

Growing back better

How councils are driving
local economic recovery

17-18



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Back to school

With most pupils in England about to return to school for the first time since before Christmas, we look at the Prime Minister's roadmap out of the current pandemic-related restrictions (p10).

We also examine the work of councils and their partners in tackling the waste problem created by millions of discarded face coverings (p11), and highlight new research on whether COVID-19 has changed how people think about their local areas (p12).

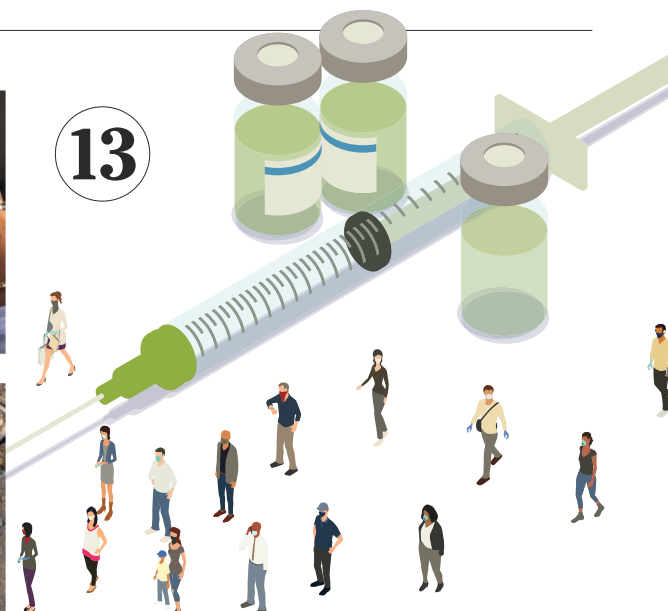
Elsewhere in this month's **first**, we focus on local economic recovery – with details of a new, LGA-commissioned good practice guide on planning for recovery (p17) and of our economic growth support hub for councils (p18).

We also hear from local lead members about ongoing work to stimulate sustainable local growth in their areas (p18-19).

Other features look at local initiatives to help young jobless people (p14) and suggest ways to maximise the effectiveness of the Government's Kickstart job creation programme (p15).

Finally, our **first** readership survey closes on 12 March – so please take this opportunity to let us know what you think of this magazine, the **first** e-bulletin and **first** online by completing the survey at www.local.gov.uk/first or scanning the QR code on p22.

Cllr James Jamieson
is LGA Chairman



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Schools' return is 'first step' out of lockdown

As first was going to press, schools in England were preparing for the return of all pupils from 8 March, as part of the Government's roadmap out of lockdown.

Ministers also announced a £700 million package of support to help children and young people catch up on missed learning and development.

The package focuses on an expansion of one-to-one and small group tutoring programmes, supporting the development of disadvantaged children in early years settings, and summer provision for those pupils who need it most.

State primary and secondary schools will receive a one-off Recovery Premium, building

on the Pupil Premium, to use as they see best to support disadvantaged students.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Councils want all children to return to school to continue with their education and will be working closely with the Government, education leaders and schools to make sure the return on 8 March is a success.

"Further clarity is needed on how all children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can recover the education that they have missed out on."

The reopening of schools and colleges marks the first step on the Prime Minister's roadmap for easing COVID-19 restrictions in England. Subject to infection rates, hospital admissions and deaths continuing to fall, and the continued rollout of the vaccination programme, it is hoped 'stay at home' rules will be lifted from 29 March, with all shops reopening from 12 April.

Indoor hospitality and entertainment could reopen from 17 May, with 21 June pencilled in as the earliest date at which all restrictions could be lifted.

Cllr Hudspeth added: "Councils will do all they can to turn this roadmap into a reality by building on successful work with the NHS on the vaccination rollout.

"Widespread community testing in schools, businesses, care homes and other places – coordinated by councils – will also be absolutely fundamental in bringing down infection rates and releasing restrictions on our lives and economy."

● See p10



More people advised to shield

The number of people considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) to COVID-19 and advised to shield has been expanded by an additional 1.7 million.

A new risk assessment takes into account age, pre-existing conditions, ethnicity, BMI and other factors to estimate the risk of serious illness from coronavirus.

New additions to the CEV group have been added to the priority lists for vaccination and the Government has extended the shielding period to 31 March.

Separately, a National Audit

Office (NAO) report into the CEV shielding programme says the scheme was set up swiftly, but that several problems arose when compiling the shielded patient list.

These included out-of-date hospital records or missing or inaccurate telephone numbers – meaning some people had to wait weeks before they were able to get deliveries of food or medicines.

The NAO recommended that the Government ensures there is easy, but secure, access to healthcare data, and sets out the key data needed for any future pandemic or civil emergency.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Councils stand ready to do all they can to help people more at risk from COVID-19.

"The expansion of the vaccine priority list and advice for all CEV people to shield until the end of March may cause worry for people and lead to an increase in requests for support.

"It is crucial that councils receive regular access to data and long-term funding so they can reach out to everyone who needs support as quickly as possible."





'Lack of PPE for social care'

Social care providers were left exposed by a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) because of the Government's decision to prioritise hospitals at the beginning of the pandemic, a report by the Commons' Public Accounts Committee says.

It meant staff had to care for people with, or suspected of having, COVID-19, without sufficient equipment to protect them from infection.

MPs on the committee heard evidence from organisations representing frontline workers that stocks were close to running out, single use items were reused and some was not fit for purpose, including reports of expired, substandard and deficient supplies.

An earlier National Audit Office report about PPE supplies during the pandemic also found that adult social care providers said they were not adequately supported by Government in procuring PPE and were very close to running out.

There were also huge increases in the price

paid for PPE compared with 2019, because of the global surge in demand and restrictions on exports in some countries. The NAO said had the Government been able to buy PPE at 2019 prices, the cost to July 2020 would have been £2.5 billion, £10 billion less than it actually paid.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Social care staff have been doing an incredible job in extremely challenging circumstances throughout this crisis.

"Many struggled to access the PPE they needed at times at the beginning of the pandemic. It is good that we now have a central stockpile and dedicated supply, alongside a government commitment to fund coronavirus-related PPE to the end of June 2021.

"Social care deserves parity of esteem with the NHS, including on future PPE supply and infection control measures. Frontline health and care workers should receive all the appropriate protective equipment they need."

Disabled people at risk

Nearly six out of every 10 people who died with coronavirus in England last year were disabled, official figures suggest.

Some 30,296 of the 50,888 deaths between January and November 2020 were of people with a disability, data from the Office for National Statistics shows. The figures also suggest the risk of death is three times greater for more severely disabled people.

People with disabilities were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, accounting for 17.2 per cent of the study population but nearly 60 per cent of coronavirus deaths.

The ONS said an "important part" of the increased risk was because disabled people

were "disproportionately exposed to a range of generally disadvantageous circumstances", compared with non-disabled people.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, LGA Community Wellbeing Board Chairman, said: "Every death from this dreadful virus is a tragedy and it is particularly harrowing to see that disabled people have been disproportionately affected. Protecting our most clinically vulnerable people has been councils' number one priority throughout the pandemic, delivering a wide range of support such as access to food and medicine, mental health services and meeting social care needs, as well as helping those who are in or at risk of financial hardship."

In brief Public health

Responsibility for public health services "rightly belongs with councils", but there needs to be much stronger joint commissioning of services between local government and the NHS, the LGA has said. Responding to an NHS Providers' briefing on the future of public health, Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Public health services are now firmly embedded in councils, which have more than proven their worth through the pandemic as part of the tremendous local response. Any moving around of public health responsibilities would be irrational and clearly undermine the progress made so far. What is needed is increased, sustained investment in councils' public health services to tackle the country's long-standing health inequalities and create happier, healthier and more resilient communities."

Services 'in crisis'

Nearly £26 million was cut from youth services' budgets in England last year, which reduced from £397.9 million in 2018/19 to £372.1 million in 2019/20, according to the charity YMCA. It said that since 2010/11, funding for youth services has reduced by 73 per cent. Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Councils have been forced to cut or scale back important services for thousands of young people in recent years as their budgets have shrunk." She urged government to ensure the £500 million Youth Investment Fund "is made available as soon as possible".

Alcohol deaths high

There were a record 5,460 alcohol-related deaths in England and Wales between January and September 2020, according to provisional figures from the Office for National Statistics. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "These figures are another tragic reminder that people with alcohol and other substance misuse problems need the right support and treatment, which councils are committed to providing despite the ongoing pressures of the pandemic. The causes and solutions are complex, but we know the positive impact that early intervention can have."

'Align violence strategy and domestic abuse law'

The Government's next Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (VAWG) needs to align with other strategies and legislation, including the Domestic Abuse Bill.

In its response to a call for evidence to inform a new strategy, the LGA also calls for the systemic barriers facing minority ethnic, migrant, deaf and disabled women, and LGBTQ+ people, to be considered, as these groups are disproportionately affected by violence.

The LGA's response says it is helpful that the Government has published a Male Victims' Position Statement to strengthen the response to male victims of violence.

The VAWG strategy for 2021-24 aims to focus on all forms of violence against women and girls, and drive forward improvements in the effort to target perpetrators, placing victims and survivors at the heart of the approach – something the LGA supports.

Investment in early intervention and prevention, particularly community-based support, are integral to any work in this area.

The LGA response says that, while there is a case for having a single VAWG strategy incorporating domestic abuse, there "must be a coordinated whole-systems approach to tackling violence against women and girls embedded across all Government departments and relevant agencies... other government strategies should align with, and complement, the VAWG Strategy". Overall, long-term, sustainable government funding is needed to help councils and their partners deliver a comprehensive approach to addressing VAWG, and the LGA will be responding to future discussions on this issue.

● See www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses



Child harm cases rise by more than a quarter

Serious child-related incidents reported by councils have risen by more than a quarter during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to LGA analysis of latest figures.

The total number of serious incident notifications in England from April to September 2020/21 increased by 27 per cent, from 224 to 285, on the same period last year, government figures show. This follows a fall of 18 per cent between 2018/19 and 2019/20.

Incidents involving infants aged under one increased by 31 per cent, from 78 to 102, while incidents involving those aged one to five soared by 50 per cent, from 32 to 48. Incidents involving those aged over 16 have also risen – by almost a third, from 45 to 59.

The number of notices relating to child deaths increased by 34 per cent, from 89 to 119.

The majority (two-thirds) of incidents occurred while living at home.

The LGA has called for the £1.7 billion removed from the Early Intervention Grant since 2010 to be reinstated to enable councils to provide more preventative and early help services, to help avoid situations escalating into acts of abuse and harm.

It says the Government's recently launched independent review of children's

social care is a vital opportunity to help ensure that the right homes for all children in care are in place, and that sufficient resources are available to give all families and children the support they need and deserve.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said councils "have been working hard with their partners to respond to changing and emerging threats to children and young people" during the pandemic, but that the rise in serious incident notifications was "particularly harrowing".



Ban on unregulated homes for under-16s

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson MP has announced that a ban on placing vulnerable children under the age of 16 in unregulated accommodation will come into force in September.

The Government will also bring forward plans to support councils to create more places in children's homes, alongside additional investment, and give inspection agency Ofsted new powers to take enforcement action against illegal, unregistered providers.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said that the announcements "are positive steps towards ensuring that all children in care live in good-quality homes that meet their needs and help them to thrive".

She added: "A key driver for the increasing use of unregulated placements for children under 16 is a lack of suitable regulated homes. The Government's commitment to funding to increase children's homes provision, which we have previously called for, is a helpful recognition of the pressures on placements."

"However, this funding will not be available immediately, and councils are keen to work with government to quickly develop the places they will need to meet these requirements."

"We remain convinced of the need for wider regulatory reform to deliver the homes children need, alongside investment in workforce and support services, and urge the chair of the independent review of children's social care to look closely at these issues."

Leaseholders 'protected' from cladding costs

The Government has announced a package of measures to protect leaseholders from the cost of removing unsafe ACM cladding from buildings.

It will pay for the removal of unsafe cladding for leaseholders in all residential buildings 18 metres and higher (six storeys or more) in England.

Non-interest loans will be offered to leaseholders in buildings between 11 and 18 metres (four to six storeys), with a guarantee that they will never pay more than £50 a month for cladding removal costs.

The Government will also introduce an industry levy and tax to ensure developers pay to make their buildings safe.

Lord Porter, the LGA's Building Safety Spokesperson, said: "It is good that the Secretary of State has secured unprecedented funding to ensure leaseholders in high-rise blocks will not have to pay anything towards cladding remediation.

"This is an important step towards protecting leaseholders from the unfair cost of a crisis that is not of their making, and something the LGA has long-called for.

"No leaseholder should have to pay the costs of making their homes safe.

"Everything should be done to force developers and product manufacturers to meet the costs they have imposed on the country through decades of failure on an industrial scale.

"The Grenfell Tower disaster exposed a building safety system that is not fit for purpose.

"If a building found to be unsafe has been built according to building regulations, then the Treasury needs to pick up the cost of remediation and, if not, then those responsible for building it must pick up the cost to make it safe.

"If a product on a building has failed, then the manufacturer must be liable for the cost."

White Paper 'to join up health and care'

Plans to reform health and care services in England so they can work more closely together have been published in a Government White Paper.

Under the proposals, councils and NHS services would set up joint bodies in every part of the country, to make decisions on how to better coordinate health and care services.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock MP said the reforms would enable greater integration, reduce bureaucracy, and strengthen accountability.

The LGA said the Health and Care White Paper provides a promising base on which to build stronger working relationships between local government and the NHS, as equal partners. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "It is good

there is renewed focus and commitment on existing local partnerships and accountability. Making decisions as close to the people they affect needs to be hardwired into the way we work together.

"We understand the desire for greater transparency in social care, but councils need to be an equal partner in the design of any national oversight. This must build on existing sector-led improvement work, recognise local democratic accountability, and give a voice to people who use and work in social care.

"It is helpful the White Paper recognises the pressures facing social care, and makes clear that the Government remains committed to reform, but action is needed and proposals must be brought forward as a matter of urgency."



In brief

New design codes

Local communities are to get the power to set design standards for new developments, in proposals announced by Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick MP.

Councils will draw up their own individual design codes in consultation with residents, supported and advised by a new national Office for Place. Cllr David Renard, LGA Housing Spokesperson, said: "We look forward to seeing the details of the draft national design code and the Office for Place. We want to continue to work with the Government to get these proposals right."



New homes bonus

Consultations close on 7 April on the future of the new homes bonus and options for reform to be implemented from 2022/23 (see www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-future-of-the-new-homes-bonus-consultation). To help shape the LGA's submission to the consultation, please email lgfinance@local.gov.uk with your views.

Hearts for the Arts

A record number of nominations were received for this year's Hearts for the Arts, the annual awards run by the National Campaign for the Arts, recognising the UK's local council arts heroes. The winners included: Haringey Council for its N17 youth radio programme; London Borough of Wandsworth Arts Service for its Create & Learn playkits for young children; and Mole Valley District Council for its online community arts festival, Arts E-Live. This year's Best Arts Champions were named as Andy Dawson, for creating Inspire Youth Arts, a programme for young people across Nottinghamshire; and Cllr Janet Emsley (Rochdale Borough Council) for her dedication and commitment to the arts in the community.



In brief

Flood targets

A lack of clear flood resilience targets leaves England at risk of 'playing catch-up' with climate change, a report from the Commons' Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee has warned. Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Environment Spokesman, said: "We particularly support recommendations in the report for councils to have the resources they need to help factor flood projections into planning decisions and for an action plan to address the mental health impacts on flood-hit communities."

Funding for flood defences needs to be devolved to local areas and sit within a new national framework for addressing the climate emergency."



first survey

The LGA wants to know what you think of **first**, our membership magazine, and its sister website and e-bulletin – and how we can make the content more useful to you, our readers. If you are a councillor and currently receive **first**, you should have received a personal email invitation to complete our latest readership survey. Alternatively, you can access the survey via the first online website (www.local.gov.uk/first) or by scanning the QR code on p22. If you have any queries about the survey, please email karen.thornton@local.gov.uk or helen.wilkinson@local.gov.uk

Local nominations

The Government has laid legislation to reduce the number of electors required on a candidate nomination form for the local elections and London mayoral elections on 6 May. This is to reduce the amount of contact needed as part of the nomination process during the pandemic. Further legislation is expected on emergency proxy votes and the mandatory wearing of face masks in polling and count venues.



MPs: 'Create green jobs'

MPs have called on the Government to counter rising unemployment by creating green jobs and focusing investment in energy efficiency, the circular economy, climate adaptation and nature recovery.

'Growing back better', a report published by the Commons' Environmental Audit Committee (EAC), warns that climate change and biodiversity collapse may deliver an even greater crisis if the COVID-19 economic recovery doesn't focus on nature and net-zero carbon.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson, said: "It is crucial that the COVID-19 economic recovery has a real focus on net zero and this report rightly focuses on the need to address unprecedented levels of unemployment and investment in green jobs."

The LGA wants the upcoming Environment Bill to be fully aligned to achieving net zero, improving air quality, protecting against flooding, and ensuring

transport, waste and energy policies are environmentally sustainable. Cllr Renard added: "We support the principle set out in the Bill of increasing biodiversity net gain through the planning process. Where net gain contributions from developers cannot be delivered on site, any financial 'credits' should be retained by councils so that local people will have a say in how they are spent."

"A multi-year extension of the Green Homes Grant would be a positive step. Some councils have faced some challenges with the competitive, short-term nature of the grant funding, which requires sufficient staffing and capacity to apply."

"Long-term funding would empower councils to be able to properly plan activity focused on the needs of local communities as a whole to support the delivery of net zero."

The EAC report also recommends VAT reductions in green sectors, and a focus on the use of recycled materials and the benefits of repair services.

Place-based approach 'key' to getting people active

The LGA has welcomed a recent report from Sport England that recognises the critical importance of a place-based approach to supporting communities to be active.

From 2017, Sport England funded 12 'local delivery pilots' in different locations around the country to test and learn how to promote physical activity and address the stubborn inequalities that exist among the least active through community-led solutions.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA's, Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "Establishing the local delivery pilots was a bold step for Sport England, and it appears to have been transformative."

"The collaboration between local areas and Sport England demonstrates the emergence of a mature relationship that uses investment and expertise to break down local barriers, often achieving promising results from small scale sums of money."

"It is encouraging to see such a successful collaboration between national and local organisations and highlights the importance of acknowledging the need for change and embracing the flexibility to

work in ways that put communities first.

"We look forward to further supporting Sport England and councils on this journey and seeing many more places benefit from this approach."

● See www.sportengland.org



PARLIAMENT

Raising local election concerns

The LGA has highlighted to MPs safety issues and the extra costs of running ballots during the pandemic

The Government has confirmed that an unprecedented round of local council and mayoral elections will go ahead this spring. After last year's postponement because of COVID-19, everyone in England will have a ballot of some kind on 6 May, with many places holding multiple ballots.

The LGA continues to work with councils and government to raise the key challenges local areas face as they strive to ensure the ballot and subsequent counts are COVID-19 secure. These include recruiting sufficient staff, booking appropriate venues and procuring equipment. As part of that, LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson provided evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

Cllr Jamieson highlighted that councils are working hard to deliver this unique set of elections safely. However, he stressed that work is needed to implement vital

extra measures to ensure everyone's safe involvement, which means the level of extra government financial support will need to be kept under review as costs become clear. The Government has committed to providing £15 million so far.

He said: "The resources issue is really important because we're not going to see a normal election and it won't be a village hall with two polling clerks in it. What happens if somebody turns up to vote and they don't have a face mask, never mind a pencil? We may have fewer people volunteering because a lot of the people who volunteer are older and they may feel less secure about doing it."

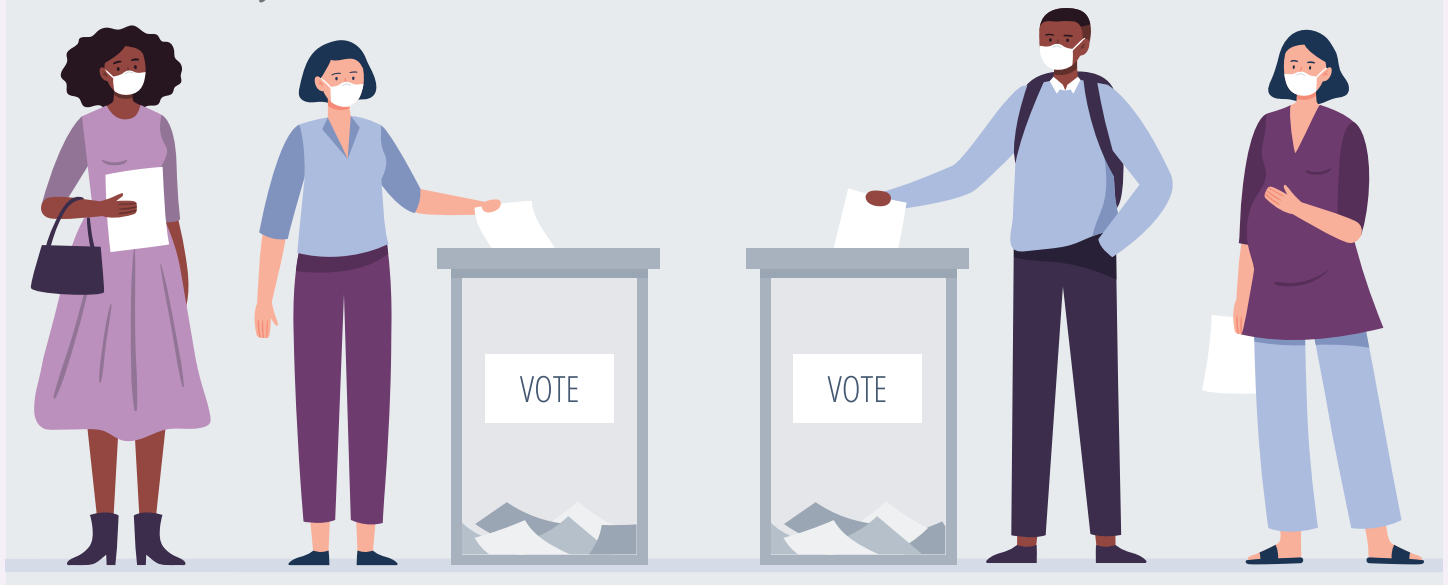
Cllr Jamieson also stressed to MPs on the committee just how vital it is that candidates have the ability to run campaigns so residents can make informed decisions about who they want to represent them. He said: "That local element – the ability to send out leaflets –

is completely missing. I have certainly had questions about why it is that the pizza shop can put a leaflet through someone's door, but the local councillor can't."

MPs also heard of other areas of concern regarding the coronavirus regulations and electoral law, including what the expectation is if someone who should be self-isolating attends a polling station or a non-exempt person refuses to wear a mask. The requirement for newly elected members to be signed into office by the end of the fourth day was also asked to be relaxed.

The committee will be making recommendations to the Government about the local elections and we hope that many of the points the LGA has been making will influence it. We continue to work with government and councils to ensure adequate support and guidance is available. As part of last month's roadmap announcement (see p4), the Government confirmed that, from 8 March, broader campaigning activity would be permitted, and specific guidance was published as **first** was going to press.

✧ What happens if somebody turns up to vote and they don't have a face mask? ✧





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

A roadmap to recovery

Councils will continue to do all they can to support the Government's plans for tackling COVID-19 and reducing restrictions

So, now we have it – a roadmap that will hopefully lead us out of the current pandemic restrictions in England to a brighter future by the summer.

The first stage begins shortly, with the welcome return of all pupils in England to their classrooms from 8 March, supported by twice-weekly testing for secondary and college pupils, and continued testing of primary staff.

Two people can meet socially outdoors, but the clinically vulnerable are advised to continue to self-isolate until at least the end of March.

We also expect that the Government will amend regulations to allow for a broader range of COVID-safe canvassing activities in the run-up to the local elections on 6 May.

Three to seven-year-olds in Wales are already back at school. As **first** was going to press, a review of Welsh stay-at-home rules was expected on 12 March, with other primary and some secondary pupils in Wales likely to return to classrooms from 15 March.

The Prime Minister's plans anticipate the legal requirement to 'stay at home' will be lifted on 29 March in England, but many lockdown restrictions will remain in place, including working from home and minimising travel.

The 'rule of six' will be reintroduced outdoors and two families from different households will be able to meet, with some outdoor facilities opening, including tennis courts and swimming pools.

It's anticipated that, from 12 April, non-essential retail may be able to re-open, alongside close-contact services and gyms. Pubs and restaurants could provide an outdoor-only service, and public libraries, community centres, zoos and theme parks may be able open their doors.

From 17 May, the 'rule of six' will be lifted outdoors and replaced by a maximum gathering limit of 30. Indoor hospitality, cinemas, hotels, performances and sporting events will then also restart. By 21 June, all restrictions could be lifted.

Of course, all of this is subject to the continuance of the current positive trends in respect of falling infection rates, hospital admissions and deaths, and rising vaccination rates.

Before moving from one stage to the next, the Government will be assessing progress against four tests: that the vaccine deployment continues successfully; vaccines are effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths; infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations and unsustainable pressure on the NHS; and that the assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new variants of COVID-19.

The threat from the virus remains substantial and, as **first** went to press, the numbers in hospital had only recently fallen below those seen at the peak of the first wave last year.

However, there is much cause for

optimism, with vaccinations rolling out at pace and the Government aiming to get a first dose to all priority groups by 15 April, and to every adult by the end of July.

Building on councils' successful work with the NHS and local partners (see p13), I know you will continue to do all you can to help with the vaccination rollout – and especially with encouraging all our communities to have the jab.

To help support the work of councils in this area, the LGA has launched a series of case studies and resources on COVID-19 behaviours, including vaccine hesitancy. These show how councils have used behavioural science techniques to increase vaccine uptake, as well as improve adherence to COVID-19 regulations (see www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-behavioural-change-case-studies).

✧ It was good to hear the **Prime Minister** praise councils for the incredible work they have done ✧

In addition to the vaccination programme, widespread community testing – coordinated by councils – will be crucial to reducing infection rates.

The Government's roadmap confirmed that the community testing programme will be extended until at least the end of June. The rapid-testing scheme partnership between national and local



*Pupils in England will
return to classrooms
from 8 March*

A mountain of mask-related waste

The LGA and partners have been working together to tackle the environmental impact of face coverings



Councillor **Liz Green** is Vice-Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, and **Keith Coleman** is the LGA's PPE Lead



One trillion and counting... that's how many face coverings have been used globally since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is estimated that the UK is using more than 58 million face masks each day, with a large percentage of them going into landfill – potentially creating a new, long-term pollution issue.

As part of the LGA's response to the climate emergency, we recently commissioned two collaborative sessions to discuss how we might urgently minimise the impact of disposable face coverings on the environment.

The participants were asked to consider the far-reaching environmental, social and economic impacts of these products that go well beyond just the single-use plastic element. This includes considerations such as: the extraction of the raw material, plastics, fabric and aluminium; the impact on CO₂ emissions of waste treatment and transportation of the product to the UK; the economic impact of sourcing policies and government policies – for example, supporting UK manufacturing and driving economic prosperity within our regions; and the way consumers view, use and dispose of the products.

The participants all gave of their time freely and included senior people from various high-profile private companies, central and local government, the NHS and charities.

The two sessions produced numerous ideas, but they were distilled into three broad themes: recycling of the material outside of normal waste streams; clear messaging for the consumer on how and what to recycle; and systemised change, with more community engagement.

We wanted to engage with different stakeholders to gain a broad perspective on the issue. The workshops truly showed the power of collaboration when we have a common goal. It was the participants' different backgrounds and perspectives that drove these collaborative efforts, not their similarities.

As a consequence of these sessions, the British Standards Institute has invited the group to review the draft personal protective equipment (PPE) standard, Flex 5555, for community face coverings.

Businesses have also come forward with new and innovative recycling systems and technologies that are being investigated by central and local government. These include: the formation of a new, commercial, fully circular recycling solution partnership; investigations into a new material manufacturer in the UK; and discussions between major retailers and local councils to help distribute PPE-mask recycling bins on high streets.

government was expanded in January for all local authorities in England and nearly all have now joined.

This enables asymptomatic testing for local public services, small businesses, self-employed people and communities that have been disproportionately affected by the virus.

Ministers have praised councils for their efforts in applying local knowledge to the programme, particularly in targeting those who are asymptomatic in our communities.

It was also good to hear the Prime Minister single out councils for praise, saying that he was "very grateful to councils, and particularly public health officials, for the incredible work that they have done in the past year".

Hopefully, some of that appreciation will have been matched with the resources councils need to support the recovery in this month's Budget, which took place after this edition of **first** went to press. Please see **www.local.gov.uk** for our response to the Chancellor's statement.

i See www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus for the LGA's latest pandemic updates, resources and support for councils. The Department for Education's updated guidance on managing schools and early years settings is at www.gov.uk/coronavirus/education-and-childcare. See www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-sets-out-roadmap-to-cautiously-ease-lockdown-restrictions for the Government's roadmap



For more information please email Georgia.rudin@local.gov.uk





COVID-19 and community behaviour

The LGA has commissioned a report into shifts in public attitudes and behaviour caused by COVID-19 and the implications for local government



Councillor **Peter Fleming** OBE is Chairman of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board

Coronavirus has impacted on all of us; our working lives, our leisure time, our ability to travel and, not least, our health and mental wellbeing.

To help councils as they respond to the pandemic, the LGA commissioned BritainThinks to explore the ways in which COVID-19 has changed public attitudes and behaviours.

The research, 'Has COVID-19 changed the way communities behave?', also aimed to understand more about how the public defines 'local' as a result of the pandemic, including any changes in attitude towards civic participation.

Perceptions of local areas and feelings of belonging were found to be driven by long-standing factors. For most, the pandemic has typically reinforced existing views rather than changed them. For example, the best things about local areas included the people, green spaces, access to

amenities, diversity, and vibrancy, whereas the worst things included anti-social behaviour, crime, traffic, potholes, a sense of decline, and a lack of community feel.

Behaviours that had changed most, universally, as a result of the pandemic were those directly connected to government restrictions. Behaviour change relating to local issues such as leisure time, shopping, travel and civic participation were highly varied, and many felt life hadn't changed much at all.

Beyond initial priorities for returning to 'normal', the pandemic has led to an increase in online shopping and also high street shopping to support local businesses, and people were enjoying more personal time.

A lack of knowledge about how to contribute to change locally was uncovered by the research. Most participants had taken part in small, individual actions, such as choosing to shop locally or signing petitions. A lack of time and information were cited as reasons preventing greater local involvement. However, the use of case studies in focus groups enabled ideas to flow on how people can have more of a say in the life of their community.

So, what do these findings mean for

councils? Recovery needs to reflect and respond to people's lived realities and experiences. The LGA's research found a desire to return to normal, coupled with a need to build back better, fairer, and healthier. The research makes the case for 'making normal better' as a path that is ambitious and in touch with local people. The public is looking for solutions to long-standing issues such as anti-social behaviour and traffic problems, which they feel have been forgotten. But there is also a willingness to support local recovery through small actions that can make a difference, such as shopping locally.

Councils need to communicate possible routes to participation, with easy access points – online and offline – and use case studies to demonstrate that even small-time commitments can effect meaningful change. Motivational barriers may be further overcome by focusing on, or demonstrating a connection between, civic participation and the issues the public cares most about.



The report 'Has COVID-19 changed the way communities behave?' is available at bit.ly/ws/bLqC

Councils play lead role in vaccine rollout

Councils' unstinting work to help meet the Government's target of vaccinating the first four priority groups has earned the praise of a Cabinet minister



Councillor **Ian Hudspeth** is Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board

Councils' vital role in the unprecedented national effort to ensure more than 15 million people had received their first COVID-19 vaccine has been praised by Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Robert Jenrick MP.

The landmark achievement, completed in 10 weeks, met the Government's target of vaccinating the first four priority groups, as identified by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

Using their unrivalled knowledge and connections with their communities, councils – alongside the NHS – have played a fundamental role in coordinating the vaccine rollout on the ground. They have set up vaccination centres swiftly and at short notice, used trusted local leaders to answer residents' questions and dispel myths, and translated information into different languages to encourage uptake of the vaccine locally.

Councils have also introduced other practical measures, such as providing free parking in council-owned car parks, offering lifts to those without their own transport, and providing volunteer marshals to help direct residents. Sports stadiums,

places of worship, and even a former nightclub are among the venues secured by councils to help boost COVID-19 vaccination efforts.

Mr Jenrick said councils have "risen to the challenge" and are "saving lives by ensuring more members of our communities have access to vaccines quickly and safely".

In Swindon, the council-owned railway museum, Steam, was turned into a mass vaccination centre for the town, and the council has recently started a new phone service to follow up with those who have not turned up for their appointments.

St Albans City and District Council helped the NHS set up a much-needed vaccination centre in a building that, until last year, was operating as a nightclub. Working with local GP surgeries, the council cleared the site, ready for use, in just a weekend, performing deep cleans, installing internet connections, and clearing cloakrooms and bar areas. Since opening, more than 12,000 vaccinations have been administered there.

Volunteers, including community champions and faith leaders, are also working alongside council staff to reach out to vulnerable people, and those from black and ethnic minority communities, to provide reassurance

and answer questions. In Birmingham, the city council has recruited 677 covid community champions and 19 organisations to help dispel myths about the vaccination process, and to drive take-up of the vaccine.

Councils have also continued to reach out to rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness in their areas, ensuring they are registered with local GPs and able to access a vaccination appointment.

Local authorities have risen to the challenge throughout the pandemic, providing crucial local leadership, and delivering services that are absolutely essential to protect lives and livelihoods, and keep communities running. They have also continued to lead the way on test and trace, distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE), shielding the vulnerable, delivering food parcels, managing food banks, providing support and grants to businesses, and finding new ways to house the homeless. All of this on top of continuing to provide communities with the everyday services they need and expect.

The vaccine is our only certain route out of this pandemic, and councils will continue to do all they can to ensure everyone can receive their vaccination safely, easily and on time.

i Council case studies on the vaccine rollout can be viewed at www.local.gov.uk/our-support/covid-19-vaccination-case-studies. **The LGA's public health conference takes place on 23-24 March.** For more information please visit www.local.gov.uk/events.





Councillor **Judith Blake** CBE is Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board

Youth unemployment

Councils continue to play a key role in supporting young people and employers with jobs and training during the pandemic

With the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and national restrictions, it's no surprise that the latest labour market statistics show a steep rise in unemployment – with young people continuing to bear the brunt of the worsening job market.

While the overall unemployment rate is 5 per cent, for 18 to 24-year-olds it is 13.2 per cent, rising to 25.6 per cent for those aged 16-17. Young people will find it tough to compete in a crowded job market against the newly unemployed with more experience and relevant skills.

The LGA highlighted the plight of our future workforce in 'Re-thinking youth participation for the present and next generation: education to employment', published last October.

In it, we called on the Government to give councils and combined authorities greater powers and resources to enable them to effectively support young people into education, employment or training.

During these difficult times, councils have responded with agility and innovation to meet the needs of young people, and are committed to tackling the issues they face locally.

For example, Hampshire County Council's Employment and Skills Hub (ESH), with a dedicated team of six, is working hard to engage with employers to source work experience and careers fairs for young people.

The ESH has been vital in ensuring coherent employer engagement around incentives for apprenticeships, Apprenticeship Levy transfers, traineeship bonuses, and the Government's Kickstart Scheme, to secure physical and virtual work experience-based pathways into businesses for young people in Hampshire. Since March 2020, the ESH has found 53 young people long-term work experience placements and has assisted more than 80 businesses with COVID-19 risk assessments.

Exploring virtual and digital engagement for schools in Hampshire has resulted in a range of videos, including 63 careers fairs, 11 'guess my job' videos, and 12 'career talks' that the ESH can share with partners, ensuring school children and young adults continue to get high-quality careers information and guidance.

Additionally, ESH has created 56 employment and skills plans for construction developments since the hub started in 2017, leading to 427 work experiences, 461 job opportunities, and 266 careers information advice and guidance engagements for individuals and young people.

Construction has been a key sector

in maintaining opportunities for young people throughout lockdown because of its outdoor nature and the sector's quick enactment of COVID-19 secure work practices.

Hampshire County Council is also participating in Kickstart as a 'gateway' organisation, supporting employers who cannot commit to 30 Kickstart placements to participate in the scheme through the ESH. More than 50 businesses have registered their interest in providing 90 Kickstart placements.

Many other councils and combined authorities have also responded swiftly to local needs by forging partnerships, adapting provision, and delivering advice and support at pace to young people.

For example, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, in collaboration with Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership and the Burberry Foundation, have launched FutureGoals Spotlight and Remote resources (see www.futuregoals.co.uk/spotlight and www.futuregoals.co.uk/remote), a series of at-home teaching resources providing careers guidance, skills and experience.

As we look ahead, local authorities must be included as the key partner that moves us out of this crisis.

The importance of our role in supporting an inclusive economic recovery needs to be recognised nationally. We can then take our proper place in establishing and delivering the route map towards recovery, ensuring today's young people don't become a lost 'pandemic' generation.



'Re-thinking youth participation for the present and next generation: education to employment' is free to download at www.local.gov.uk/re-thinking-youth-participation-present-and-next-generation-education-employment



Councillor **Kevin Bentley** (I) is Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board and Councillor **Sir Richard Leese** is Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board



Kickstarting careers

Councils are backing a government scheme to boost learning and job opportunities for young people, and have suggested ways to maximise its effectiveness

The Government's Kickstart job creation programme has the potential to deliver much-needed local opportunities for young people hard hit by the pandemic.

So it's no surprise that councils have got behind this and become the trusted local 'go to' organisation. They know how best to support young people into work or learning, are in a good position to help local employers develop work placements, and are trusted to deliver the wraparound support for employers and young people so both can get the most out of the work placement.

Kickstart will work best for young people, businesses, and communities if planned, promoted and delivered in partnership, which is why councils' role is so crucial, either as a 'gateway' organisation or signposting for those interested. When we knew the Government was considering a job creation programme, we put forward suggestions on how it could work to best effect for young people, employers and the local economy.

For Kickstart to fulfil its potential, young people need a coordinated post-16 local offer so it's clear what Kickstart is and how it connects with other local and national initiatives, backed up by impartial, local careers advice and

guidance. A personal action plan is vital to help them get the best out of the placement, for example, training, pre-employment and wraparound support. Kickstart should feel like a job, with a record of achievement and a bankable transferable skill. Also vital is in-placement support to help them hold on to a job and, after placement, to find alternative routes if the employer is unable to help them further.

Employers are expected to support a range of national work placement schemes. The Government should do more to explain how Kickstart fits with other programmes and explore how incentives can help employers take on young people with more complex needs.

They need a named, local contact and a trusted local network to help work through issues. Despite the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP's) recent decisions to stop applications for further gateways, and remove thresholds allowing any employer to apply to it direct, employers still prefer to go through trusted council 'gateway'

routes, given their added value, including recruitment support, pastoral support and pre-employment and in-work training.

Local economies need leadership and coordination, as uncoordinated national recovery initiatives risk creating a turbulent jobs market. As local economies lose more jobs, the creation of decent, in-demand jobs – including in health and social care, housing, low carbon and logistics – is vital. Councils have joined up the Kickstart conversation locally, bringing together DWP, employers, local chambers, training providers and the third sector. This is where councils come into their own.

We encourage the DWP to work with us early on as it evolves Kickstart, and urge ministers to consider extending Kickstart to non-Universal Credit claimants (16 to 17-year-olds and older young people, including care leavers). The scheme should also be continued beyond the current cut-off point of December 2021.

Kickstart will work best for young people, businesses, and communities if planned, promoted and delivered in partnership, which is why councils' role is so crucial



An LGA paper, 'Kickstart: what good looks like,' which aims to support local and national discussions on the design, commissioning and delivery of Kickstart, is available at bitly.ws/bLyg





Councillor **Judi Billing** MBE is Deputy Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board and Leadership Lead Member

Bearing the brunt

The impact of the pandemic has not been felt equally by communities or the sexes



What a year it's been since I last reflected on International Women's Day. Few of us could have expected what was to come.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has had vast implications the world over, and touched everyone's lives in some way, it is clear the impact has not been felt equally.

According to recent research, published jointly by the Fawcett Society and others, women make up the majority (77 per cent) of frontline workers in the UK.

Women keyworkers are concentrated in face-to-face roles, such as in education, retail, and health and social care (where black, Asian and minority ethnic women are particularly disproportionately represented) – putting them right at the brunt of the crisis.

A report by the Commons' Women and Inequalities Select Committee also found that women were more likely to be employed in less secure work and, therefore, have experienced greater falls in earnings or hours during the pandemic. In addition, it found evidence that the gap between the number of childcare hours provided by men and women had grown, putting additional pressure on working mothers, especially those juggling employment and the new – and taxing – phenomenon of home schooling.

It is also clear that minority ethnic communities have been impacted disproportionately by the virus, and by loss, during the pandemic. It will be vital that these experiences in our communities are given voice as we move into recovery from the pandemic.

There have been green shoots of opportunity that it will be important not to let dwindle. For instance, the shift to virtual meetings has, in many areas, meant that a broader range of people can engage in civic life and decision-making.

Holding meetings on Zoom may make the council chamber seem less intimidating and may hold standards of

behaviour to greater account – as we have seen recently in the extraordinary interest generated by Jackie Weaver and the Handforth Parish Council.

Additionally, more people have been switched on to the idea of community, and the power of community action. We have seen it in our volunteer hubs up and down the country, and the lengths to which people have gone to deliver food, aid and comfort to vulnerable people in their communities.

It is essential that we harness this energy beyond the pandemic, and keep those engagement levels up in the world into which we emerge.

Women's equality

International Women's Day (8 March) is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women, and is a call to action for accelerating women's equality (see www.internationalwomensday.com, #IWD2021, #ChooseToChallenge).

Councils across the country will be marking the day with online events and activities, and support for community groups and organisations.

For example, Manchester City Council has provided funding for one-off events, but also for buying annual Zoom licences so community groups can continue activities to support women throughout the year.

The LGA's Be a Councillor campaign (see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership/be-councillor) aims to increase the pool of talent from which councillors are elected – a key task for local government given that, after the 2019 local elections, the Fawcett Society reported that women made up just 35 per cent of all councillors in England (up from 32 per cent in 2015).

The LGA's 'Twenty-first Century Councils' toolkit can help councils create the underlying policies, procedures, ethos and environment that encourages and empowers women, parents and carers to become local councillors and take on leadership positions (see www.local.gov.uk/twenty-first-century-councils).

Leading the local recovery

More than 20 local authorities have contributed to a new 'playbook' on economic recovery, commissioned by the LGA



Robert Pollock
is a Director at
Social Finance

Local government has stepped up during the pandemic, demonstrating leadership and resilience, and reviving its critical importance to residents in their time of need.

While we must remain vigilant to control the virus and tackle the widening health and income inequality laid bare by the pandemic, we can begin to look forward to a better future.

So, what role should local government play in the recovery?

Legislation in the 1880s and 1890s set up the basic system of local government we have today, and established councils' core purpose as the improvement of the welfare and wellbeing of their residents and boroughs.

That founding spirit of social and economic place-making and civic leadership has been evident in research commissioned by the LGA that has informed the 'Local economic recovery playbook' – a good practice guide on local economic recovery planning for councils.

The desire to 'build back fairer' – to support growth that is more inclusive and greener – has come through loud and clear from the consultations.

More than 20 English authorities have been involved in the project – cities, towns and rural areas spanning counties, districts and unitaries. The playbook, due out later this month, contains best practice and local examples to help councillors and senior officers navigate the uncertainties ahead.

While many councils have already published recovery plans, we have learnt

that the route ahead through this crisis is not linear. Plans need to be flexible, and adapt to changing circumstances and local and national opportunities as they may arise.

The playbook captures good practice from leading councils and explores the key ingredients to making a good plan and delivering it. Some of the key themes consistently raised by senior local leaders include:

- The critical importance of place-based leadership to develop a shared sense of purpose, bold vision and a framework for action to mobilise local partners and communities.
- Recovery is a marathon not a sprint, so pace yourself, your partners and your plans for the short, medium and long term, with the flexibility to move between these phases.

- Don't reinvent the wheel: back your existing economic strategy and plans if they address local challenges accelerated by COVID-19, but also look out for new economic opportunities and priorities.
- Make use of all the tools, organisations and people in your communities by giving them an active voice in decision-making and governance – in particular the 'leaders' and 'doers' who will make change happen.
- Doing the basics really well, such as distributing grants quickly and communicating regularly, builds trust with partners and communities, as well as a sense of momentum and positive sentiment.

The playbook will give you confidence that you are on the right path and prioritising limited resources to have the greatest impact.

With the Prime Minister having set out a roadmap for lifting lockdown restrictions and the Budget taking place after **first** went to press, now is the ideal time to re-engage partners and revise local recovery plans to put your place in the best position to thrive.

Whatever the challenges and opportunities that emerge, we know that local government leadership will be critical. You will need to translate those policies into practice and develop the plans to build better futures for your communities: you can make it happen.



Robert Pollock will be speaking about the playbook with a panel of local government peers at an LGA webinar on 'Local economic COVID-19 recovery planning' on 25 March. To find

out more and book a place, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events. Social Finance is a not-for-profit organisation that partners with public and social sector organisations to find better ways of tackling social and economic challenges

Recovery is
a marathon
not a sprint, so
pace yourself



Growing back better

The LGA has launched a support hub to help councils drive local economic growth

Councils have a key role in driving economic recovery, and the LGA continues to press the Government to deliver real devolution of economic powers and funding to councils.

We are committed to supporting councils on all aspects of their economic development plans, including employment, re-skilling, high streets, support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), procurement, and business retention.

COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on the country's economy. As part of our sector-led improvement offer, the LGA offers a wide range of support to help councils address the issues of economic recovery.

You can find out more about our

work on economic growth, and access our support hub, at www.local.gov.uk/topics/economic-growth. Please email productivity@local.gov.uk if you would like to share work that your council is undertaking.

Here (see below and right), we hear from lead members about some of the work councils already have in hand to stimulate local economies and promote sustainable growth and regeneration.

Understanding the exact nature of an effective and sustainable stimulus can only be carried out locally. In turn, these decisions can only be taken by empowered local decision-makers who know what resources they can expect for the long term and have the flexibility to use them in a way that makes sense locally.

Virtual high street



Councillor **Paula Ferguson** (Lib Dem) is Cabinet Member for Local Economy at Winchester City Council

The Winchester district has traditionally had a robust and diverse economy, but during the pandemic the council has focused on supporting those sectors affected the most.

We set up an advice hotline, produced regular e-bulletins, provided access to free business support, and quickly distributed £35 million in business grants.

When restrictions eased after the first lockdown, we produced Back to Business packs and posters for retailers, created outdoor seating areas, and ran a successful 'Rediscover What's on Your Doorstep' campaign, driving up footfall. We built confidence with clear messaging and signage, and outdoor hand-

sanitising units, and deployed COVID-19 ambassadors and marshals.

Many of our businesses were quick to embrace digital technology – with virtual tours of attractions, online festivals, and new take-away/delivery services – and we supported this with digital and print media promoting a 'Support Local' message.

Most recently we've teamed up with online specialists Digital Islands to help our high street businesses adapt and innovate. We're now working to create a district-wide virtual high street, so residents can 'shop local' online, supporting the many independent businesses that make our district unique.

There is still plenty of uncertainty, but some changes may be good. The shift to home working will mean many more people will stay local, aiding a green recovery and helping us to reach our 2030 carbon-neutrality target. Winchester has been around since the days of King Alfred, and I'm confident the district will adapt.

Meanwhile in Oxfordshire...



Councillor **Susan Brown** (Lab) is Leader of Oxford City Council

We're working with a local social enterprise on a £1.9 million revitalisation of vacant shops to help us bounce back from COVID-19.

The 'Meanwhile in Oxfordshire...' project will see vacant units in high streets across the county transformed into independent shops, cultural venues, creative studios and co-working space during 2021.

Our aim is to provide affordable premises for 112 organisations, which will create or secure at least 300 jobs.

The project will reduce the number of vacant units in the county's high streets, and enable entrepreneurs to fill them with new and innovative ideas. This will diversify the offer in our city and town centres, and give people more reasons to visit.

Oxford and Oxfordshire are particularly reliant on the visitor economy, so COVID-19 has had a significant impact on our high streets. In Oxford city centre, footfall was down from 3.1 million in 2019 to 1.2 million in 2020.

We're also hoping the project will encourage a more inclusive local economy by providing units at affordable rent, and giving priority to organisations that pay the Oxford Living Wage and take on apprentices.

Oxford City Council designed 'Meanwhile in Oxfordshire...', and secured the funding for it from Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership via the Government's Getting Building Fund.

We've commissioned local social enterprise Makespace to run the project. Makespace has formed a consortium with other local organisations to help them identify, secure, fit out and let dozens of empty units, and the county's other district councils will help find properties and tenants.

Units will be leased from landlords and licenced (at affordable rates) to tenants, and upgraded to meet the needs of the new tenants and reduce carbon emissions. This should make the project an attractive offer for both Oxfordshire's entrepreneurs and landlords.



Bishop's Waltham florist Jenna changed her business model regularly during national restrictions

Building council housing again



Councillor **Dr Ellie Chowns** (Green) is Cabinet Member for Environment, Economy and Skills at Herefordshire Council

In Herefordshire, local economic recovery and resilience are top priorities for our Independent/It's Our County/Green coalition administration.

We have a clear, shared vision – stronger communities, a thriving economy, and an enhanced environment – and we're putting those principles into practice as we 'build back better' from COVID-19 and from flooding.

A central ambition is to start building council housing again; too many families struggle to find affordable homes. But with historically low borrowing costs, there's never been a better time for a council with vision to tackle this market failure.

We plan to build 2,500 affordable, net-zero carbon, high-quality homes for local people over the next 10 years. This will deliver social and environmental benefits, as well as create new jobs – a triple win!

This integrated approach characterises other Herefordshire initiatives. For example, last year, we bought Maylords shopping centre, a key chunk of Hereford city retail space, to help regenerate it using social value principles.

We've used it to help new local businesses set up shop, and to support creative projects that bring new life and footfall to the area.

In the longer term, our community-led Town Investment Plan envisages relocating the library there, alongside new skills training facilities – part of a strategy to rejuvenate the high street through mixed-use development.

It's not all about the city, of course – after all, two-thirds of our population lives in market towns or rural areas. We're helping the market towns draw up their own economic development investment plans, and earmarking £20 million to support job creation outside the city.

Our beautiful countryside is one of our greatest assets, so we've been investing in developing our visitor economy, too. Herefordshire is a 'hidden gem' – so do come and experience our fabulous countryside and fantastic hospitality for yourselves, once lockdown is lifted!

Tenacity and fluid thinking



Councillor **Dawn Melvin** (Con) is Cabinet Member for Economic Recovery and Growth at Gloucester City Council

It has been a rewarding – albeit challenging – 10 months since I became Gloucester City Council's Cabinet Member for Economic Recovery and Growth. I had to hit the ground running, and there are so many facets to reimagining our city, but tenacity and fluid thinking are key.

The most important part of doing anything well is understanding the product and working with its best attributes.

Outer city and online retail started the demise of the high street, so, COVID-19 or not, every area has to reinvent itself now or it won't survive.

I set up an Economic Recovery Task Force. It comprises around 30 representatives from all sectors

– leading people in their own fields who understand challenges and see solutions, not the problem.

We have set an ambitious list of priorities to guide the city out of lockdown and that list is reducing as we start delivery of each goal.

These include:

- developing a skills academy for the creation of apprenticeships and careers within construction and digital industries at our new £110 million regeneration centre
- introducing a youth hub to support jobseekers taking advantage of the Government's Kickstart programme
- actively seeking investors for our empty shops and strengthening support for larger employers.

Economic recovery and growth following COVID-19 will challenge every business, large and small. It won't be overnight, but, together, we will get through this, as we always do in Gloucester.

My trusty friends through it all? Black coffee and 14-hour days!

A positive image

Tackle negative stereotypes of later life with free-to-use photos



For too long, both verbal and visual language have been used to dehumanise older people and depict ageing in a negative light. These attitudes to ageing have been brought sharply to light by the pandemic, with suggestions that older people's lives are 'less valuable' than the young, or that a 'cull' of the elderly could be a good outcome of the crisis.

These are the most extreme examples, but the association of old age with frailty and decline – and the belief that older people are a burden on society – are deeply ingrained in the language we use to talk about age and ageing. And perhaps just as influential as language is the imagery we see, and the ways older people are represented visually in the media.

Stock image websites host a plethora of photos that are, quite frankly, outdated and deeply rooted in harmful stereotypes. They range from one extreme to another: from a glossy image of an affluent older person relaxing on a cruise ship, to a pair of 'wrinkly hands' gripping a walking stick.

This phenomenon isn't new, nor is it limited to image libraries. There's a dearth of realistic photographs on news websites and in magazines when older people are the focus of

the story or advert. Stories that reference older people are often illustrated with images that ignore any of the person's qualities beyond their wrinkles.

✧ When people search for age-related images, they shouldn't be served up lazy stereotypes ✧

There's of course nothing inherently negative about wrinkles or walking sticks – except for the fact that these tropes have become synonymous with older people and reinforce negative stereotypes. Around 3.3 million people in the UK are aged 80 and over with a huge diversity of abilities, interests and backgrounds. And yet, the images we see of older people don't represent that diversity.

Look at the photos in these image libraries and ask yourself how accurately do they represent you or older people you live with, work with or meet in your community? As normal as it is (at least when we are not in lockdown) for people aged 65 and over to be active in communities – whether through

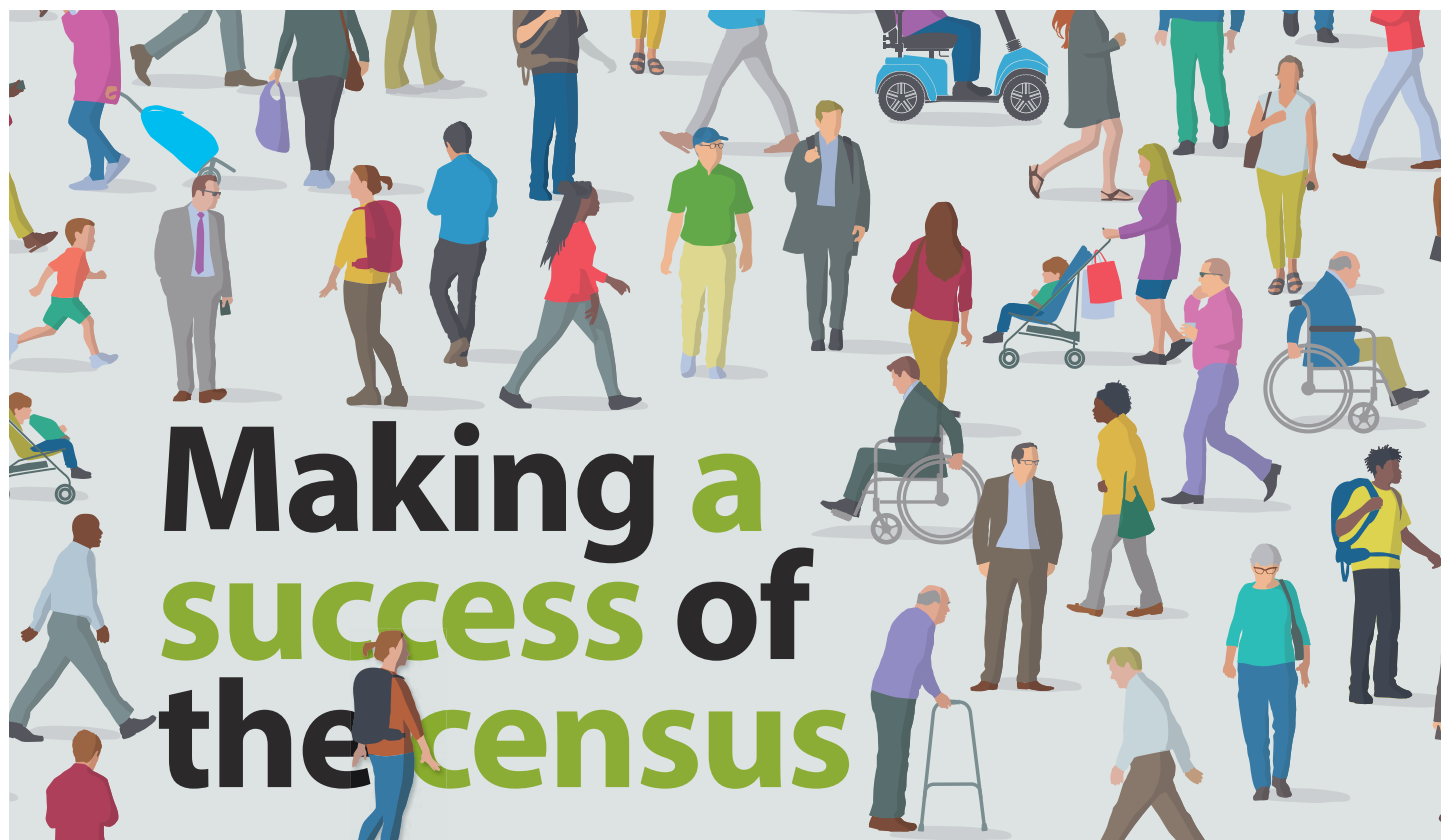
voluntary activity or employment – image libraries seem disinterested in these activities.

When people search for age-related images, they shouldn't be served up lazy stereotypes. They should be able to access a wide range of images that realistically and positively represent the diversity of people in later life; not as a group of people that are defined by their age and society's outdated attitudes.

So we at the Centre for Ageing Better decided to do something about it. We've launched a free image library, containing more than 400 images of older people in a range of settings, showcasing the vibrancy and diversity of later life. We've also put together a simple guide that lays out some basic tips to consider when commissioning work or capturing photographs, so that other organisations can follow suit.

With more of us set to live for much longer than previous generations, it's time we tackled our negative view of ageing. Simple steps – like thinking more carefully about the images we use – will play a huge part in this shift.

i To find out more or to download your first images visit bit.ly/age-library



Councils can help ensure the 2021 census gives a clear picture of local communities



Councillor **Peter Fleming** OBE is Chairman of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board

Although some authorities have expressed concern that the census is taking place this year, the Office for National Statistics has confirmed that it will proceed, so it is even more important that we help our residents to take part safely.

It's also never been more important to get a clear picture of what local communities need, and the census is a crucial part of this. Census information will offer tangible benefits for your own community and council.

The process for members of the public is very straightforward. Before Census Day, on 21 March, everyone will receive a letter through the post with an access code for the online questionnaire. People will then be asked to respond to a series of questions about themselves and their household.

We should all stay up to date on census activities in our areas, and get

familiar with the resources for local authorities at www.census.gov.uk/downloadable-resources. There is also a guide for councillors at bit.ly/3bFtmyr.

We can find out who are the census liaison manager (CLM) and assistant census liaison manager (ACLM) in our council, and contact them to see how we can support their plans.

There's even more we can do beyond that. As trusted local figures, our positivity about the census will make a big difference.

When residents come to us with questions, we can let them know that the census is legitimate and important. We can offer reassurance, for example, that people's personal information will be kept safe, or that census staff who knock on their door will show an ID badge.

We can follow the census on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook – the handles are [@Census2021](https://twitter.com/Census2021) and [@Cyfrifrad2021](https://twitter.com/Cyfrifrad2021). Sharing posts on our own channels will get them seen more widely.

Though the COVID-19 situation presents challenges, people can take part in the census safely and easily by filling in the questionnaire online or ordering a paper form by post. Census 2021 is designed to make sure that the public and field staff stay safe – for

example, no census staff will enter anyone's home.

We can also let people know they'll be free to choose the way they identify on the census questionnaire. For questions such as those about ethnicity and religion, people are encouraged to complete the questionnaire how they feel best represents them.

Most people will be able to fill in the online questionnaire themselves, while others will need extra help. Here, too, our role is very important, as we can help signpost our communities to the wide range of support that's available.

The census's free contact centre – offering help over the phone, as well as via webchat, text message and more – opened on 1 March, and telephone and other contact details are available at www.census.gov.uk.

Staff from the Office for National Statistics will be working in our communities to make sure that everybody can take part. Language support will include a translation helpline, and guidance booklets in up to 49 languages. Support will be provided in accessible formats, including braille, large print and Easy Read.

We've all got a part to play in boosting response rates and making sure our communities are fully engaged. The message we need to help spread is that the census is for everyone.

LGA/ADPH Annual Public Health Conference 2021: Rising to the Challenge

23-24 March 2021

This series of virtual webinars will look at how local and national systems rose to the challenges of 2020 and how to support our communities to emerge and recover from the impacts of the pandemic. Sessions will explore: the future of the public health system, the new National Institute for Health Protection, public opinion on public health, and tackling health inequalities.

Confirmed speakers: **Professor Chris Whitty**, Chief Medical Officer for England; **Baroness Dido Harding**, Interim Chair, National Institute for Health Protection; **Ben Page**, Chief Executive Officer, Ipsos MORI; **Professor Linda Bauld**, Professor of Public Health and Co-Director, Usher Institute, Edinburgh University; **Professor Kevin Fenton**, Regional Director for London, Public Health England; **Professor Maggie Rae**, President, Faculty of Public Health; **Joanne Roney OBE**, Chief Executive, Manchester City Council; **Jo Bibby**, Director of Health, the Health Foundation

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



COMMENT



Mike Trace is Chief Executive Officer of the Forward Trust, and a former government drug czar

The end of austerity for addiction services?

For decades, local authorities have held lead responsibility for commissioning services to provide care and recovery for people struggling with drug or alcohol addiction.

Since 2012, these services have primarily been funded from the public health grant, which has suffered from government cuts through the austerity years.

Most council services have, therefore, been struggling through a decade of increasing demand and risks, with decreasing resources – estimates range from 20 to 40 per cent cuts since 2012.

Drug and alcohol treatments are a classic 'cross-cutting' investment. Effective measures to engage, protect, motivate, and support people struggling with addictions to turn their lives around produce benefits across many sectors – health improvement, crime reduction, improving mental health, and reducing homelessness and unemployment.

Numerous studies have shown that this is a positive 'spend to save' investment that should be planned jointly by local authorities, the NHS, police, probation, and employment services.

In reality, however, commissioners and providers in this sector have been on the defensive in recent times – struggling with reducing budgets while coping with an ageing population of high need, primarily heroin-using clients, who require increasing levels of healthcare and who are dying in greater numbers.

Meanwhile, new and younger cohorts of people in need – struggling with alcohol

problems, cocaine or new synthetic drugs – are not getting sufficient access to support.

There are some signs of light at the end of the tunnel. Central government has appointed Dame Carol Black to review the sector and make recommendations for its regeneration. Her 'Review of drugs: phase one report' was an excellent analysis of the challenges and priorities for action.

The stage 2 report is due out in April, and is likely to call for consistent and ring-fenced rises in funding allocations, allied with much closer policy attention and accountability for delivering outcomes.

New funds are starting to flow for the financial year 2021/22. Allocations have been made to local areas to enhance the drug and alcohol support offered to homeless people, released prisoners and probation clients, and Public Health England is due to announce the details of an £80 million single-year allocation to local authorities, dedicated to improving treatment services.

These allocations, while welcome and significant, are for one year only, and come

with a challenge to council leaders – to show they can spend them wisely on meaningful service enhancements, with outcomes demonstrated more clearly than in the past.

Time is short, therefore, for local authorities to ensure that these single-year allocations are well planned and spent, and deliver real benefits in terms of better health, reduced crime, and increased rates of recovery.

HM Treasury will be seeking clear signs of re-energised joint commissioning structures at local level, and realistic plans for measuring and reporting on outcomes, when it makes spending review decisions at the end of the year.

My advice to any council leader would be to pull together your local stakeholders to start work urgently on revised strategies that explicitly offer a route to better service coverage and outcomes, ensuring that currently available resources are directed where they are most needed.

That will give confidence for a more generous spending review outcome for the next three years.



i For further information on the Black Review or spending plans, please contact mike.trace@forwardtrust.org.uk. **The Forward Trust is a charity that helps people with drug and alcohol dependence. The first part of Dame Carol Black's independent review of drugs** is available at www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-drugs-phase-one-report

Certainty and resources to plan ahead



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

The final local government finance settlement for 2021/22, which was laid before Parliament in February, confirmed that councils will receive a share of £51.3 billion in funding (a 4.6 per cent increase in cash terms).

This includes an additional £300 million non-ringfenced grant for adult and children's social care.

This is good news for councils as it provides us with some certainty and resources to plan ahead in these unprecedented times.

It also demonstrates that our frequent and constructive engagement with ministers is paying off – the Government is listening to our concerns. They recognise

the important role councils have played during this pandemic and are providing the crucial local services that people rely on every day.

However, as a former Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, who has been advocating for a sustainable funding solution for social care, I would like to see my Government provide a long-term reform and funding settlement for a social care system which is currently under severe pressure.

This year, the settlement clearly has been defined by the COVID-19 pandemic. I was pleased to hear that the Secretary of State, Robert Jenrick MP, has provided a further £1.55 billion of additional support for local authorities to deal with the pandemic and lead the recovery in their local areas.

This represents a lobbying 'win' for the LGA as we have been asking the Government to help councils meet COVID-19 cost pressures.

Many councils have also welcomed the

continuation of the New Homes Bonus scheme for another year, backed by £622 million of funding. The Government has launched a consultation on reforms to the scheme, which will help to develop a more effective way of incentivising housing growth and provide increased assurance over the coming years of this income stream.

This consultation will run for eight weeks and the deadline is 7 April. If you have not already submitted your comments, I would like to encourage you to take the time and share your views and ideas. To read more, please visit www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-future-of-the-new-homes-bonus-consultation

“Our frequent and constructive engagement with ministers is paying off – the Government is listening to our concerns”



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

Building communities

The Government has an ambitious target of building 300,000 homes a year. While these homes are much needed in many areas, the fundamental importance of building communities is often forgotten.

From the post-war building boom that saw council estates and whole communities transferred out of city areas to more recent large new estates, for too long too little thought has gone into creating communities.

This awful pandemic has been traumatic. As we come through it, we have a real opportunity to build a better, fairer country led by local communities.

This should see powers around the planning and creating of places handed to local areas. Decisions should be made by the people who live there so that they can engage with and invest in their own neighbourhood

COVID-19 will have brought about rapid



societal change, transforming people's attitudes, behaviour and aspirations. They will have appreciated their local areas more, having spent more time there.

Some may recognise the need for more space within the home and nearby, such as places to exercise or for their children to play. For others it will be having people around to support each other – not just the vulnerable but also families needing childcare.

Or it could be being closer to services such as doctors, schools, shops and parks, and not being dependent on public transport or cars. Replacing some of those

vacant offices and retail units will help support urban regeneration and minimise the need to build on greenfield sites.

We now have an opportunity to improve how we approach place making, while at the same time capitalising on the huge health and environmental benefits that this will offer.

Government policy should recognise this. While there is a role for some national strategic thinking, we need to devolve planning and delivery of places – alongside all the other key aspects of places, such as education, skills, employment, health, environment, transport and sustainability.

It is at a local level that great places can be built, driven by local communities working together with their councils.



You can read a longer version of this article at www.local.gov.uk/first



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

Allowing local partnerships to lead

Have we ever owed a bigger debt of thanks to the NHS than we do today?

The last year has been the greatest challenge it has faced since it was created by Labour in 1948. Not only have NHS staff worked heroically to save lives, but the NHS is rightfully being lauded for the success of its vaccinations programme.

Thank you to every nurse, doctor, and community volunteer who is playing their part – and to the many local authority workers who are also contributing.

From Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's network of community leaders working to increase vaccine uptake among minority ethnic communities, to Kirklees Council's brilliant offer of free transport to get vulnerable patients to vaccination clinics, local government has also played a strong role.

"The success of the vaccination programme lies in the way local partnerships have finally been given the chance to work together"

In fact, the success of the vaccination programme lies in the way local partnerships have finally been given the chance to work together and to lead: they understand and can communicate with their communities better than Whitehall could.

If only this model had been used for the delivery of Test and Trace, or the earlier shielding effort.

But there is still a long way to go and as we near a million people fully vaccinated, we must remain vigilant, follow social distancing rules and, most importantly, take the vaccine when offered it.

We all have a role to play in protecting our communities and returning to normality – there is a light at the end of the tunnel but we're not there yet.



Councillor **Howard Sykes** MBE is Leader of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group

Election campaigning in a pandemic

The intervention of Constitution and Devolution Minister Chloe Smith in January, about the local elections and the issues of campaigning and delivering of leaflets, was a major concern to me and one that made no sense at all.

It performed the interesting trick of both ruling the local elections can go ahead – but at the same time restricting the ability of potential

"Government advice is incredibly muddled"

candidates to campaign, with the advice that volunteer deliverers should not deliver leaflets.

This is something a banana republic would be proud of.

The government advice was incredibly muddled, as it allowed political parties to pay private firms to deliver leaflets but did not let volunteers do so.

This week alone, I have received three takeaway leaflets, an estate agent leaflet, as well as flyers about car and carpet cleaning. It's a joke and an affront to democracy!

Despite pleas by me and others, the Government has yet to publish the research that shows that delivering leaflets voluntarily carries a higher risk than those delivered commercially.

So we were delighted to hear, as **first** was going to press, that the Cabinet Office has published new guidance allowing campaigners to deliver leaflets and canvass electors from 8 March, subject to strict covid-safety procedures including social distancing, hand washing and mask wearing.

I am pleased the Liberal Democrats have already provided advice to councillors and their volunteers allowing them to keep in touch with the residents they serve (get delivering!).

And in other good news, our lobbying to reduce the number of signatures we need for candidates to be nominated has been successful, with statutory instruments laid by the minister.



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

Taking a local approach

Friends, this is my last column ahead of the local elections and our group elections that follow.

The light at the end of this pandemic tunnel is in sight as the Government moves to lift the toughest 'command and control' measures we have seen since World War Two.

The centralised approach has ranged from daily appearances on TV giving us the latest count of casualties to central contracts to deliver personal protective equipment (PPE). Councils have helped deliver food to our residents, succour to our businesses and support to orderly lines of more than 17 million people queuing for vaccinations.

"We are asking ministers not to stand in the way of fair, covid-safe campaigning"

Is there developing a more centralised approach with reorganisation of councils, and sweeping changes to planning, health and funding? I hope not.

As Spring and the May local elections arrive together, let's create a more positive local approach, keeping the independence of our local government, led by you who will serve your residents well.

If candidates are only elected from the big national parties, they may struggle to stand up independently thereafter.

That's why colleagues and I have written to the Government asking ministers not to stand in the way of fair, covid-safe campaigning.

The vital information and connections made during campaigning are the foundation for residents to work with their councillor over the following years, creating a sound recovery in a green, safe environment.

Independents do a tremendous job of listening and representing people over politics and I wish everyone standing good luck in the elections ahead.

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

Be nice to your noggin!



Councillor
Damian White
(Con) is Leader of
Havering Council

The COVID-19 pandemic has been incredibly difficult for us all. The social isolation and uncertainty has left many people expressing concerns over their mental health, such as increased anxiety, depression and loneliness.

Havering residents have a wealth of mental health support and advice available to them, but we found that people were unsure where, or to whom, to turn.

So, we decided to launch our own mental health campaign that specifically targeted residents, local



business owners, carers and frontline workers, to signpost to those needing support the help our borough has to offer.

The #BeNiceToYourNoggin campaign uses a series of characters, created by local illustrator Richard Darani, to speak directly to residents about a range of concerns, such as financial worries, grief and loneliness.

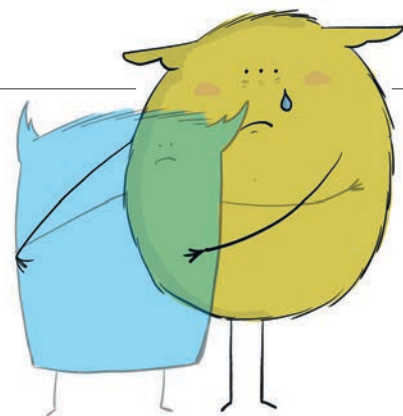
We have a dedicated page for the campaign on our council website, with 16 sections to ensure that, whatever the visitor's concern may be, they can easily find the advice and support they need.

As well as sharing the campaign via our social media channels, we lead and take part in various engagement sessions to speak directly with our communities, including young people and local business owners.

This has given us a valuable insight into the needs of our borough, which also helps keep the campaign current and relevant to our residents.

The response to the campaign has been phenomenal, with almost 2,000 residents accessing the campaign webpage since it launched in January.

Havering MIND, with which we have worked closely on the campaign, has reported a 51 per cent increase in calls from



© RICHARD DARANI

local people seeking support through #BeNiceToYourNoggin.

This is a clear indication of why #BeNiceToYourNoggin and having open conversations about mental health are so important.

I'm immensely proud of how Havering Council has helped residents during this pandemic – from financial support to buy food and heat homes, to providing free school meals and supporting our struggling businesses.

#BeNiceToYourNoggin is our latest initiative to continue to support our community through this immensely challenging time.



Find the #BeNiceToYourNoggin webpage at www.havering.gov.uk/benicketoyournoggin



first is the LGA's monthly membership magazine for our councillors and local authority chief executives in England and Wales

We want to know **what you think** of
the magazine – and its **sister**
website and **e-bulletin** – so we
can continue to **improve first**
to meet **your needs.**

So please take a moment to complete our first readership survey at www.local.gov.uk/first or by scanning the QR code below on your mobile phone. If you are a councillor, we will also send you a personal email inviting you to complete the survey.

If you have any queries regarding the survey, please email helen.wilkinson@local.gov.uk or karen.thornton@local.gov.uk





Councillor **Ernest Gibson** is Chairman of the LGA's Coastal Special Interest Group

Turning the tide for coastal communities



The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and worsened the socio-economic problems that uniquely affect our coastal communities.

On top of this, coastal communities are at the sharp end of climate change, with homes, businesses, infrastructure and, most importantly, lives increasingly at risk.

I have seen these issues first hand in my ward, and have been working hard for my community for more than 20 years.

When I joined the LGA Coastal Special Interest Group (SIG), as representative for South Tyneside Council in 2008, I realised how widespread these issues were, and the immense value that membership of the SIG brings.

I now had access to national experience and expertise on the problems I was facing locally, as well as a means of raising local issues upwards to central government with the collective power of a united coastal voice.

The LGA Coastal SIG is a well-established group concerned with coastal issues. We have a cross-party membership of 56 coastal local authorities from all around England and, together, we cover nearly 60 per cent of England's coastline.

When I was elected Chairman of the SIG in 2019, my ambition was to mobilise our membership – elected members and

our expert officers – to work together for the communities that we serve.

Over the past 16 months, I have done so, appointing member champions for our key policy areas and establishing expert working groups that innovate practical and policy solutions to widespread problems, including beach and water safety, coastal erosion and flooding, coastal landfills, and bathing-water quality.

*✧ We will be working to ensure **the levelling up agenda** is delivered at the coast ✧*

These groups are open to all our members.

In 2021, the LGA Coastal SIG is moving forwards with an ambitious plan to drive change with our communities.

I am pleased to announce that we have been appointed as co-Secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Coastal Communities. We will be

working with this cross-party group of coastal MPs to ensure the Government's levelling up agenda is delivered at the coast, and that we build back better after the pandemic.

Together with our partners, we will be leading an inquiry for this APPG, bringing together experts and local voices to recommend the policy solutions needed to deliver a resilient future for coastal communities.

We will be planning this inquiry over the coming months, starting with a dedicated discussion at our next quarterly meeting of the SIG, on 25 March 2021, to be held on Zoom. Non-member councils are invited to join us for this session on a one-time-only invitation.

In 2021, we have an historic opportunity to turn the tide for our coastal communities, and the LGA Coastal SIG is leading the way. We have written to the Prime Minister calling for the appointment of a dedicated minister for coastal communities and are fighting for ring-fenced recovery funding for the coast.

Without action, coastal communities stand to fall further behind, and the need for a united coastal voice is stronger than ever before. All councils are welcome to join us, and membership currently costs less than £1 a day.

i **For more information on joining the LGA Coastal SIG or attending the open discussion on 25 March,** contact lgacoastalsig@southtyneside.gov.uk. Follow the LGA Coastal SIG on Twitter @LGACoastalSIG



Bryony Harrington is
Head of the Right to
Build Task Force

Making custom and self-build part of your housing strategy

This is the year self-build and custom house building will scale up.

Government remains firmly committed to the Right to Build, announcing a review of the legislation and a Help to Build loan scheme, and updating the planning practice guidance.

At the Right to Build Task Force, we facilitate this process by advising local authorities to build capacity for custom and self-build (CSB).

Our key priority is providing free 'Introduction to the Right to Build' sessions to local authorities, funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

These webinars showcase a range of approaches and, to date, our experts have conducted sessions with councils working under different pressures, from rural to urban situations.

For example, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council is developing draft policies for its local plan update. In January, the task force ran a workshop for council

members, tailored to those working on policy direction, informing them about planning policy mechanisms and legislative requirements.

This gave members insight into the opportunities for CSB, a discussion on the issues around the delivery of plots and how these could be secured through planning policies.

Cllr Mark Ruffell, Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Natural Environment, said: "Custom and self-build housing plays an important role in meeting the borough's housing needs. The session helped us get to grips with the different ways that custom and self-build plots could be delivered, and helped shape our new policy approaches."

In contrast, the London Borough of Tower Hamlet's workshop highlighted urban design issues and offered insight into the potential of infill and regeneration schemes to be delivered by CSB and collective self-build.

Cllr Eve McQuillan, Cabinet Member for

Planning and Social Inclusion – Lead on Planning, said: "With Tower Hamlets Council committed to custom and self-build housing, and in the process of implementing an affordable self-build programme, this workshop was helpful in highlighting the importance of the sector, giving examples of recent projects and signposting to where further information was available."

"It was appreciated that the designer leading the workshop was well prepared, with local knowledge used to help focus the session."

The introductory sessions help publicise good practice examples, especially those tailored by councils to meet local needs.

In 2020, COVID-19 brought these sessions online, which made them more effective, as it enabled more people to join. Reaching a range of council stakeholders, including councillors and housing and planning teams, is important to our mission. This reduces siloed working, supports authorities with their statutory duties, and ensures CSB sits within wider housing strategies.

This good practice can embrace a range of solutions, including plan making and policy to bring on plots – either on public land or as a portion of large/strategic sites, or through affordable exceptions.

Councils also promote CSB through policy guidance and by supporting collective/community self-build.

For more detailed support, the task force operates as a consultancy, advising councils about tasks such as writing supplementary planning documents, pilot projects, and assessing demand. To support this, its 'Planning guidance for custom and self-build' and advisory notes are free to access via the website.



To find out more, or apply for support, visit the Right to Build Task Force at www.righttobuild.org.uk



Reaching a range of council stakeholders is important

COUNCILLOR



Follow the money

Every council requires money to finance the resources it needs to provide local public services. So, every councillor should take an interest in the way their council is funded and the financial decisions the council takes.

The legislation makes it clear that every councillor is responsible for the financial control and decision-making at their council. It gives a responsibility to every local authority to “make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs”.

The Local Government Act 2000 also requires the full council to approve the council’s budget and council tax demand.

It is an important part of your role as an effective community leader and advocate to consider the council’s finance and funding as a central part of all decision-making, and to ensure that the council provides value for money, or best value, in all its services.

As there is unlikely to be sufficient money to do everything the council would wish to provide, because of funding gaps, councillors need to consider their priorities and objectives, and ensure that these drive the budget

process. They should also consider how efficient the council is in providing services and obtaining the appropriate outcomes for all its services

Those serving on the executive have a responsibility to consider their service portfolio in the light of its budget position.

Councillors serving on overview and scrutiny also have an important role in reviewing the council’s finances regularly, and in considering the proposed annual budget.

In addition, every councillor will be concerned to ensure that services are delivered effectively in their local ward.

However, while councillors have an important role to play in the budget-setting process, it is recognised that they may not be financial experts.

Consequently, as part of its sector-led improvement offer, the LGA has produced a new e-learning module to assist you with this important aspect of your councillor role. This complements the recently updated workbook, ‘A councillor’s workbook on local government finance’.

This will provide you with the tools to better understand the budget-setting process, the strategic and vision-setting objectives of finance in a local authority, and demystify some of the commonly used terms and principles of local government finance.

New e-learning platform for councillors

Over the past year, as the LGA has delivered more of what we do online, we have recognised that our e-learning platform needs to offer a better learning experience for councillors.

As part of our enhanced programme of political leadership support – both during the pandemic and for the post-pandemic council landscape – we have added to our range of online learning modules, and will continue to do so to be responsive to the needs of local councillors.

We now have a new platform, which is easier to use and can be better customised to your needs, with easier-to-read text and improved graphics.

The platform – **lga.kallidus-suite.com/external** – is a place where councillors can enhance their knowledge and expertise, and ensure they have access to online leadership tools particularly relevant to supporting their vital community leadership role.

If you are already a user of our current e-learning provision, you can re-register using your **.gov.uk** email address. If you are not currently registered, please email **elearning@local.gov.uk**



See www.local.gov.uk/councillors-workbook-local-government-finance

ELECTIONS

A test of endurance



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



It is nearly half a century since the last wholesale review of English local government in 1973 created a pattern of county and constituent district councils. Much has happened since then, of course.

The two-tier system was first breached in 1986 when Margaret Thatcher abolished metropolitan counties. Subsequently, the number of unitary councils has sharply increased with many districts being reorganised out of existence.

Dorset shrunk from eight councils to just two in 2019. This year, there are elections for all-purpose authorities in Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire and a reduction of 10 in the number of councils covering those areas.

In 1973, there were 410 local authorities in England; there are now 333. Over the same period, the number of councillors, affected by both this and re-warding, is down by more than a fifth to barely 17,000.

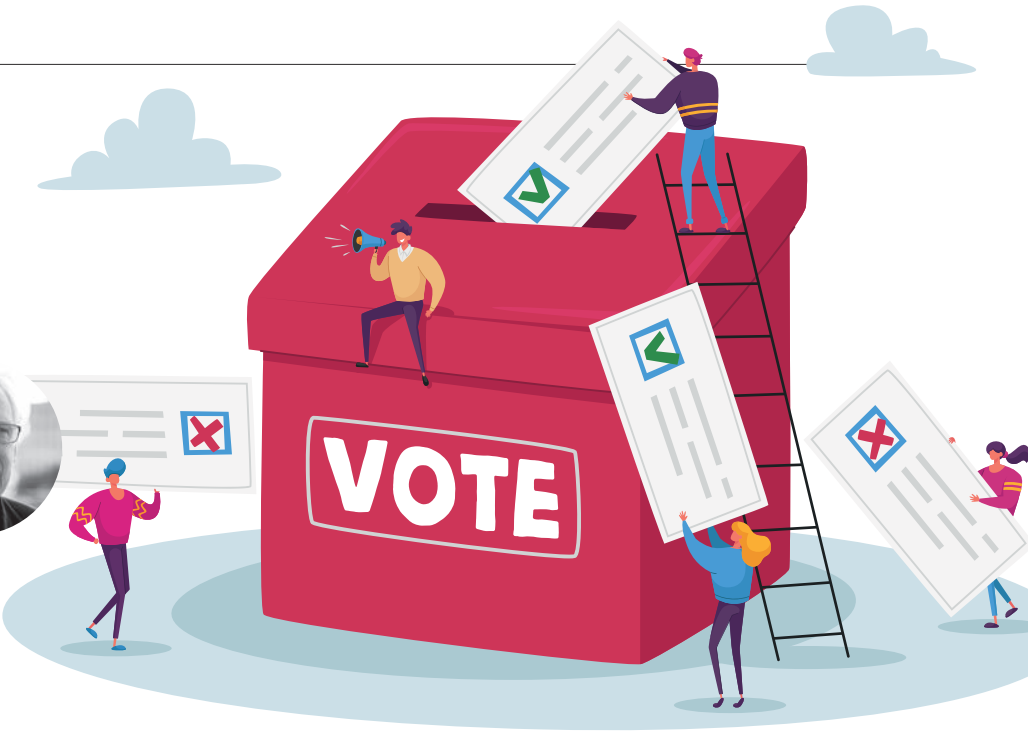
And further mergers remain on the cards including in Cumbria and Lancashire, east and north Yorkshire, and Warwickshire.

But in the midst of change there are electoral wards and divisions whose boundaries have not altered throughout the period.

There are fewer than 200 of them in total and, by definition, they are less likely to have seen dramatic population growth or housing development and are often places in relative geographic isolation.

What they do offer, though, is a fascinating micro-level insight into how local politics can change as a result of demography, campaigning, or salient local issues.

West Thornton ward in Croydon for example – one of two in the borough and only three in the whole of London to be



unchanged since 1964 – began as fairly marginal but leaning to the Conservatives. Labour won it briefly in the 1970s, but since its 1986 victory has built support to the point where it attracted no less than 75 per cent of the vote in 2018.

The Handside ward of Welwyn Hatfield was a Conservative banker for a decade, but in the 1980s the Labour vote shrank and that for the Liberal Democrats rose – propelling them initially to second place before winning for the first time in 1986. Since then, the battle has swung between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats with Labour nowhere.

The Conservatives had won Castle Bromwich ward in Solihull on 33 consecutive occasions and usually by a country mile. In both 2018 and 2019, however, the Greens came from nowhere to record decisive victories.

There was great media excitement

in 2012 when Labour gained Chipping Norton (part of Prime Minister David Cameron's Witney constituency) from the Conservatives. In truth though, Labour councillors had been elected for the ward at 16 out of 26 contests since 1973, and the Conservatives had not won there at all until 2000.

Several of these enduring wards will be going to the polls again in May when they will be joined by seven county divisions whose boundaries have remained unaltered since 1981.

In all, more than 4,500 councillors across 143 local authorities will be chosen following the unprecedented peacetime rollover of last year's due elections.

In the next two editions of **first**, we will offer a comprehensive analysis of the differing contexts against which they are taking place and argue why the results may be difficult to interpret.

May local elections

Party positions, mainly from 2016*					
Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	Ind	Other
894	1,263	311	44	59	91

*accounting for boundary changes but not casual vacancies/defections

Postponed from 2020 – 2,662 seats in 115 local authorities, mostly for a third of the council

Party positions, from 2017*					
Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	Ind	Other
1,176	367	259	16	132	20

*accounting for boundary changes but not casual vacancies/defections

Due in 2021 – 1,970 seats for the entire council in 28 local authorities

LETTERS

Planning for people with disabilities

I read with interest the article in **first** 655 ('Disability provides insights into council services') and feel there is still a lot more to do to help disabled people.

My partner became disabled eight years ago when he lost a leg. He also has rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis, and is vision and hearing impaired.

As an able-bodied person, I did not realise what disabled people had to put up with, especially if you are pushing them in different places and the issues you come across.

I think planning is the place to start. I know there are 'houses for life' but a disabled person needs a bungalow, and all private builders should be made to build bungalows on new developments, even if it's just a couple.

We could not do without ours. The amount of people who have asked me for a bungalow, whether in good health or not, is incredible.

Our village has had six applications all passed except one, which is up for appeal. The only development that has got a bungalow is social housing.

Some of the pavements on these new estates are too narrow for wheelchairs. Everything is for profit. We should plan for the future, learn from our mistakes, and make builders do all that is needed in our communities. They will still be in profit anyway.

I want government and councils to listen to communities, because the mistakes that have been made on all our new private developments are incredible. Private builders seem to be given the go-ahead come what may and do what they like. This impacts on disabled people and residents who already live there.

Cllr Cindy Hinds (Lab), Flintshire County Council



Advice for whips

I am a Conservative councillor and became group whip in 2019.

When assuming this role, I found that advice is thin on the ground, if you are lucky enough to find any. I have contacted county councillor group whips and the Conservative Councillors' Association and come up with almost nothing.

I am now thinking of putting

together a cross-party guide for whips, unless **first** readers can point me in the direction of one that already exists. If you have some 'top tips and advice' for group whips, please email me at cllrpschwie@braintree.gov.uk.

Cllr Peter Schwier (Con), Braintree District Council



Support for older residents

East Suffolk Council put together 2,000 EAST bags to give to our older residents who might be feeling lonely and isolated – a reminder they are not forgotten.

The EAST bag (Everyone Active, Supported Together) is a reusable jute bag funded by the East Suffolk Community Partnership Board and Ipswich and East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group.

In the bags are items that enabled recipients to stay active, both physically and mentally, during the winter months. These included resistance bands and exercise cards, a water bottle, hand warmer, recipe cards, freezer boxes, a puzzle book and some seeds to plant when the weather improves.

As an extra treat, the bags also included soft drinks and chutney, kindly donated by Adnams brewery, tea bags and biscuits.

Through good neighbours' schemes and parish and town councils across the district, we have delivered more than 2,000 bags to our residents, all of which have been well received.

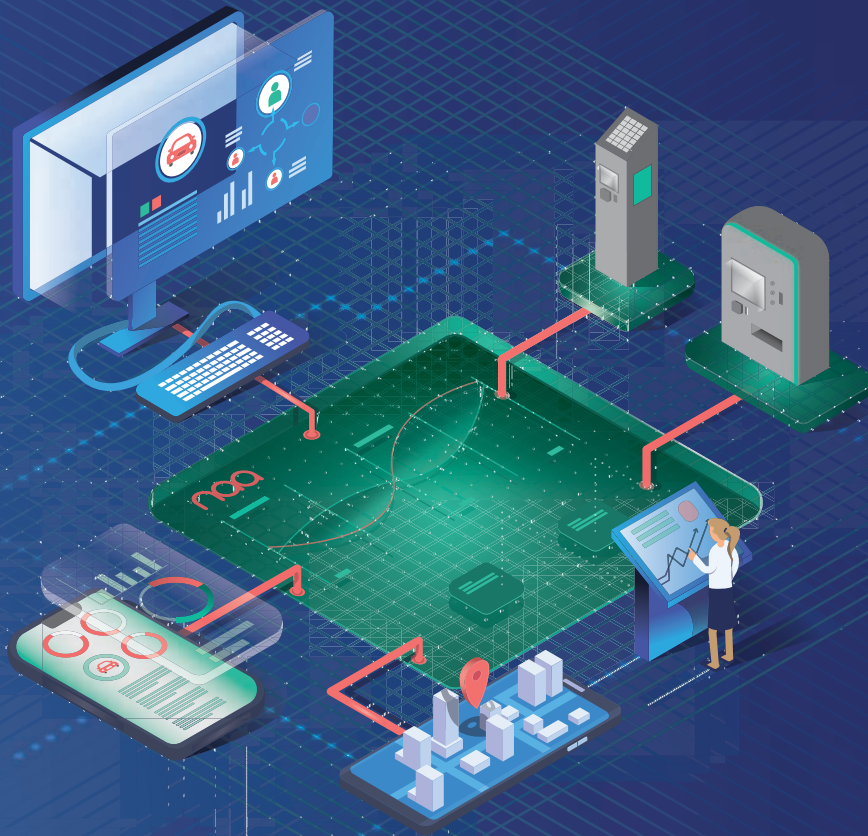
In these difficult times, it's always important to look after each other and a cheery hello and smile always lifts the spirits. Cllr Steve Gallant, as Leader of East Suffolk Council, has always stated we must put people first.

Ultimately, the reason we all stand as councillors and enter local government is to improve people's lives. The EAST bags initiative cuts out applications and bureaucracy and focuses resources directly on residents and communities.

Cllr James Mallinder (Con), Cabinet Member for the Environment, East Suffolk Council

? If you have a letter for **first**, please email karen.thornton@local.gov.uk. Letters may be edited and published online

CALLING ALL FUTURE THINKERS



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Evolution is happening, will you be a part of it?