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Guidance for new councillors



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Welcome

This guide, produced by the Local Government Association (LGA), is designed to provide you with the key information you need to know as a new councillor and is a useful addition to the support and guidance you will receive from your own council. It explores some of the main issues and challenges facing local government today and includes hints and tips from experienced councillors.

Whether you have a few hours to spare or just 10 minutes, you will find helpful information here about the areas in which you may become involved. You can find lots of further information on our website: www.local.gov.uk



Lord Porter of Spalding CBE
LGA Chairman



Councillor Nick Forbes
Labour Group Leader and LGA Senior Vice-Chairman



Councillor David Simmonds CBE
Conservative Group Leader and LGA Vice-Chairman



Councillor Howard Sykes MBE
Liberal Democrat Group Leader and LGA Vice-Chairman



Councillor Marianne Overton MBE
Independent Group Leader and LGA Vice-Chairman



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From the Chairman

As Chairman of the LGA, it is my pleasure to congratulate you on being elected as a councillor and to welcome you to the local government family. For many of you, this will be your first time in elected office and this honour will give you a completely new perspective on how vital councils are in improving the lives of those in our communities.

As you will all be aware, and I'm sure as you settle into your new role you will increasingly come to understand, local government is facing unprecedented challenges. There is less money in the pot but demands for services our residents rely on are increasing. Despite this, it's also an exciting time to play your part in the most trusted part of the public sector. At its best, local government provides the strong and ambitious leadership that ensures the nation remains fit and well, economically resilient and continues to thrive.

As elected representatives on the frontline, we are accountable at the ballot-box to residents who rely on

the 1,300 different statutory duties and responsibilities councils provide. Community care for the elderly and disabled, housebuilding, education, maintenance of green spaces, road repair, recycling, street lights, the list goes on. The day-to-day life of a citizen is directly impacted by what we achieve as councillors.

Rest assured that the LGA continues to work hard with councils across the country, as well as making the case to central government, to make sure local authorities can continue to deliver the best possible public services. Being a politically led organisation gives the LGA credibility to represent you on the national, and increasingly international, stage. On your behalf, we engage with MPs and Peers in Westminster, Secretaries and Ministers of State and their officials, and representatives at the EU. As a councillor, you are able to get involved in this work, to help shape the landscape of local government for the future.

The LGA is also a resource to help you carry out the role to the best of your ability. This guide outlines just some of the services that we provide.

With over 400 councils in membership across England and Wales, the LGA provides a vast network to share best practice and help support you in your work.

I wish you the best of luck in your term in office, and hope to see you soon.

Lord Porter of Spalding CBE
Chairman of the LGA



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Welcome to the LGA

The national voice of local government

The LGA works with councils in England and Wales to support, promote and improve local government. As a councillor you will automatically have access to the full range of services that we provide.

We are politically led and cross-party, working with and on behalf of councils to give local government a strong, credible voice at national level. Having one politically-led membership body gives local government the capacity to:

- pick up emerging government thinking and ensure that local government’s views are heard at the heart of government
- think ahead to shape and develop the policies that councils need
- work with public, private, community and voluntary organisations to secure their support for local authorities’ priorities and their understanding of our perspectives

- ensure that the right issues are raised with the right people at the right time, increasing their chance of resolution
- speak with one voice to the public through the national media
- take responsibility for driving innovation and improvement across local government.

Support for councils

The current financial challenges mean that finding new and innovative ways to improve effectiveness, increase efficiency and reduce costs is more important than ever. The LGA facilitates the sharing of ideas and best practice, helping councils build capacity to support one another. During 2017, 115 councils received a free ‘peer challenge’ to support them to improve, while 1,412 councillors and 3,145 officers attended one of our 100-plus free and subsidised events. This approach, helping to coordinate improvement work on behalf of councils, has helped them to deliver millions of pounds of savings.

You can find out more about our support offer for councils on our website: www.local.gov.uk/our-support

Campaigning on your behalf

One of the LGA’s key roles is to lobby and campaign on behalf of our members on issues that councils have identified as priorities.

In the past year, we have focussed on the areas councils tell us are most important – funding, social care, housing, devolution and keeping local government central to the Brexit negotiations.

Funding is top of the agenda and we continue to call for the funding and powers councils and councillors need to best serve their communities and for the flexibility to raise more funds locally. Against the backdrop of reductions in public sector funding, our work behind the scenes, and our collective legal actions on your behalf, have delivered some important wins for our sector, prevented additional burdens being placed on councils and secured funding that would not otherwise have been passed to local level.



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Our continued calls for fundamental reform of the way that adult social care is funded have secured Government commitment to publish a Green Paper by the summer of 2018. It is a step in the right direction but we will continue to campaign hard on the issue and to represent councils' interests at every opportunity.

Our 2017 Annual Conference in Birmingham saw the launch of **'Growing Places'**, showing how local government stands ready to meet the challenges of a changing world and the resources and shifts in thinking needed to make that happen. Housing and homelessness are major strands of Growing Places and the Government has responded to our calls, announcing additional funding and flexibilities for councils implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act and no changes to the New Homes Bonus. However, we still have a long way to go if we are to meet the housing needs of our current and future generations.

Britain's exit from the EU will make sound, democratically-elected local leadership more important than ever. Our neutral position during the

referendum put local government in a strong position to work alongside Government to reshape the way this country is run. We continue to use our seat at the negotiating table to make sure that money and powers from Brussels do not stop in Whitehall but are devolved, wherever possible, to local areas.

That means wider devolution and an increased role for councils and councillors. Devolution brings both benefits and challenges, but local government has already made great progress. In May 2017 we were delighted to welcome the first six combined authority elected mayors into LGA membership, and we continue to work with councils and government to deliver a real shift in power to councils and local communities.

In the aftermath of the tragic Grenfell Tower fire, we called for an urgent review of building regulations. Dame Judith Hackitt's interim report, published at the end of 2017, reflected the LGA's position – that the regulatory system as a whole is not fit for purpose. We will continue to be closely involved in the review as it moves forward.

On a practical level, our campaign to attract 100 former social workers back into the profession is already halfway towards its target, and we are looking to extend this approach to other difficult-to-recruit professions.

Other important wins for local government during the year have included securing:

- an extra £150 million grant for adult social care in 2018/19
- an agreement from government to waive financial penalties faced by social care employers who are found to have underpaid their workers for sleep-in shifts preceding 26 July 2017
- a commitment to bring forward a Green Paper on social housing
- a further £2 billion for the Affordable Homes Programme, taking the total pot to more than £9 billion
- securing £886 million to deliver 200,000 homes across 133 council-led projects as part of the Housing Infrastructure Fund.

You can find out more about our campaigning work on our website: www.local.gov.uk



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The councillor's role

As a democratically elected local representative, you have a unique and privileged position – and the potential to make a real difference to people's lives.

However, being a councillor is hard work. Every day you will be expected to balance the needs of your local area, your residents and voters, community groups, local businesses, your political party (if you belong to one) and the council. All will make legitimate demands on your time – on top of your personal commitments to family, friends and workplace.

As a councillor you will have many different roles to balance. As the locally elected representative, you will engage with residents and groups on a wide range of different issues and take on an important community leadership role. At the council you will contribute to the development of polities and strategies, including budget setting, and you may be involved in scrutinising council decisions or taking decisions on planning or licensing applications.

Representing your local area

A councillor's primary role is to represent their ward or division and the people who live in it. Councillors provide a bridge between the community and the council. As well as being an advocate for your local residents and signposting them to the right people at the council, you will need to keep them informed about the issues that affect them.

In order to understand and represent local views and priorities, you need to build strong relationships and encourage local people to make their views known and engage with you and the council. Good communication and engagement is central to being an effective councillor.

As a local councillor, your residents will expect you to:

- respond to their queries and investigate their concerns (casework)
- communicate council decisions that affect them
- know your patch and be aware of any problems

- know and work with representatives of local organisations, interest groups and businesses
- represent their views at council meetings
- lead local campaigns on their behalf.

Community leadership

Community leadership is at the heart of modern local government. Councils work in partnership with local communities and organisations – including the public, voluntary, community and private sectors – to develop a vision for their local area, working collaboratively to improve services and quality of life for citizens. Councillors have a lead role in this process.

Developing council policy

Councils need clear strategies and policies to enable them to achieve their vision for the area, make the best use of resources and deliver services that meet the needs of local communities. As a local councillor you will contribute to the development of these policies and strategies, bringing the views and priorities of your local area to the



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debate. How you do this will depend on the committees and forums you are appointed to. However, the council's policy framework must be signed off by full council, on which every councillor sits.

Planning and regulation

Councils are not just service providers, they also act as regulators. As a councillor you may be appointed to sit on the planning and regulatory committee, considering issues such as planning applications and licences for pubs and restaurants and ensuring that businesses comply with the law. In these roles, councillors are required to act independently and are not subject to the group/party whip. Most councils arrange special training for this.

Code of conduct and standards

As a councillor you will be required to adhere to your council's agreed code of conduct for elected members. Each council adopts its own code, but it must be based on the Committee on Standards in Public Life's seven principles of public life (see below).

These were developed by the Nolan Committee, which looked at how to improve ethical standards in public life, and are often referred to as the Nolan principles.

These principles apply to anyone who works as a public office holder. This includes all those elected or appointed to public office, nationally or locally; and everyone working in the civil service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, non-departmental public bodies and in the health, education and social care sectors. All public office holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources. The principles also apply to everyone in other sectors delivering public services.

All standards matters are the responsibility of individual councils, which are required to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by councillors. You must register any disclosable pecuniary interests for yourself, your spouse or a partner you live with, within 28 days of taking up office. It is a criminal offence if you fail, without reasonable excuse, to declare or register interests to the monitoring officer.

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Lynne Doherty, Conservative, West Berkshire Council

I studied history at Cardiff University before embarking on a sales and marketing career. Following the birth of my children, I changed direction and joined the voluntary sector. I ran a family support charity for six years and it was this work that led me to stand for election in 2015.

As Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education, I am responsible for children's services to protect those in need and for the provision of education to all. I am proud to have overseen the improvement journey required following an 'inadequate' Ofsted rating, which resulted in a re-inspection finding of 'good'.



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Seven principles of public life

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for doing so.

Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to change poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Lynne Doherty, Conservative, West Berkshire Council

My advice for new councillors is:

- Don't be afraid to question: if it is running through your mind, it is most likely to be running through someone else's.
- Think 'so what?' on behalf of your residents – what do decisions actually mean to those you represent?
- Find a friend – find someone you trust to guide and support you in your early days as a councillor.



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An introduction to local government

Local government touches the lives of everybody, every day. Councils deal with everything from schools to care of older people, from roads to rubbish, libraries and local planning. Behind all of this is a web of legislation and bureaucracy that most people don't need to see. As a councillor, understanding how it works will help you to represent your local community.

What do councils do?

Councils work with local people and partners, such as local businesses and other organisations, to agree and deliver on local priorities. They provide a wide range of services either directly, in partnership with others or by commissioning them from a third party.

Since the Local Government Act 2000, councils have been responsible for the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their areas. The Localism Act 2011 and more recent changes to the way that public health, welfare and the police

are organised have given councils and communities more influence over the way their local area is managed.

Councils provide more than 800 services to local communities. Most are mandatory, which means by law the council must do them. Some mandatory functions are tightly controlled by central government, resulting in a similar level of service across the country.

Other services are discretionary: the council has discretion over the type and level of service it provides. They range from large economic regeneration projects right down to the removal of wasp nests. Councils have been allowed to charge for some discretionary services, such as leisure facilities, for a long time. They now have a general power to charge for discretionary services, provided it is not prohibited by other legislation and the council does not make a profit.

How is local government organised?

Successive reorganisations of local government have created a complex and often baffling array of

arrangements which vary from area to area. Much of England has two tiers of local government – county councils and district councils – with responsibility for services split between the two. Other areas have a single unitary authority responsible for all local services. Recently, the emphasis on greater devolution of powers and funding has led to the creation of combined authorities.

Two-tier areas

- County councils provide services that cover the whole county such as education, waste disposal and adult social care.
- District councils (sometimes called borough or city councils) are smaller and provide local services such as refuse collection, environmental health and leisure facilities.

Unitary areas

- Metropolitan councils were councils set up in 1974 covering large urban areas.
- London boroughs are unitary councils, although the Greater London Authority provides some services including fire, police, transport and strategic planning.



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- Unitary authorities may cover a whole county, part of a county or a large town or city. For example, Cornwall Council, Nottingham City Council and Reading Borough Council are all unitary councils. Wales has unitary councils.

Combined authorities

- All the councils in an area can come together to form a combined authority, with a directly elected mayor, in return for greater devolution of powers from central government. Although each deal has bespoke elements, all have some common elements:
 - a single investment fund enabling pooling of central and local funding for economic growth
 - a fully devolved adult skills budget by 2018/19, and control over post-16 further education and the apprenticeship grant for employers
 - co-design with the Department for Work and Pensions on future employment support for harder-to-help claimants
 - tailored engagement of city regions on UK Trade and Investment services

- ‘intermediate body’ status for European regional development and social funds
- power to pursue bus franchising, pooled and devolved local transport funding and smart ticketing across local modes of transport
- devolved approaches to business support
- powers over strategic planning; power to establish public land commissions to influence decisions on disposal of public assets.
- Elected mayors in combined authorities have varying degrees of power over different matters, but all share some core characteristics:
 - chairing the combined authority cabinet
 - an effective veto over some decisions (for example the decision to create a spatial strategy, which requires unanimous approval of mayor and cabinet)
 - mayoral spending plans (these can be rejected by cabinet members on a two-thirds majority)

- power to take on the role of police and crime commissioner (with the consent of all appropriate authorities)
- a member of the local enterprise partnership.
- The first six combined authority mayors (Greater Manchester, West Midlands, Liverpool City Region, Tees Valley, West of England and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough) were elected in May 2017.

Town, parish and community councils

In some areas, the most local tier of local government is a parish or town council (or community councils in Wales). They maintain local amenities such as recreational areas, footpaths and cemeteries. The parish council is also consulted on highway and planning applications.

A councillor may serve on one or more tiers of local government – so a county councillor may also be a district councillor and a parish councillor.

England has 27 counties split into 201 districts, 56 unitary authorities, 37 metropolitan districts, 32 London boroughs (plus the City of London), 30 combined and metropolitan fire



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and rescue authorities (FRAs), 15 county FRAs and 10,000 parish and town councils. Wales has 22 unitary councils and 1,000 community councils.

Devolution

Devolution is the transfer of power and funding from national to local government. This process is important because it means decisions are made closer to the people, communities and businesses they affect. This helps councils develop more effective public services and provides residents with better value for money. It also helps to build stronger partnerships between local organisations such as businesses, universities and the NHS.

Since 2014, when the first 'devolution deal' was signed between government and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, similar deals have been struck around the country, transferring new powers over skills, employment, health and housing to local areas.

The LGA has been involved throughout this process – advocating on behalf of member authorities, working with national government

to develop policy and providing direct support to those areas looking to develop and secure further devolution. We have built a strong relationship with the newly elected 'metro mayors' and continue to push for devolution outside the framework of a mayoral combined authority.

The LGA is working closely with central government, local enterprise partnerships and others to ensure that forthcoming local industrial strategies are backed by the devolution of funding and powers over key policies such as skills and employment support.

We have also made it clear that Brexit must not simply mean a transfer of powers from Brussels to Westminster. It must instead lead to new legislative freedoms and flexibilities for councils so that residents and businesses benefit.

Our Devolution Hub has the latest publications and tools:
www.local.gov.uk/topics/devolution

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Adam Ellison, Labour, South Tyneside Council

I became a councillor in 2015 at the age of 19, becoming the youngest person ever elected to South Tyneside Council. I am currently Vice-Chair of the Safeguarding and Education Panel and as such play a role in scrutiny of education and children's services.

My day-to-day activities involve attending council and public meetings, visiting residents and responding to calls and enquiries from the community that I represent. It is a real honour to represent my home ward of Hebburn North.



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How are decisions made?

Councils can operate their executive governance arrangements in one of the following four models:

- a leader and cabinet
- a committee system
- executive arrangements with a directly elected mayor
- arrangements prescribed by the Secretary of State.

Most operate a leader and cabinet model. The full council elects a leader who in turn appoints and chairs the cabinet. Each cabinet member has a specific area of responsibility – for example children and young people, housing or finance. The cabinet meets regularly (weekly or fortnightly) so decisions are made quickly. The cabinet may also be called the executive.

In some areas, an executive mayor is elected for a four-year term. The mayor has greater powers than a council leader and may or may not be a member of the majority party on the council. He/she proposes the budget and policy framework and appoints and chairs the cabinet, which can be

single or cross-party.

Some councils opt for a committee system. The council establishes a number of committees, each with a specific area of responsibility. The political groups appoint elected members to those committees. More councillors are actively involved in decision making, but it can take longer to reach decisions.

Increasingly, areas are creating joint decision-making arrangements such as combined authorities or joint leaders' boards to deal with important issues that cross local authority boundaries, such as economic growth and transport.

Whichever system an authority opts for, it must have a full council on which all councillors sit. This is responsible for setting the policy framework, agreeing the budget and spending plans, electing the leader and making constitutional decisions. It is also a forum for debate on major issues affecting the council and its local area. In councils with a directly elected mayor, the budget and framework are proposed by the mayor and can only be amended or

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Adam Ellison, Labour, South Tyneside Council

- Try to be organised from the start. It is very easy to get lost in emails, letters and information if you don't keep on top of it.
- Go with your own gut. As a new councillor you hear lots of conflicting information from others about the role and what they're doing in their area. It's your role to shape and embrace.
- You won't always achieve the outcome you would like, but don't be disheartened. There are lots of ways to make an impact.



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overturned by the council with a two-thirds majority.

Councils that do not opt for the committee system must establish overview and scrutiny arrangements through which non-cabinet councillors can scrutinise decisions (overview and scrutiny is covered later in this guide).

There are some regulatory and quasi-judicial functions over which the cabinet does not have responsibility – for example, determining planning applications and making decisions on licensing. These are delegated to separate planning and regulatory committees.

The constitution

As a new councillor you will receive a copy of your council’s constitution which sets out how the council conducts its business, including:

- who is responsible for making decisions and how decisions are made
- procedural matters (set out in the standing orders)
- the role of officers

- standards and ethical governance.

It is important to familiarise yourself with these parts of the constitution, in particular the standing orders. These specify the terms of reference of the council’s various member structures, the rules on declarations of interest, the timings and order of business at council meetings and the rules of debate.

Agendas and minutes

By law the council’s formal meetings must be held in public, although the public and press can be excluded for discussions on some confidential items (known as ‘Part 2’). Councils must give at least five days’ notice of a meeting. The agenda must be made available at least five days before the meeting. The minutes should be published on the council’s website and available on request. The council must also publish its forward plan showing the key decisions to be made in the next four months.

Defamation and privilege

Councillors can be sued for defamation if they say or write

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Rhys Taylor, Liberal Democrat, Cardiff City Council

I was elected in 2017, and it’s a privilege to represent residents and help shape city-wide priorities. Being a councillor is a hugely varied role. The issues residents have raised with me have ranged from the state of our pavements and roads to missed waste collections, planning applications, school admissions and the air quality around our schools.

I serve on the children and young people scrutiny committee, which oversees education, children’s services and play services; and the public protection and licensing committee, with oversight of taxi and premises licensing and air quality across the city.



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anything that will 'lower a person in the estimation of right-thinking people'. However, in council meetings they have a qualified privilege to allow freedom of speech. This can protect you against being sued for something you say as part of your duty as a councillor or to defend or support the interests of the council – but it only applies if you can show that you honestly believed what you said and were not motivated by malice.

The council workforce

A council's paid employees are called officers. Unlike civil servants, who work for the government, local government officers have a duty to support the whole council, not just the cabinet. This means that they must remain politically neutral.

Very simply, councillors set the strategic direction and agree the policy framework of the council; officers are responsible for delivering the council's policies and for the day-to-day operation of the organisation.

Officers fall broadly into two main categories: front-line and support. Front-line officers deliver services to

the public – for example teachers, social workers, care assistants and refuse collectors. Support staff ensure that front-line services and the democratic process can operate smoothly – for example through administrative, finance, legal, communications and IT support.

Councils also deliver services through various partnerships and outsourcing arrangements. These staff are not directly employed by the council but are affected by decisions made by councillors.

Specific provisions will be included in the standing orders about the involvement that individual councillors can have in the appointment and dismissal of staff and in setting employment policies. Many councils have protocols or policies to govern councillor/officer relations. All councillors have a general duty of care towards officers, but the protocol will set a framework for members to promote equality and respect the impartiality and integrity of staff.

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Rhys Taylor, Liberal Democrat, Cardiff City Council

My advice for new councillors is:

- Get to know council officers in key departments and get to grips with any enquiry or information systems your council has – it will make dealing with enquiries and complaints far easier.
- Give yourself time to switch off on a regular basis – it will be good for you and your residents!
- Enjoy your time, the people you meet and help and the experience you gain as a councillor.



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By law, every council must appoint three key officers:

1. A head of the paid staff – usually the chief executive (or managing director) who advises councillors on policy, procedure and legislation.
2. A monitoring officer – responsible for advising councillors of the legal framework within which they operate, and for ensuring that they understand if their decisions or actions could lead to a legal challenge or be found to be maladministration.
3. A Section 151 officer – usually the director of finance, whose task it is to monitor the financial affairs of the council.

The senior management team will head up the main functions or departments of the council. Good member/officer relationships are important to a high-performing authority, but the relationship between the leader or elected mayor and the chief executive is particularly important and can have a profound effect on the council's performance. In some instances, more than one council

shares a senior management team or other management arrangements.

Equality and community cohesion

At the heart of the Equality Act is the public sector equality duty, which aims to tackle discrimination and inequality by embedding equality considerations in the day-to-day work of all public bodies. Public bodies must have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity between different groups
- foster good relations between different groups.

Councils must publish:

- one or more equality objectives every four years
- information to demonstrate compliance with the equality duty each year
- information on their employees and others affected by their policies and practices.

Councillors are expected to understand the impact of cutting budgets and to mitigate potential negative outcomes, especially the cumulative impact on specific groups of people. Getting this right will ensure fairness and equality of opportunity for local people.

For more information go to: www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/equality-frameworks



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Support for councillors

Councils provide support to councillors in their role as democratically elected representatives, although the level and type of support provided will vary. It can include:

- induction and training
- access to space in the council headquarters, such as a members' room
- office equipment such as a mobile phone, computer and printer
- access to media and general communications advice
- research support.

Some support is provided for all councillors; other support is provided via the political groups (or if you are an independent councillor, your council may have an independent group office). The leader of the council and cabinet members are more likely to have access to dedicated support, along with the chairs of scrutiny in some councils.

Induction and training

Most councils offer induction courses for new councillors to familiarise them with their new role and how the council works. Your induction should introduce you to the members and officers you need to know to do your job effectively, and show you how and where to access the information you will need. It should also run through the legal framework you will be operating within.

Some councils provide a wider range of training for councillors. This may build your knowledge in a particular service area (such as education, adult social care, housing or planning) or develop your skills – for example effective scrutiny, working with the media, presentations, political leadership, influencing or time management.

From time to time, your council may hold briefings and away-days to bring everyone up-to-date with the big issues affecting the authority and its local area, or joint events where officers and councillors work together to formulate strategy and build good working relationships.

Accessing information

Most of the information you need to be effective in your new role as a councillor will be available online. Your council's website and intranet will contain lots of information about the council, the way it works, its services and the local area.

Council papers may be provided electronically and/or in paper form. Many councils have good tele-conference facilities that enable you to attend meetings remotely, or you may be able to join meetings through video chat or voice call services.

Officers have a duty to ensure that councillors have access to the information they need in order to make well-informed decisions. They may do this by producing factual reports, making presentations or arranging visits – for example, taking members of the planning committee to visit a site that is subject to a planning application. In some councils, the larger political groups may have a political assistant who can carry out research on their behalf.



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Allowances

All councillors are entitled to a basic allowance. Those with additional roles may also receive a special responsibility allowance (SRA) which reflects the level of responsibility and expected time commitment. Allowances are set by the council on the recommendation of an independent remuneration panel. Councils may also cover the cost of childcare or dependent care, along with travel and subsistence.

Allowances are subject to income tax and it is your responsibility to ensure that you pay the correct amount. Some incidental costs, such as use of a home office and telephone, can be deducted before calculating the tax to be paid.



Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Anna Charles-Jones, Independent, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

I have lived in my ward for more than ten years, becoming increasingly involved in the local community. Heald Green is the only ward we know of with a nearly 90-year unbroken record of all local councillors being independent 'Ratepayers Association' councillors. This was a fantastic opportunity for someone like me, who is interested in politics but could never conform to a party-political whip.

I have been involved with a diverse range of committees and projects. My ward borders two other councils on the edge of the Greater Manchester conurbation, which brings unique challenges, particularly around new housing and where to put it.



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HIGHLIGHTING POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

THE LGA DEVELOPMENT OFFER

Councillor development programmes

Inspiring local communities, making a real difference and changing people's lives to help create a better future for the people and places we represent requires ambitious, bold leadership. Effective political leadership is the building block of a healthy and vibrant democracy.

The LGA's range of political leadership development programmes supports councillors to become more confident, capable and skilled and better prepared to make a difference. There is a programme for everyone, whether you are a brand new councillor or a seasoned veteran at the top of your political career.

As a local politician, finding the time to reflect, build your networks and learn can be tricky. The LGA development programmes provide opportunities to do just that, building the leadership capacity of individuals and the wider sector.

For new councillors in particular, our community leadership resources offer includes workbooks, e-learning tools and in-house training to support you in your role as a community leader, facilitator and broker.

The **Focus on Leadership** series provides seminars and workshops to help councillors in their existing roles and as they move towards challenging new leadership positions. These include the popular **Young Councillor's Weekender**, which helps councillors to build networks with their peers early on in their careers, and the **Effective Opposition Programme**.



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Themed learning opportunities for portfolio holders or service committee chairs are available in the **Leadership Essentials Programme**, which concentrates on specific portfolio areas (such as planning or adult social care) or a specific theme such as scrutiny or effective community engagement.

Next Generation is a modular development programme which has been developed and designed within party political groups. It offers ambitious and talented councillors an unparalleled opportunity to develop their leadership, with a particular focus on their own party traditions.

For councillors already in leadership positions and looking to stretch their leadership skills further (including group leaders, portfolio holders, portfolio shadows and committee chairs), we provide the highly respected **Leadership Academy**. Another modular programme, it delivers accredited leadership development opportunities all year round.

And for those who have reached their ambition of council leader we offer, by invitation, the **Leaders' Programme**, aimed towards new council leaders in their first term of leadership. Leaders may also choose to be involved in the 'Leading Edge' series, which brings together leaders and chief executives to share ideas and look at the current challenges facing local government.

For more information go to:
www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership



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The Member Development Charter

The LGA has been working with regional employers' organisations to establish and support the Charter for Member Development. The charter signifies a commitment from a local authority to introduce a policy that supports and encourages councillor development.

All nine UK regions have signed up to the charter and a growing number of councils are pledging to introduce it for their members.

The Member Development Charter and Charter Plus provide a robust and structured framework to:

- encourage councils to develop an effective strategy or approach to member development
- recognise those councils that have developed an effective approach
- encourage councils to continue that development and share experiences and learning.



Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Anna Charles-Jones, Independent, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

My advice for new councillors is:

- Don't be afraid to go straight to the top: I have had queries resolved much more quickly by approaching the most senior officers, rather than trying to work up through the ranks.
- Don't be afraid to take a day off. Being a councillor is a 24/7 role which can take over your life if you allow it to.
- Be yourself. Residents and officers will appreciate a councillor who is honest, genuine and has a well-reasoned opinion, even if it differs from their own.



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Want to learn more about the key skills you need to enhance your effectiveness as a ward or division councillor?

Councillor development e-learning

As an exciting new part of the LGA's Highlighting Political Leadership offer, you can now undertake your own member development through our new e-learning portal.

Free to access, the modules are based on our community leadership resources and workbooks; providing an interactive way to ensure that you are well-equipped and well-supported to make a difference, deliver and be trusted as a local politician.

Access e-learning modules at:
<http://lms.learningnexus.co.uk/LGA/>

To sign up, simply email elarning@local.gov.uk to receive a user name and password.



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Communication

An essential part of being a good councillor is knowing how and what to communicate with different audiences. The following broad principles can help you.

Listen as well as promote

As an elected representative it is important to let local people know what you have been doing, but it's equally important to listen to people and groups in your area, such as:

- local residents
- fellow councillors and officers
- local MPs
- your political party or group
- local organisations (businesses, voluntary and community sector, partners)
- the media
- community and faith leaders.

Make the most of available help

Most councils have a communications team whose job it is to represent the

council from a corporate point of view, reflecting the policy decisions made.

The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity states that they are not allowed to write or send out press releases on behalf of individual councillors, but they can still help you to promote council work you have been involved with. If you think you have an item of interest to your residents or the media, your communications team can advise you on how best to promote it.

Find out what methods of communication are available to you and who their audience is (for example council and party websites, newsletters and magazines, e-newsletters, social media channels and events).

Meet people where they are – online and offline

Over the last 10-15 years, there has been a dramatic shift in how people get their information and how communities come together on different issues. Whereas previously a story in the local media might have been the way to get greatest awareness (and still might be),



Councillor viewpoint

Councillor James Hill, Conservative, Northampton Borough Council

I became a councillor in 2015. It came somewhat out of blue, I wasn't expecting to be elected! I stood because I felt it was important to have younger people on the council to reflect the electorate.

I'm proud to represent the town I grew up in. The chance to make a small but important difference in people's lives is what I find most satisfying. I am the Assistant Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning, a role which is essentially about the future regeneration of the town, which is very exciting.



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depending on the audience you are speaking to, you might find that a Facebook group, Twitter campaign or organising a local forum will be more effective. You need to think about who you are trying to reach, then use the channels that audience can be reached through.

Good communications need not cost a lot, sometimes just the price of a coffee. You can:

- visit local meeting places – cafes, shops and markets
- write newsletters (paper and/or email)
- run events or meetings
- hold surgeries, either in person or online, providing opportunities for local people to ask questions or raise concerns
- use social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and YouTube (make sure your content is accurate, informative, balanced and objective – if in any doubt then check your council’s social media policy)
- set up a basic website, blog or vlog (video blog).

Using social media

Councillors, officers and the council itself will use social media in distinct ways. However, there is a set of universal principles that are useful to keep in mind.

- Be strategic – plan ahead: who do you want to engage with, why and how? What do you want to achieve?
- Be human: be approachable in your language and tone, behave online as you would in person.
- Be engaging: respond to questions and join in when you can move the conversation on or help.
- Be professional: remember that you represent your council, so be aware of how your public voice comes across.
- Share and attribute: you can share what others have posted but it is polite to acknowledge and attribute where this has come from.
- Go to where your audience is: if the people you want to connect with are on a particular platform, forum or group, join it.
- Content is king: by creating sharable and engaging content you can contribute to the conversation and be heard.



Councillor viewpoint

Councillor James Hill, Conservative, Northampton Borough Council

My advice for new councillors is:

- The first six months are a whirlwind – it takes time to find your feet and learn how the council works, but don’t worry, every new councillor feels like this.
- Involve your family and friends. As a married father of four I try to involve my family wherever possible. This might include bringing them to community activities such as litter picks and fun days.
- Use various ways to engage with residents. As well as social media I run surgeries, attend residents’ association meetings, use email and am always available on the phone.



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- Be authentic: don't pretend to be something you are not.
- The internet is forever: remember that what you post now could be found in years to come.

Develop a positive relationship with the local media

Local journalists are always looking for good stories. By building and maintaining a positive relationship with reporters in your area, you can establish yourself as a valuable and credible contact for news and comment.

Journalists you have built up trust with will often call you looking for tip-offs. Think about the stories you can offer – even if they are not necessarily council-related. If you have a story of interest, don't assume that issuing a press release will automatically do the job. Get to know the local media's deadlines and give reporters as much notice as possible.

Present a story

The best news stories are those that tell the TRUTH: Topical, Relevant, Unusual, Trouble or Human. Remember that your greatest strength with the media is as a community leader. A local reporter may not be interested in a political press release, but they will take notice if you are campaigning on behalf of your residents on high-profile local issues.

Know your residents, relate to their concerns, understand their ambitions and be their champion. Work with community groups – often they will be involved in campaigns of interest to the media that can help to boost your profile. And think pictures: if a story has an obvious visual angle involving local people, it is far more likely to be covered.

For more tips and guidance – including advice on communications in a crisis, engaging with residents and digital communications – visit the Comms Hub: www.local.gov.uk/comms-hub



Councillor viewpoint

**Councillor Philippa Hart,
Liberal Democrat, South
Cambridgeshire District Council**

I grew up in my ward and love representing its residents. Forty per cent of my council time is spent dealing with casework, which often involves liaising with council officers to ask them to assist with a particular matter.

Twenty per cent is spent keeping residents informed: I write reports for parish council meetings and magazines and, with fellow Lib Dem councillors, a monthly email newsletter for local residents. The other 40 per cent of my time goes on being on the scrutiny and planning committees and attending monthly full council meetings.



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Access to information

Freedom of information

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives people rights of access to the information held by councils and other public bodies. The legislation aims to give people a better understanding of how organisations make decisions, carry out their duties and spend public money. The act created two principal obligations for councils:

1. All councils must adopt and maintain a **publication scheme** setting out details of information they will routinely make available, how the information can be obtained and whether there is a charge for it.
2. All councils must **comply with requests** made under the Act for information they hold (unless one of the exemptions from disclosure applies). Requests for information should be responded to as quickly as possible, and certainly within 20 working days, except in some limited circumstances.

As a councillor, the decisions you make and the actions you take are all subject to public scrutiny. Your allowance, along with any expenses that you claim, will be published on the council's website.

General Data Protection Regulation

The law on data protection is changing from 25 May 2018.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a new, Europe-wide law that replaces the Data Protection Act 1998 in the UK. The GDPR sets out requirements for how organisations will need to handle personal data.

In addition to other changes, it will enhance the rights of people whose data is held (known as data subjects in the Data Protection Act 1998) and give them more control over what happens to their data. The eight data protection principles which were in the 1998 legislation have been replaced by six in the new Regulation.



Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Philippa Hart, Liberal Democrat, South Cambridgeshire District Council

My advice for new councillors is:

- For at least six months you will feel like you don't know anything. Democratic services were a lifeline during that time in answering my questions.
- Some councillors schedule meetings at school pick-up or evening meal times. Irrespective of your gender, ask for meetings to be held at family-friendly times so that candidates from a wider age range can consider becoming a councillor.
- Face and name recall are very useful! The people you meet will remember your name as their local councillor. It's nice to repay the compliment by remembering who they are.



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These six general principles are very similar to the current law. Personal information should be:

- processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner
- collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and not further processed in a manner that is incompatible with those purposes
- adequate, relevant, and limited to what is necessary
- accurate and, where necessary, kept up-to-date
- retained only for as long as necessary
- processed in an appropriate manner to maintain security.

The legislation to enact this into UK law is still in its final stages but the view of the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) is that councillors will continue to have data protection responsibilities for the personal information they process in their work in a similar way to their current obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998. And that they will be controllers under the GDPR. This means you are responsible for ensuring all personal data is handled

in a way which complies with the requirements of the GDPR.

Some of the detail about how exactly the changes will affect councillors will emerge over time.

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) website provides useful advice relevant to councillors: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/political>

Better use of data in local government

Data is increasingly being recognised as important in the design, delivery and transformation of local public services. It can be used to improve outcomes and drive efficiencies, which is particularly valuable within current financial constraints. The LGA delivers a programme of work each year to help councillors and councils get a better understanding of the value of data in public services and to support them in using it. This work aims to encourage councils to open up, share and better use data to:

- design services around user needs
- drive efficiencies within services and across the council

- support public sector transformation and digitisation
- engage and empower citizens within their communities
- be transparent and publicly accountable.

In 2018/19, initiatives are being developed to:

- brief, debate and instruct councillors to remain on top of the extraordinary developments achieved in IT, digital communications and data practices in recent years
- develop projects, products and services to encourage closer working between local service delivery organisations by pooling learning, expertise and resources
- facilitate capabilities to allow councils and fire authorities to self-assess their data practices and then suggest options for next steps to continue their improvement
- continue to maintain and promote the use of local government's information sharing standards and publishing practices to remain compliant with the expectations of the transparency agenda and national data practices



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- represent local government interests in the areas of transparency, open data publishing and consistency of data quality
- commission initiatives to demonstrate the benefit of sector-wide data standards.

Open data

Since 2010 there has been a strong emphasis on transparency in government, with an expectation by the public of more local government information being shared openly. Some data is mandated to be shared in the Transparency Code, and the LGA offers guidance for councillors and officers on this: <http://transparency.opendata.esd.org.uk>

Publishing data openly, and sharing it within and between local service providers, can create opportunities for efficiency savings and organisational innovation. The LGA leads on a range of projects and support services to encourage sector-led learning and improvement in all aspects of data standards, governance and information best practice.

The LGA has developed a series of online eLearning modules to encourage

local government to support greater transparency and better use of its data. There are six modules: the first three are for information officers and focus on data standards and open publishing; the second three are for council officers and councillors and outline practical examples and case studies for promoting better use and re-use of data.

The eLearning modules can be found at: <http://lga.learndata.info>

Using data

The LGA has assembled a range of case studies, online support and training aids to encourage councils to learn from each other and maximise the benefits that can be made from the data they hold. These resources include:

- Wise Council – a report with case studies of councils making better use of data to improve efficiencies and service delivery
- a suite of eLearning modules
- the powers and duties tool, which helps to explain the legislative framework.



Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Mike Bush, Independent, Tendring District Council

I live in the rural Essex village of Great Oakley. I was fortunate to be elected as district councillor in a 2017 by-election. I am an active member volunteer in our village community-run pub and, having listened to the issues raised by local residents, I wanted to be their voice in council and make a difference to our village life.

It has been a steep but rewarding learning curve and I have worked on a variety of cases, from potholes, fly-tipping and flooding through to anti-social behaviour and planning applications. I am also a parish councillor, which provides different challenges.



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Know your patch

Have you ever wondered what proportion of your residents are employed or how many local school children are obese? How does that compare to other places?



LG Inform gives you and your council easy access to up-to-date published data about your local area and the performance of your council and fire and rescue service.

Whether you're interested in scrutiny, a particular service area, or simply need an overview, it can help you review and compare performance with other authorities and assess whether your council is meeting your residents' needs.

▶ To view LG Inform and register visit: www.lginform.local.gov.uk



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'LG Inform' brings together a range of key performance data for councils in an online tool. It presents the latest metrics, measures and context about local places and organisations, allowing reports and comparisons to be made. It includes data and statistics drawn from education, health, democracy, housing, environment and waste management, safety, council assets and facilities and population demographics.

To find out more, visit:
www.local.gov.uk/benchmarking-data-lg-inform



Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Mike Bush, Independent, Tendring District Council

My advice for new councillors is:

- Introduce yourself to as many council officers as possible – get to know their roles and how they can provide support and advice to assist with your casework.
- Get to know other council members who have experience and knowledge to guide you through the council protocol.
- Always respond to your residents' issues promptly, keep them informed and ensure you get out amongst your community to let them know what you can do for them.



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Local government finance

The local government finance system is complex and has evolved over many years, so it has a reputation for being difficult to understand. Part of your role as a councillor will be to debate and agree your council's budget, so it is important to know the basics.

Local authority spending in England falls into three main categories:

- spending on capital projects such as roads or school buildings (capital expenditure results in the creation, acquisition or enhancement of an asset)
- revenue spending on council housing
- revenue spending on all other areas (mainly pay and the other costs of running services); the following sections cover the funding and setting of this part of councils' budgets.

Councils cannot use capital resources to fund their revenue expenses without specific government authorisation. For example, staff salaries cannot generally be paid using the proceeds from the sale of a building.

Local authorities find out their individual revenue funding figures for the next financial year in December (excluding housing) through the provisional local government finance settlement. Once it is approved by Parliament, usually in February, councils know how much they will get from government.

They can then estimate the total business rates they will collect and be able to retain, look at how much they will spend in the coming year and calculate the amount of council tax revenue needed to meet the shortfall between their spending needs and expected income from other sources.

In 2015, the Government announced a four-year settlement for the financial years 2016/17 up to 2019/20. Councils were invited to sign up to an 'offer' covering the following three years, and 97 per cent of councils signed up. The figures for the third

year of the four-year settlement, 2018/19, were confirmed by Parliament in February 2018.

Setting council tax

Dividing the council tax requirement by the 'council tax base' (roughly speaking, the number of domestic properties in the area, with a domestic property in Band H worth double a property in Band A) will give the council tax that must be charged for a band D property. The rates for other bands are a fixed portion of the band D charge.

Councils must hold a local referendum if they want to raise council tax above a certain percentage threshold decided by central government. The result is binding, so they must have a contingency plan in place, with a rise below the threshold, in case of a 'no' vote.

For 2018/19, the general referendum limit for single tier and county councils was 3 per cent – so these councils could raise council tax by 2.99 per cent before triggering a referendum. District councils could raise council tax by whichever was larger of £5 or 3 per cent per band D property per year.



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Since 2016/17, single tier authorities and county councils can also raise a 'social care precept' in addition to the general referendum limit. In 2018/19 the adult social care precept limit was 3 per cent (although the total increase over the three years up to and including 2019/20 for adult social care should not exceed 6 per cent).

Business rates

Business rates are a tax levied on non-residential properties. Until 2013, business rates collected by councils were paid into a central pot to be redistributed as grant funding. Since then, councils have been able to retain a portion of business rates raised locally – the 'local share'. Central government sets the maximum increase in the business rates multiplier and decides what share of business rates can be kept by councils (currently 50 per cent).

This means that a council receives more income if it experiences real-terms growth in its local business rates base and loses income if it experiences a reduction. The government's aim is to incentivise councils to promote local economic growth by rewarding them for

every new business they help to put on the map.

From 2020/21, local government as a whole will be allowed to keep 75 per cent of all of the business rates it collects. Councils will no longer receive the revenue support grant. At the same time there will be a reset of the funding baseline. This will be informed by the fair funding review currently underway, which is looking at how needs are measured, how resources such as council tax are taken into account and transitioning to the new system.

Five areas (Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, West Midlands, Cornwall and the West of England) have been piloting greater business rates retention since 2017. Another 10 areas (Berkshire, Derbyshire, Gloucestershire, Kent and Medway, Leeds City Region, Lincolnshire, Solent, Suffolk and Surrey), as well as London, will pilot greater business rates retention in 2018/19. These areas will get to keep 100 per cent of growth in business rates during the pilot period. The Government has committed to having more retention pilots in 2019/20.

Budgets

Revenue and capital budgets cover all the costs of the council – employees, services, buildings and so on. They represent the fundamental tools that councillors use to make their policies and strategies come alive. The budget process enables councillors to:

- review spending priorities
- monitor actual spending
- control spending by service departments and budget holders
- enable redirection of resources
- identify gaps in provision
- plan ahead.

Generally, the ruling group or coalition will present a set of budget proposals to full council following consultation with officers and local residents. This tends to use the previous year's budget as the starting point, with adjustments made to reflect changing service priorities, statutory duties and the need to make savings. The budget will also include reserves and contingencies to manage risk. All councillors have a critical role to play in monitoring budgets and ensuring money is spent on delivering the council's policies and strategies.



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The budget year runs from April to March. The cycle is largely driven by the need to set council tax, which must be done annually. As well as an annual budget, the council will have medium-term financial plans which look three to five years ahead.

The four main stages of the budgeting process councillors should think about are:

- 1. Planning and setting the budget:** what does the council want to achieve?
- 2. Scrutinising the proposed budget:** does it comply with the council's policies?
- 3. Monitoring the budget throughout the year:** is there an over- or an under-spend?
- 4. Reviewing the budget:** did the allocated budgets achieve the desired type and level of service?

Income and expenditure

Revenue and capital income comes from a range of sources and is spent on services that benefit local people. Most revenue comes from:

- business rates, the 'local share' and the net effect of any tariff or top-up (see paragraph below)
- revenue support grant, currently the largest single grant stream, funded mainly from the 'central share' of business rates, which is non-ring-fenced (so can be spent on any lawful purpose)
- specific government grants, some of which are ring-fenced for specific services
- council tax.

When introducing the business rates 'local share' system, the Government put in place a system to ensure that councils with relatively high needs, but relatively low income from business rates, receive a 'top-up'. Equally, a council whose relative income from business rates is deemed to be greater than relative need pays a 'tariff' to government. These top-ups and tariffs rise in line with inflation between re-valuations.

Income from fees and charges to residents and service users (such as planning fees, social care contributions, commercial waste, parking and leisure) is a relatively small proportion of council income. Councils also receive funding through the New Homes Bonus for any increase in the number of residential properties in their area over a threshold of 0.4 per cent of the council tax base.

For more information, visit: www.local.gov.uk/topics/finance-and-business-rates

Holding the council to account

Overview and scrutiny

Overview and scrutiny lies at the heart of local accountability. It is the principal democratic means, between elections, of ensuring that decisions made by the council and its partners are held to account. In many councils, scrutiny has built up a reputation as a strong voice in the policy development process and a place where ideas for improvement can be debated and evaluated.



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Depending on the type of council (districts and counties have slightly different powers), overview and scrutiny has some specific statutory roles – such as the scrutiny of health bodies and other partner organisations. The profile and influence of health scrutiny has grown in recent years, and it has played a particularly important role as the NHS locally consults on and agrees sustainability and transformation plans.

The legislation setting up scrutiny arrangements makes it clear that scrutiny committees can look at any issue which affects the area or the area’s inhabitants. Scrutiny’s principal powers, however, relate to councils.

Scrutiny committees can require that cabinet members and council officers attend meetings; that information held by the council be provided to it; and that the cabinet provides responses to its recommendations. In addition, committee members have enhanced rights to access information held by the council.

Many councils now carry out the bulk of their detailed scrutiny work in informal time-limited task groups.

These can carry out investigations into any issue, collecting evidence from a wide range of sources. They make recommendations which, through a scrutiny committee, are sent to the council’s cabinet to be either accepted or rejected.

Where councils come together to form a combined authority, it must have an overview and scrutiny committee (although this does not replace those of the individual councils). Councils that have opted for a committee system are not required to have an overview and scrutiny committee; those with a cabinet system or an elected mayor must have at least one.

Getting it right

Scrutiny has no formal powers to stop the cabinet from doing something (or to make it do something) but it is far from toothless. If members work to build positive relationships with the cabinet and external partners, and make recommendations clearly based on evidence rather than partisan politics, it can act as a constructive, critical friend and can have significant influence over policy.

This is best achieved by scrutiny carrying out timely, relevant work that focuses on tangible outcomes for local people, and producing meaningful and realistic recommendations. The executive has a responsibility to ensure that scrutiny is properly resourced and supported and that they engage with it openly and honestly.

Health scrutiny

County and unitary councils have specific responsibility for holding the health service to account when local health bodies are planning ‘substantial variations’ to services. Health scrutiny is one of the most important ways that councils can respond to the concerns of local residents about health and wellbeing. It enables councillors to scrutinise how local health needs are being addressed, how health services are run and how they can be improved.

It can be a challenging task, as health scrutiny can play an important part in identifying failures and poor care. Councils need to recognise its important role – not only in holding acute trusts and other health bodies to account, but in bringing about change to improve health and reduce health inequalities.



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Centre for Public Scrutiny

The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) promotes the value of scrutiny and accountability in public services. It is part-funded with an LGA grant specifically to provide advice and guidance to councillors and officers with a scrutiny role.

Visit www.cfps.org.uk for more information and a range of case studies; telephone 020 3866 5100 or email info@cfps.org.uk for advice.

The Ombudsmen

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) investigates complaints from the public about councils and some other bodies providing public services in England. It also investigates complaints about registered adult social care providers. Similar duties are carried out by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

The LGO investigates allegations of maladministration that have caused

injustice to the complainant. Most council services can be investigated including some areas of housing, planning, education, social services, council tax, housing benefit and highways.

The LGO service is provided free-of-charge to the complainant. By law, councils or providers should have an opportunity to resolve complaints before they are referred to the ombudsman, and a complaint will not be considered unless this has happened. Complaints will only be considered if someone has suffered a significant personal injustice and the council or provider has not taken, or is unwilling to take, satisfactory action to resolve it.

If the LGO finds that the council or provider acted 'with fault' which caused the person an injustice, it will recommend a remedy to put things right. Where appropriate, it also recommends action to avoid similar issues affecting other people, such as reviewing practice and procedure, and can recommend remedies for other persons affected by the same fault.

Although it can hear complaints of maladministration stemming from the actions of individual councillors and council employees, the service can only seek to remedy the injustice and cannot discipline the employee(s) responsible. Unless they are also members of a professional body, such as the Law Society, individual officers can only be disciplined by their employer.

The LGO also carries out joint investigations with the other ombudsmen. For example, a complaint about a council's social services department and the NHS would be jointly investigated with the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (see below), with the LGO managing the joint investigation.

For more information, visit: www.lgo.org.uk

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) was set up by Parliament to provide an independent service to handle



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unresolved complaints relating to the NHS in England and UK government departments. Its findings are shared as a means of scrutinising public service providers and are used to help drive improvements in public services and complaint handling.

The PHSO combines the two statutory roles of parliamentary commissioner for administration (the Parliamentary Ombudsman) and the health service commissioner for England (Health Service Ombudsman). It is not a part of government or the NHS. Its role is to investigate unresolved complaints, unfair treatment and poor service in relation to government departments, other public organisations and NHS-funded healthcare services. Complaints about a government department or service must be referred by an MP.

For more information, visit: www.ombudsman.org.uk

Housing Ombudsman Service

The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) is an executive non-departmental public body which

requires social landlords (such as housing associations and councils) to be members of an approved scheme. Private landlords may also join the scheme on a voluntary basis.

The HOS investigates complaints and resolves disputes involving members of the scheme. Tenants of housing associations, local authorities and arms-length management organisations have the right to ask for their complaint to be considered by a 'designated person' once it has been through their landlord's complaints procedure. As a councillor, you may be asked to be a designated person. You can try and resolve the complaint yourself or refer it straight to the HOS.

For more information, visit: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Children's services and education

Safeguarding and looked after children

Local government plays a crucial statutory role in safeguarding children. The director of children's



Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Kelly Braund, Labour, London Borough of Merton

I applied to be a candidate early in 2017, having run the Merton campaign for Britain Stronger in Europe. I was a committed community organiser and loved nothing better than being on the doorstep talking to residents. I won a by-election in July that year.

Since making my maiden speech, I have made a speech at every council meeting I have attended – and now I even look forward to it. Seeing as I was terrified of public speaking only a few years ago, it really shows how becoming a councillor allows you to challenge yourself.



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services and the portfolio holder for children are ultimately accountable on behalf of the whole community and partner agencies, so everyone must play their part, along with the wider community.

Councils can use their links with police, schools, health professionals, community and faith groups to highlight the signs and ensure people know where to turn if they have concerns. High-profile cases in recent years have led to a national focus on child sexual exploitation, and each local area is expected to raise awareness and have multi-agency planning in place to respond to local issues.

Councils have a duty to ensure there is a sufficient supply of appropriate high-quality placements for all children in care, and all councillors have a duty as a 'corporate parent' for looked-after children and care leavers. In practical terms, this means councillors should ensure their council is recruiting enough foster carers, providing appropriate foster care placements and high-quality residential care homes, and that there are efficient plans for adoption,

adopter recruitment or special guardianship, where appropriate. Support for children in care and care leavers is also key.

The LGA produces resource packs for councillors to support the scrutiny and development of local children's services. Resource packs are currently available on the LGA's publications page looking at support for care leavers and the corporate parenting duty: www.local.gov.uk/publications

Making sure all children and young people can have the bright future they deserve is a key ambition of every council, but our children's services are under increasing pressure. In recent years, demand for these services has increased significantly. The number of children subject to child protection enquiries has increased from 73,800 in 2006/07 to 185,450 in 2016/17, a 151 per cent increase in just 10 years. Over the same period the number of children on child protection plans increased by almost 23,000. Although councils are finding innovative solutions, a £2 billion funding gap for children's services is expected by 2020. We are



pushing for urgent action to be taken to reduce the financial pressures and for a renewed focus on investing in early intervention.

To find out more, visit: www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures

Education and training

Despite considerable changes in national education policy over recent years, councils still retain the bulk of their statutory education duties. They have a key role as champions of educational excellence for all children and young people.

Significant budget cuts and the increasing number of academies and free schools mean the council role in school improvement is changing. Schools are increasingly expected



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to take responsibility for their own improvement and for helping other schools. Different models are developing across the country, with councils facilitating and supporting school-to-school improvement partnerships. Examples of differing approaches to school improvement taken by councils are set out in research recently commissioned by the LGA: www.local.gov.uk/enabling-school-improvement

Councils must ensure there are enough good-quality school places locally but they do not have the power to open new schools, which must be opened as free schools. Many areas are facing a large rise in demand. Councils still have a significant role in ensuring fair school admissions and have duties in relation to home-to-school transport for some children and young people. They continue to have a role in allocating school funding, despite the introduction of a national funding formula. The Department for Education will calculate funding for each council area, but councils themselves will continue to consult local schools, through the Schools Forum, to determine a locally agreed formula.

Young people must continue in education, training or apprenticeships to the age of 18. Councils must secure sufficient education and training provision for everyone aged 16-19 and for people aged 20-24 with a learning difficulty. They must also identify and track any young person not in education, training or employment.

Councils have few formal levers to fulfil these duties and so rely on relationships with key local partners to deliver this provision. These partners include schools, further education and work-based training providers and neighbouring councils (to support young people learning or training in another local authority area).

Adult social care and health

Adult social care

Adult social care and support is critical to the wellbeing of people with a range of often complex needs, their carers and families and our wider communities. The system operates

under the legal framework set out by the Care Act 2014. The Act is built on the principle of promoting individual wellbeing, defined in broad terms to include physical, mental, social, economic or emotional wellbeing. It embeds the concept of personalisation and gives individuals more control over their care and support.

All councils in England with social services responsibilities must be consistent in their assessment of people's needs and must follow a national minimum threshold of eligibility for care and support. Councils also have a duty to promote a diverse and efficient provider market so that a range of services are available locally to meet people's needs.

The Care Act was shaped by major inquiries and commissions such as the Dilnot Commission (which reviewed the funding system for care and support) and the Law Commission's work to review the laws and statutes covering care and support.

The Act includes provisions for universal deferred payment agreements (subject to some qualifying conditions) to help prevent



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people having to sell their homes to pay for care. It also introduced a cap on the amount that people have to contribute towards their care costs. In 2017, the Government announced it would not be proceeding with the cap on care costs, which had been due to be implemented in 2020. A Government Green Paper on care and support reform for older people is planned for the summer of 2018, and it is expected that this will include proposals for how people contribute to their care costs in the future.

Funding for adult social care and support is a key issue for councils. The LGA has been vocal in highlighting the pressure on adult social care and the consequences of underfunding (including the risk of more providers leaving the market or going bust; increased unmet and under-met need; further pressure on the care workforce and informal carers; and a reduced ability of social care to help deal with pressures facing the NHS).

The LGA has long argued for urgent government funding to make the system more sustainable. In 2017, the Chancellor announced that councils

would receive £2 billion of new 'improved Better Care Fund' funding over the next three years, including £1 billion in 2017/18. While this is good news for local government, short-term pressures remain, and the challenge of finding a long-term solution to the social care crisis is far from over (there is more detail on the Better Care Fund later in this section).

The LGA estimates that adult social care faces a funding gap of £2.3 billion by 2019/20. This includes £1 billion of 'core pressures' (inflation, demography and the National Living Wage) and an immediate and annually recurring £1.3 billion pressure to stabilise the provider market. The funding gap does not include other known pressures, such as the cost of funding historic liabilities and current and future costs associated with 'sleep in' payments for care workers.

The Care Act covers issues including:

- general responsibilities of local authorities (wellbeing, prevention, integration, information and advice)
- the individual's journey through the system (assessment, national eligibility, charging, care planning)

- provider failure and market oversight
- transition to adult services
- safeguarding adults at risk of abuse or neglect.

All councillors share a responsibility in relation to keeping people safe. Councillors may identify safeguarding concerns through their work with local residents which they need to raise. They can also ask questions of the council, and other organisations, about the safety and quality of services and the focus on achieving the best outcomes for vulnerable people.

Councillors will want to ensure that local people achieve the best possible outcomes across health and social care. People with learning disabilities, autism, mental health needs, dementia, physical disabilities and others, such as people experiencing loneliness or isolation, may rely on their council for information, advice, support and services.

To find out more, visit the adult social care section of the LGA website: www.local.gov.uk/topics/social-care-health-and-integration/adult-social-care



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Care and health integration

The Care Act places a duty on councils to promote integration. However, integration is not an end in itself – it is a means of improving health and wellbeing outcomes by joining up services around the individual and making the best use of public resources. The LGA is committed to supporting councils and their health partners to adopt a place-based and person-centred approach to improving health and wellbeing outcomes, and integrating support to achieve this end.

Since the Health and Social Care Act 2012 was introduced, all unitary and county councils must:

- set up health and wellbeing boards
- develop joint strategic needs assessments and joint health and wellbeing strategies
- promote integration of health, social care and other services to improve health outcomes
- procure Local Healthwatch (a patient and public involvement body).

Health and wellbeing boards bring together the political, professional, clinical and community leadership in an area to identify key health challenges, agree priorities and drive integrated activity to improve health outcomes for local people. They are statutory committees of the council but are unlike any other council committee. They include, as a minimum, at least one councillor, the directors of adult social care, children’s services and public health, and representatives from local clinical commissioning groups and Local Healthwatch.

All councillors have an important role in identifying health and wellbeing priorities for their communities. Some will occupy key positions on health and wellbeing boards. Others will take part in health overview and scrutiny, be non-executive directors on the boards of mental health, community and acute trusts, or be involved in other ways.

In 2016, the LGA wrote ‘Stepping up to the place: the key to successful integration’ with the NHS Confederation, NHS Clinical Commissioners and the Association for the Directors of Adult Social

Services (ADASS), setting out our system-wide vision for a fully integrated health and care system.

Care and health improvement

The LGA represents the social care sector and is in a unique position to bridge the interface between national policy and local implementation. Through its Care and Health Improvement Programme, the LGA is working with ADASS, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services in England, and the Department of Health and Social Care on a range of social care improvement and health integration initiatives, taking a sector-led improvement approach. The priorities for 2018 are:

- resilience in adult social care
- effective care and health systems
- fulfilling our role with NHS England in the Transforming Care programme.

This includes resources and events aimed specifically at councillors.

To find out more, visit: www.local.gov.uk/chip



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The Better Care Fund

The Better Care Fund, introduced in 2015, created a local single pooled budget to incentivise the NHS and local government to shift resources into social care and community services for the benefit of people, communities and health and care systems. In some areas it has provided an impetus to joint working, and in many areas it has supported existing joint work. However, the way in which the fund was set up means the impact has been less positive in some places.

In 2017, the Chancellor announced the £2 billion 'improved Better Care Fund' to go directly to councils in order to meet adult social care needs, reduce pressure on the NHS and ensure that the local social care provider market is supported. However, this funding comes with greater central influence and direction over how local areas spend it. In the LGA's view, there is a disproportionate focus on unrealistic targets around reducing delayed transfers of care, in particular delayed transfers that are attributable to adult social care.

The LGA will continue to work with NHS England and government departments to ensure that the fund returns to its original objective: to encourage health and social care local leaders to work together to provide joined-up, community-based services to improve health, wellbeing and independence, thereby reducing pressure on acute health services.

Sustainability and transformation partnerships

Sustainability and transformation plans (STPs) were proposed as place-based, medium-term plans to address the triple challenges facing health and care systems: improving health and wellbeing, improving quality and safety and improving financial sustainability. Unfortunately, their practical implementation has largely focused on the financial challenges of acute hospitals, to the detriment of working with partners to address problems across the health and care system.

In most areas, STPs have been developed without any meaningful engagement with councillors or citizens, leading to the widespread

perception of a lack of transparency and local accountability. The LGA believes that STPs need to take a system-wide approach and engage councils in a meaningful way in the development of plans, including utilising health and wellbeing boards as forums to engage with councillors. Councils are very keen to see STPs succeed, as they could play a vital role in tackling a number of issues in the health and care system. The LGA is working closely with NHS England and other partners to develop support and resources for STPs to work more effectively with local government.

Mental health

Councils have statutory and non-statutory duties that form an integral part of mental health care and support. In most cases, when people are treated in a hospital or mental health facility, they have agreed or volunteered to be there. However, there are situations where a person can be detained (or 'sectioned') and treated without their agreement under the Mental Health Act 1983. This Act covers the assessment, treatment and rights of people with a mental health



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disorder and was amended by the Mental Health Act 2007. The Act is currently being reviewed.

Councils make a significant contribution to the mental wellbeing of their local communities. There is a recognised need to re-focus mental health policy away from medicalisation and mental ill-health to prevention, early intervention and mental wellness. The LGA report 'Being mindful' explores how councils influence people's mental wellbeing and how council services, from social care to parks, education and housing, help to make up the fabric of mental health support for people in our communities.

In 2015, following the report 'Future in Mind', which set out a blueprint for how local areas could improve children and young people's mental health services, central government committed £1.4 billion in additional funding for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) over a five-year period. Funding was released to local areas following the development of local transformation plans, which were signed off by health and wellbeing boards.

In 2017, an additional £300 million was made available to support implementation of the proposals in the Government's Green Paper on transforming children and young people's mental health provision. The Green Paper set out proposals for schools and the NHS to play a greater role in delivering early intervention support in schools. Councils commission some CAMHS services and have a number of responsibilities for schools, therefore they will need to work with local partners to ensure the reforms are embedded locally and there are no gaps in service provision.

For a simple overview please read our **'Don't be left in the dark'** guide to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing: www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures-camhs



Mental capacity

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 provides a legal framework for acting and making decisions on behalf of adults who lack the capacity to make particular decisions for themselves. It applies to all professions – staff and employers have a duty to ensure they know how to use it. Most trusts and local authorities will have a Mental Capacity Act lead to provide specialist advice. The Act allows restraint and restrictions to be used – but only if they are in a person's best interests.

The Mental Capacity Act Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) are new statutory safeguards introduced to prevent deprivations of liberty, and include independent consideration and authorisation. Deprivations of liberty in hospitals or care homes (other than under the Mental Health Act) should now follow the DoLS process, and all affected patients and residents should benefit from these safeguards.

The 2014 Supreme Court judgement on DoLS resulted in an almost 70 per cent increase in the number of DoLS assessments that councils had to conduct between 2014/15 and 2015/16.



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The LGA has called on the Government for a fully-funded scheme so councils can ensure that everyone who lacks mental capacity is at the heart of decisions made about their care.

Councils and health

The biggest influences on the health of individuals and populations are the social, economic and environmental conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. Despite concerted action over several decades, health inequalities (the gap between the healthiest and least healthy in society) is widening. This has led to major change in the way service providers work together to identify health priorities and improve outcomes.

An introduction to the health system for councillors can be found at: www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-health-system-england

In 2013, responsibility for the delivery of public health services such as smoking cessation, drug and alcohol treatment and sexual health services transferred from the NHS to local government and Public Health

England. This represented a major extension of local government powers and duties, along with an opportunity to change the focus from treating sickness to actively promoting health and wellbeing.

Preventing illness and empowering people to stay well requires action from all sections of the community. The broader determinants of health – people’s local environment, housing, transport, employment and social interactions – can be significantly influenced by how councils deliver their core roles and functions. Public health in individual councils is backed by a ring-fenced grant and a specialist public health team. Other services such as housing, planning, leisure and children’s services can support work around public health issues.

For more information on public health visit: www.local.gov.uk/topics/social-care-health-and-integration/public-health



Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Kelly Braund, Labour, London Borough of Merton

My advice for new councillors is:

- Don't be afraid to ask questions. At one of my first scrutiny panels, everyone was using an acronym that I didn't recognise, so I asked. The other panel members sighed with relief – they didn't know what it stood for either.
- It's a steep learning curve: take advantage of all the training on offer, take time to meet the officers and find a mentor to show you the ropes.
- Just say yes: positions are always coming up on committees, panels and task groups. Put yourself forward – your fresh ideas might be exactly what is needed.



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In 2015, responsibility for commissioning the Healthy Child Programme (HCP) for 0-5 year olds transferred from NHS England to upper-tier and unitary authorities. New responsibilities include delivering five mandated universal health checks in addition to the HCP and commissioning health visiting and the family nurse partnership programme.

Unlike the previous public health transfer, only the commissioning transferred and not the workforce, which is still employed by the provider organisations. The transfer joined up commissioning for 0-19 year olds (and up to 25 for people with special educational needs or disabilities) and improves continuity of care for children and families. It presents an opportunity for councils to look at how they can transform these services and integrate them with children's services, health, education and social care to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

To find out more, visit: www.local.gov.uk/topics/social-care-health-and-integration/public-health/children-public-health-transfer

Councils and the economy

Economic development is not a statutory role for councils but they play a vital role in supporting local economies and driving growth, for example by:

- working with colleges and training providers to ensure that local people have the skills that they, and local businesses, need
- supporting growth and investment in new and existing businesses, for example through regulatory services
- enhancing the quality of life for their communities and making local areas more attractive to shoppers and business investment
- improving infrastructure, such as improved transport or broadband services.

Economies do not follow council boundaries – for example, people travel to work in different areas. Councils play a strategic role in determining economic priorities and working towards economic growth and job creation, and they work

closely with others in their sub-region. In many areas, councils are coming together to form combined authorities, which allows them to pool resources around issues such as economic development and transport to support growth across a wider area.

Central government recognises the importance of local or 'place-based' factors such as the availability of skills, local infrastructure and socio-economic issues such as income levels and housing affordability. It is therefore looking to work with councils to improve economic productivity and people's career opportunities, as set out in the new national industrial strategy. Mayoral combined authorities appear to be central government's favoured structure for further devolution of economic-related powers to local areas.

Whether your council is part of a combined authority or not, it will be working with leaders from the private sector and universities as part of a local enterprise partnership (LEP). There are 38 LEPs covering all parts of the country. Their priorities vary depending on local economic circumstances, but they were set up as business-led partnerships between councils and the private sector.



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LEPs play a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and job creation. They usually receive funding from their constituent councils and from central government, and businesses may offer support 'in kind'.

For more information, visit: www.local.gov.uk/topics/economic-growth

Work Local is our campaign calling for the growing skills gap to be addressed and for local areas to be put at the heart of career and employment provision.

Across a local area, take up of the Work Local vision could each year result in 8,500 more people in work and 6,000 increasing their skills. That means that for the average combined authority, £280 million benefits to the public purse alongside a £420 million boost to the economy.

Find out about our asks in detail and how to get involved: www.local.gov.uk/work-local



Hot topic: digital connectivity

A digital connection is now widely considered 'the fourth utility', in the same league as a water, gas and electricity supply. Councillors are increasingly campaigning to improve the speed and reliability of connection for local residents and businesses, whether fixed-line broadband to the home or office or mobile on-the-go coverage.

Councillors also have an important role to play at ward level, for example in helping to find the best location for new digital infrastructure. Improving a local area's mobile coverage often requires the building or upgrading of mobile phone masts. In this situation, councillors can represent the views of their community to mobile operators and help balance the needs of those wanting better coverage with those who might disagree with the placement of a mast. Mobile operators have signed up to a code of practice obligating them to make councillors aware when a new mast is to be erected in their ward.

As a local representative, you can request that they liaise with you and your community on the best placement of new mobile infrastructure.

The council-led superfast broadband programme has already enabled 95 per cent of premises in the UK to have superfast speed. For areas without adequate download speeds, the Government is introducing a 'universal service obligation' (USO), so that by 2020 everyone in the UK will have a right to request high-speed broadband of at least 10Mbps download speed. The LGA has argued that while the proposed USO is a step in the right direction, it will leave approximately 60,000 premises unserved – mostly in rural areas. This brings the potential for an increasing digital divide affecting businesses and residents in those areas.

The LGA has argued for Government to be more ambitious and ensure the broadband USO covers 100 per cent of premises.



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Culture, heritage and sport

Culture, heritage and sport are among the most used and highly valued council services. Library services alone were visited 225 million times in 2014/15 – more than visits to Premier League football games, the cinema and the top 10 UK tourist attractions combined. The economic impact of these services is considerable: the creative industries are worth £84 billion a year to the UK economy, while tourism is worth almost £127 billion – making them relevant to any council considering growing the local economy.

Most of these services are of a non-statutory (optional) nature, so there is a lot of variation in the services that councils provide and how they provide them. Exceptions to this are the statutory provision of public libraries by upper-tier and unitary councils and the statutory protection, by planning authorities, of listed buildings and scheduled monuments.

Delivery models are diverse, ranging from direct provision to shared services, trusts, public-private partnerships and community owned

or managed facilities. Culture and sports assets such as libraries, museums and leisure centres are increasingly used as gateways to other local services. This reflects the sector's focus on positioning and evidencing the contribution of culture, heritage, tourism and sport to wider community outcomes such as economic growth, health and wellbeing, support for young people and community cohesion.

To find out more about these services, their contribution to the economic and health agendas and best practice in delivering them, visit: www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport

Supporting low-income households

In 2012, the Coalition Government embarked on a major programme of welfare reform which was intended to simplify the existing system, improve work incentives and reduce national spending on working-age benefits.

Councils have supported households throughout the implementation of these welfare reforms. They have

identified those most at risk of poverty, health inequalities and social exclusion and have prioritised better integration of support and early intervention. A number of national initiatives, most notably the Troubled Families programme, have focused on better integration of services to address multiple disadvantage.

The years since the 2007/08 financial crash have seen considerable pressures on many households, particularly those at the lower end of the income spectrum and those facing other barriers to social inclusion and social mobility, such as ill health.

Many parts of the country now have low levels of unemployment. However, low pay, part-time work, poor progression opportunities and the 'gig economy' continue to present real challenges for many working households. The Government has also recognised the detrimental impact of worklessness on life chances and has committed to doing more to support workless families.

A shortage of social and affordable housing, along with high rental



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costs in the private rented sector, are presenting real challenges for councils and families in many parts of the country.

Councils are therefore bringing together funding and services across welfare benefits, housing, employment, education, health and social care and financial inclusion to ensure that those most at risk of socio-economic disadvantage have choices and opportunities and can access the support they need to improve their life chances.

Welfare reform

Councils are working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Jobcentre Plus and other partners (such as the learning and skills sector, voluntary and community sector and housing) to help with implementation of this welfare reform and support those affected.

The Government's stated aim is to simplify the benefits system and improve work incentives. It is making significant changes to entitlement and the way in-work and out-of-work benefits are calculated and administered.

Councils have a central role in both implementing the reforms and managing the transition and impact for local people. The reforms are extensive, and in some cases contentious and politically contested. The main areas of change are outlined here.

Universal Credit

Universal Credit combines and simplifies the main working-age benefits into one monthly payment per household. It is expected to be available for all new claimants from July 2019, and for claimants on existing benefits to be transferred onto it by 2022. Most claims will be made and managed online.

Support for housing costs, which was previously often paid directly to landlords as housing benefit, will be provided as part of the Universal Credit payment.

Responsibility for administering housing benefit is gradually transferring from councils to the DWP as Universal Credit is implemented. However, councils currently retain considerable responsibility for housing benefit, particularly for more vulnerable residents, and will

still administer pension credit (which provides housing payments for older residents). Households in temporary accommodation will remain on housing benefit until at least 2022 to resolve some issues, in particular around assessment periods.

Councils and their local partners continue to have a key role in helping people to make and manage their Universal Credit claim, manage their finances and access housing and employment. Provision of assisted digital and personal budgeting support is called Universal Support and is funded to the local level by the DWP.

Within Universal Credit, considerable changes are being made to work-related benefits – in particular through reductions to working tax credits and bringing Employment Support Allowance in line with Jobseeker's Allowance.

The benefit cap

This places a cap on the total benefits for most households where no adult is in work, currently £442 a week for families in London and £385 outside



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London (£296/£258 for single people). It was first implemented as a reduction to housing benefit, administered by councils, but is being applied as a cap on Universal Credit as this is introduced. The benefit cap can present particular challenges for lone parents with young children, and many councils are prioritising targeted support for these households.

Removal of the spare room subsidy

Unofficially referred to as the 'bedroom tax', this is also known as the social sector size criterion or the under-occupancy penalty. It applies to housing benefit recipients in social housing who are deemed to have spare bedroom/s, with some exemptions. Housing benefit is reduced by 14 per cent for one spare room and 25 per cent for two or more. Councils have been given additional discretionary housing payment funds to support residents with a convincing case for needing an extra room.

Local housing allowance

Local housing allowance (LHA) is the maximum level of rent used to calculate housing benefit entitlement for those renting privately. It is currently the 30th percentile of average local rents. The Government has frozen most working-age benefits, including local housing allowance, until 2020. This is one of the main ways in which it hopes to realise £12 billion of planned savings. This is likely to have a considerable impact on residents in higher-cost areas. The Government announced additional funding for the Targeted Affordability Fund in the 2017 Autumn Budget to address some of the issues in higher-cost areas.

Disability benefit

The Government has significantly reformed disability benefits, introducing more regular and stringent eligibility testing and reducing awards in the transition from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to the Personal Independence Payment (PIP), with an estimated saving of around £1 billion a year.

Local support for households

Many councils place their support for those affected by welfare reforms within the context of wider strategies to reduce poverty and promote social and financial inclusion. It is likely to sit alongside, in particular, employment support for disadvantaged jobseekers; housing support for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness; and work to support and promote financial inclusion. Key partners include job centres, local advice and support providers such as Citizens Advice and housing providers.

Your council may have a **local welfare scheme** or similar. In 2012, the Government devolved funding from the Social Fund (which provided grants, loans and in-kind support to households facing severe short-term disadvantage) to local government as funding for 'local welfare assistance'. Separately identified funding for these schemes ceased in 2015, and the number of councils providing this kind of support has reduced significantly as a result.



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Councils receive money for **discretionary housing payments** (DHP) which is intended to help housing benefit claimants who face short-term or transitional challenges with meeting their housing costs. DHP pots have been increased in recent years to help mitigate some of the impacts of the welfare reforms. The use of the DHP pot, and the pressures upon it, vary from council to council.

Financial support and debt advice

Councils are increasingly focusing on the provision, commissioning and signposting of financial support alongside their support on housing, employment and public health. This can include working with local credit unions, voluntary sector organisations and financial service providers to improve alternatives to high-cost credit or help people to manage down their debt. It may be integrated with other forms of direct financial support or intensive advice and mentoring, for example as households move to Universal Credit.

Councils take account of financial inclusion in the design of their local

council tax support schemes and their approach to debt recovery.

Councils and the environment

Planning

As a councillor you are likely to be involved in planning at some point. Planning decisions can impact on housing, job creation, climate change, investment, infrastructure and the quality of people's lives. They can be controversial, and finding the right balance between conflicting perspectives can be challenging. Community involvement is critical in both plan-making and dealing with applications.

The Planning Advisory Service, a programme within the LGA, provides advice and support to councils (officers and councillors) to help them understand and respond to planning reform. As the service is a grant-funded programme, some of its support is offered free of charge.

To find out more, visit: www.local.gov.uk/pas

The Local Plan

This is written by the council in consultation with community groups and other stakeholders. It sets out the council's approach to development and is used as the basis for planning decisions. Groups of councils can write a joint plan. It must reflect the National Planning Policy Framework.

The Local Plan is examined by the Planning Inspectorate. If agreed then the local authority adopts it, making it the statutory plan for the area. Plans must be kept up-to-date or councils risk decisions being made against national, rather than local, policies.

Neighbourhood planning

Neighbourhood plans are written by parish or town councils or neighbourhood forums. They are a tool to give communities more influence over the type, location, size, pace and design of development in their area (providing it fits with local and national policies).

These plans become part of the development plan for the area once they have been passed by an examiner



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and ratified by the community through a referendum. Councillors can encourage communities to take advantage of this tool, help them to understand the process, act as a liaison with the council and contribute to the development of proposals in their ward or division.

Planning applications

Sometimes called development management, this is the aspect of planning that people are most familiar with and the main way of implementing the Local Plan. Decisions are made in two ways. Officers can determine some of the more straightforward applications, leaving the planning committee to focus on strategic or controversial applications. The committee aims to balance the economic, environmental and social impacts of development to achieve the ambitions set out in the Local Plan.

As a councillor, you may be lobbied by individuals or groups on planning applications. If you are not on the planning committee, you can ask to address it as the local councillor when it considers a particular application.

If you are on the committee, you can get involved and express your opinions in advance of the decision as long as you retain an open mind, listen to all the evidence and don't predetermine the decision. Check your council's code of conduct for guidance on getting involved in planning proposals.

Housing

Housing authorities have different arrangements for meeting local housing need. Some run their housing stock directly or through an arms-length management organisation. Others may have transferred their stock and will work closely with local housing associations to place residents on the council housing waiting list.

Demand for housing is steadily increasing and there are lots of opportunities for councils to support the development of new housing. This can include working in partnership with housing associations or the private sector, using public sector land, building new homes and bringing empty properties back into use.

But far fewer houses are being built than we need. The country has not

built enough homes to meet demand since 1977/78, when 44 per cent of homes were built by councils. 183,000 homes were built last year, but we need between 220,000 and 250,000 new homes a year to meet demand.

The Government has begun to respond to the urgent need for housebuilding by committing to building 1 million homes by 2020/21 and has responded to LGA Housing Commission asks in the Housing White Paper by, for example, increasing the funding and flexibility for the Affordable Homes Programme and increasing Housing Revenue Account borrowing headroom by an additional £1 billion.

We continue to push for a more ambitious vision and substantive measures – allowing councils to retain more Right to Buy receipts to invest in housing, lifting the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap, and providing rental certainty from 2025 – that will enable local government to build the genuinely affordable homes communities need.

To find out more, visit: www.local.gov.uk/topics/housing-and-planning



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Councils have duties to collect and dispose of waste. The arrangements for this vary. In two-tier areas, district councils are responsible for waste collection and county councils for waste disposal. Some metropolitan districts and London boroughs are combined waste and disposal authorities, but others have responsibility for collection only, with disposal provided by statutory waste authorities. All unitary councils have responsibility for waste and disposal.

Councils have different approaches to the frequency of collection and the services offered; some have joint arrangements with neighbouring authorities.

Climate change and extreme weather

The Climate Change Act 2008 set a target for an 80 per cent cut in greenhouse gases by 2050 in order to mitigate the potential impacts of a changing climate, such as increased flood risk and heatwaves.

Extreme weather can have a major impact on council services and

property. In recent years, drought, snow, heatwaves, storms and flooding have affected many buildings and public areas, damaged roads and bridges and created challenges in maintaining essential services such as schools and home-based care. With extreme weather predicted to increase, councils are being encouraged to put in place appropriate long-term risk management strategies.

A range of LGA resources to help councils cope with severe weather can be found at: www.local.gov.uk/topics/severe-weather

Transport

Councils play a vital role in keeping people and businesses moving so that they can work, shop, use local services, visit friends and family and deliver goods. A council's role includes transport planning, maintaining highways and managing traffic, supporting public transport and promoting road safety.

Locally managed roads make up 98 per cent of the road network and are the responsibility of highway

authorities (top-tier and unitary councils). In London, Transport for London manages trunk roads and local authorities manage the local network.

Strategic transport authorities (county and unitary councils, passenger transport authorities and London boroughs) produce long-term transport plans and strategies. These typically aim to support more sustainable and healthier transport systems, manage air quality through vehicle emissions and improve public health and safety, while also improving the local and sub-regional economy.

Maintaining highways and managing traffic

Councils spend a significant amount of money on maintaining roads and managing traffic. This includes fixing potholes, gritting and clearing main roads in the winter and inspecting, regulating and providing information on roadworks (such as those carried out by utility companies). Fixing potholes is expensive, so where possible councils will try to spend their limited funding on planned works and improvements that make road surfaces more resilient to extreme weather.



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Parking enforcement is another key role. Parking controls exist for many reasons, but they are typically designed to:

- ensure roads are safe
- enable traffic to flow freely
- manage the competing demands of residents, businesses and commuters
- provide parking for disabled people and health/care workers.

Public transport

Councils provide public transport as part of their broader transport strategy and to help meet the needs of local communities. In most places outside of London, local bus services are run by private operators. Many routes which would not be commercially viable rely on financial support from, and contracts with, the council. The national concessionary fares scheme provides free off-park bus travel for older people and eligible disabled people and is administered by councils.

Councils also provide home-to-school transport and support demand-responsive transport as a cost-

effective way of providing vital services in areas of low demand. They may provide grants to voluntary and community sector schemes for those who find it difficult to access other forms of transport. District and unitary authorities are responsible for licensing the provision of taxis and private hire vehicles.

Road safety

Councils play an important role in promoting road safety through design features such as traffic calming, cycle lanes, improving visibility and road layout design. They will look at engineering solutions in areas with accident problems and carry out safety audits on new roads and changes to existing road layouts. Many also deliver a programme of education, publicity and training to increase the skills and knowledge of local road users.

Hot topic: managing air quality

The state of air quality in our towns and cities is now a high-profile issue for local and national politicians. As

a result of the UK being in breach of nitrogen dioxide limit values under the EU Air Quality Directive, the Government and many councils are prioritising air quality more than they used to. Councils have a responsibility under Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) legislation to review air quality. Where concentrations exceed national objectives, measures should be put in place to reduce emissions and this should be reported in the local air quality action plan.

Transport is responsible for 80 per cent of harmful roadside emissions. Typical measures to reduce emissions from local sources include traffic management, encouraging the uptake of cleaner vehicles and increased use of public transport, along with more sustainable transport methods such as walking and cycling. The Government's latest air quality plan sets out further measures to help councils manage air quality and bring the UK to within national air quality standards. This may include 'clean air zones', with measures such as charging high-polluting vehicles to enter areas where the council is trying to tackle air pollution.



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Safer, stronger communities

Police and crime panels

All areas outside London have directly elected police and crime commissioners (PCCs) who are responsible for holding the local police service to account. In London, the elected mayor performs this function. These commissioners have a duty to ensure that there is an efficient and effective force in their area, to set the strategic priorities through a five-year plan, set the police precept and hire (and fire) the chief constable.

The work of every PCC is scrutinised by a police and crime panel. In London, the panel is a committee of the Greater London Assembly (a different system operates in the City of London). Police and crime panels must scrutinise the PCC's police and crime plan, the annual report on progress against the plan, the proposed precept and some senior appointments. The panel can veto the precept and the appointment of a chief constable. Panels have a minimum membership

of 10 councillors and a maximum of 18 (plus two independent appointees). Where a PCC takes over the fire and rescue authority (see below), the police and crime panel will have equivalent scrutiny functions in relation to the PCC's fire responsibilities.

For more on the role of PCCs, visit the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners website: www.apccs.police.uk

Fire and rescue services

Fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) are responsible for delivering fire and rescue services. These fall into six distinct categories.

In some areas, fire and rescue is part of the county council. In others, it is delivered by a standalone organisation called a combined fire authority (made up of members from a number of councils). In large cities, responsibility falls to the metropolitan fire authorities, while in London (from April 2018) it is the responsibility of the elected Mayor, with a Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience. FRAs can be led by the local police and

crime commissioner (see below) and there are also other mayoral-led FRAs, such as Greater Manchester, which has a fire committee.

FRAs are statutory bodies and, in the case of combined and metropolitan authorities, are made up of a politically balanced committee of local councillors which oversees the service's policy and delivery. Councillors on county or unitary councils can be nominated to serve on these FRAs by their councils. County councils with responsibility for fire and rescue will have a portfolio holder leading on these services.

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 allows police and crime commissioners (PCCs) to take over the governance of fire and rescue services or to become a part of the FRA. At the time of publication, Essex was the only area with a PCC-led fire and rescue authority. PCCs wishing to follow this route must consult the affected councils, communities and employees, and where there is local disagreement put together a business case for the Secretary of State to decide on.



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Community cohesion and counter-terrorism

Working with partners and local communities, councils have a key role to play in building community cohesion, developing resilience to extremism and helping to identify and protect people at risk of radicalisation. Some councils currently receive additional government funding for dedicated posts to support work around counter-terrorism and counter-extremism.

At a national level, the UK's counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST) comprises four strands. The most important from a council point of view is the Prevent workstream, which aims to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 introduced a statutory Prevent duty for councils which requires them to have due regard to the need to prevent people being drawn into terrorism. This includes establishing multi-agency panels, known as Channel panels, to offer support to people at risk of radicalisation.

The national counter-extremism

strategy includes objectives to counter extremist ideology, disrupt activity and build cohesive communities. Councils are well placed to deliver work around counter-extremism – including challenging extremist ideology, responding and building resilience to hate crime and tackling harmful illegal cultural practices. A new local authority led network, the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism, has been set up to provide support and develop and disseminate good practice among councils.

Councils' work on cohesion includes:

- working with their communities and partners to develop a common vision and a sense of belonging for all
- ensuring that the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued
- helping people from different backgrounds develop strong and positive relationships
- supporting work to enable those from different backgrounds to have similar life opportunities.

The Government has committed to developing a new integration strategy and will be working with a number of councils to progress this.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission will be producing a toolkit in 2018 to support elected officials to seek out early interventions to address offensive speech in their communities.

Find more out at: www.local.gov.uk/topics/community-safety

Public protection / regulatory services

Public protection or regulatory services in councils (usually taken to include environmental health, trading standards and licensing) have two important functions: protecting communities and supporting local businesses. Around half of all business contact with councils is through these services, which gives them an important role in facilitating economic growth, maintaining consumer confidence and supporting the high standards that make an area attractive to live in, work in and visit.



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As they are relatively small, public protection services have been hit particularly hard by reduced budgets. Some councils face real challenges in ensuring that these services are sustainable, but they can make a significant contribution to key council priorities such as safeguarding and local growth.

Licensing

Licensing exists to protect customers and businesses and support economic development in a way that manages the risk of potentially dangerous or irresponsible activities harming individuals, businesses and communities. It provides assurance to residents about the businesses they engage with and boosts consumer confidence in an area.

Councils are responsible for issuing more than 150 different types of licences, consents, permits and registrations covering a diverse range of trades and activities. These include licenses permitting the sale of alcohol and overseeing local taxi/private hire vehicle services and gambling premises. Councillors have a specific role in licensing through the work of licensing committees.

For more information on public protection services, visit: www.local.gov.uk/topics/licences-regulations-and-trading-standards

The voluntary and community sector

The term 'voluntary and community sector' (VCS) covers a range of organisations including national and local charities, tenants' and residents' organisations, faith organisations and community groups. Sometimes referred to as the 'third sector', it can also include housing associations, social enterprises and cooperatives. These not-for-profit organisations seek to reinvest any income generated in social, environmental or cultural objectives.

In the past, most councils gave grants to local VCS organisations, either to cover their core costs or to contribute to a particular aspect of their work. These days, councils often directly commission VCS organisations to deliver specific outcomes or services. Some councils have created new not-for-profit organisations to deliver services previously delivered by

the council, such as youth services, libraries and children's centres.

Many VCS organisations employ significant numbers of local people and offer a route into employment through volunteering programmes. As such, they are an integral part of efforts to deliver on wider inclusive growth ambitions. The VCS is often represented in local partnership structures such as health and wellbeing boards and local strategic partnerships. Building strong relationships with the sector can form a significant part of every councillor's role.

More information is available from:

- the National Council of Voluntary Organisations www.ncvo.org.uk
- the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action www.navca.org.uk
- Social Enterprise UK www.socialenterprise.org.uk

The LGA is working to support councils to better engage their communities in the design and delivery of services.

Details of this can be found at: www.local.gov.uk/community-action



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Improvement, efficiency and innovation

Local government is the most efficient part of the public sector. Councils are developing new and innovative approaches to service delivery in response to the ongoing cuts to public spending and the increased demand for services.

Improvement support

Each council is responsible for its own performance and improvement, and councils collectively are responsible for the performance of the whole sector. Our role at the LGA is to provide tools and support to help councils improve, and to maintain an overview of performance so we can offer specific support to councils facing particular challenges.

Based on what we know from experience works best, our key support offer includes:

- leadership training and development
- peer challenge

- performance comparison with others
- our productivity programme.

The LGA's improvement support is being refreshed all the time in response to feedback from councils. For example, a finance support offer has been developed which includes a financial peer challenge, financial health check, a budget challenge and tools to enable councils to assess their own financial position.

For more information about the sector-led approach to local government improvement, visit: www.local.gov.uk/our-support

Peer challenge

A peer challenge allows councils to review and transform their services and deal with performance issues. Delivered by experienced local government officers and councillors, it is a voluntary process tailored to the needs of an individual council. Every council is entitled to a corporate or financial peer challenge every four to five years, at no cost. County and unitary councils may also qualify for a subsidised or fully-funded children's

safeguarding peer challenge/ diagnostic.

A corporate peer challenge focuses on priority setting, leadership, governance, financial management and capacity. The process includes:

- a challenge team with experienced councillors and officers
- a pre-visit; four days on site; end-of-week feedback and a final report
- a challenge shaped to focus on the council's own priorities
- a follow-up visit by the challenge team one or two years later.

Recent corporate peer challenges have focused on:

- providing an organisational 'health check' and reassurance about overall performance and direction of travel
- new ways of working, service delivery and relationships with citizens/partners
- corporate priorities such as regeneration and economic development
- proposed corporate strategy and future financial plans.

For more information visit: www.local.gov.uk/peer-challenges



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Efficiency and innovation

Councils are constantly finding new and innovative ways to deliver services and improve the lives of people in their local communities. The LGA collates examples of these initiatives within the searchable case studies section of its website:

www.local.gov.uk/case-studies

The productivity programme includes a range of initiatives designed to help councils reshape their services and increase efficiency. Nowadays, that inevitably means a focus on saving money and generating income.

The programme has three main areas of activity:

- **transforming services** to make them more efficient and effective through behavioural insights, re-designing services and greater use of technology
- **smarter sourcing** through commissioning and buying services, goods and works that contribute to local outcomes more effectively and at the best value for money; and managing resulting contracts to optimise value, including social value

- **generating income** – helping councils to develop commercial skills and knowledge to generate a greater proportion of funding.

At a time of immense financial pressure and increasing public expectations, councils face their greatest challenge yet to reshape services in a way that meets local need and is cost-effective. New councillors are in a unique position to be able to look with fresh eyes at how their council does things.



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Cost-saving questions for newly elected councillors to ask

1. Given the budget restrictions required by all councils, how clearly articulated and understood is the political vision for the future role, size and shape of your council?
2. With the Government's plan to make local government financially self-sufficient, does your council have a strategy for achieving long-term financial sustainability?
3. Does the council influence how the resources held by other partners in the local area are prioritised and spent?
4. Does the council have a prioritised medium-term financial strategy for the next four years which allows for the appropriate level of reserves?
5. Have all potential savings been identified and agreed for the next few years, and is the council on track to make these savings?
6. What is the council doing to manage future demand for services – for example by focusing on prevention of need or getting things right first time?
7. Does the council have a shared services strategy to reduce management, support and back-office costs while protecting frontline services?
8. Does the council and its partners have a comprehensive view of the publicly-owned assets in the local area, is this published openly and are they being used to generate income?
9. Does the council negotiate its contracts with outside suppliers to maximise opportunities for making savings and adding social value?
10. Is the council working with a full range of social care providers to reduce the cost of complex placements in children's and adult social care?
11. How is the council taking advantage of commercial opportunities locally to generate more income to protect frontline services? Are these commercial activities allied to the political outcomes for the local area and residents – for example housing, economic growth, jobs or skills?

To find out more, visit:
www.local.gov.uk/efficiency-and-income-generation



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Where to find out more

The Local Government Association website

www.local.gov.uk

The LGA website is updated daily to provide the latest news, information and guidance for councillors and officers. From here, you can sign up to **email bulletins** – handy digests of the latest news, analysis and best practice, and **on-the-day briefings** – summaries of important events and developments that might affect local government. Topics can include the Budget, the Queen’s Speech or new legislation.

The LGA’s four **political group offices** (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Independent) each have their own home pages with links to events, publications and group activities. The Independent Group represents independent councillors and those who belong to any of the smaller political groups (with the exception of the BNP).

The latest **analysis, guidance and good practice** on the issues that affect councils and their residents are covered under the following broad headings:

- children and young people
- communities community safety
- culture, tourism, leisure and sport
- devolution
- economic growth
- employment and skills
- environment and waste
- European and international
- finance and business rates
- fire and rescue
- housing and planning
- licences, regulations and trading standards
- severe weather
- social care, health and integration
- transport
- welfare reform.

First is a monthly magazine sent to councillors and chief executives in LGA member councils. The online version is at: www.local.gov.uk/first

The LGA’s Twitter handle is **@LGComms** which provides updates and information on its work. The Twitter handle **@LGAnews** provides updates on media work promoting local government.

The Twitter handles of the LGA’s political group offices are:

LGA Conservative Group:
@LGACons

LGA Labour Group:
@LGA_Labour

LGA Liberal Democrat Group:
@libdemlocalgov

LGA Independent Group:
@LGA_Independent

Other handles of interest include:

District Councils’ Network:
@districtcouncil

County Councils Network:
@CCNOoffice

Centre for Public Scrutiny:
@CfPScrutiny



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The information contained in this guide was believed to be correct at the time of publication. Opinions expressed by individuals remain their personal views and do not necessarily represent those of the Local Government Association (LGA). The content does not purport to give legal opinion and councillors should raise any points of law with the relevant officer. The LGA cannot take responsibility for errors or omissions. Some councillors quoted in the text may no longer hold the office ascribed to them.

References to government, government policy, legislation, plans and intentions refer to their status in March 2018.

The Councillors' Guide 2018 is available to download free of charge from the LGA website: www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide

You can download the full guide on your iPad or tablet or as a PDF for your desktop or laptop.





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