 34.0%

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, East Cliff and Springbourne

GREEN GAIN FROM LAB
9.5% over Con Turnout 18.7%

Cambridge, King's Hedges

CON GAIN FROM LAB
1.3% over Lab Turnout 26.7%

Dorset, Sherborne West

LIB DEM HELD
9.4% over Con Turnout 30.5%

Haringey, Hermitage and Gardens

LAB HELD
45.7% over Green Turnout 22.9%

Kent, Maidstone Central

LIB DEM HELD
6.1% over Con Turnout 21.7%

Newham, Boleyn

IND GAIN FROM LAB
10.4% over Lab Turnout 27.7%

Newham, Wall End

LAB HELD
33.9% over Con Turnout 25.1%

Norfolk, West Depwade

GREEN GAIN FROM CON
3.5% over Con Turnout 24.8%

Rotherham, Dinnington

CON HELD
9.8% over Lab Turnout 27.4%

Southwark, Newington

LAB HELD
29.7% over Lib Dem Turnout 26.6%

West Devon, Tavistock North

IND GAIN FROM GREEN
0.1% over Lib Dem Turnout 24.2%



NATIONAL CHILDREN AND ADULT SERVICES CONFERENCE 2023

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