

ANNUAL REPORT 2020 LIBERAL DEMOCRAT GROUP LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION





During the COVID lockdown, Hull Lib Dems ran a local 'stay home stay safe' campaign

Liberal Democrat councillors across the country have helped collect and staff foodbanks during the COVID lockdown – and our thanks to them



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A message from the Leader of the LGA Liberal Democrat Group

The world looked so different in the summer of 2019 when the Group last wrote its annual report.

A key element of our work over those months was supporting the new Liberal Democrat run or led councils following the 2019 local elections, with Liberal Democrats also involved in the administration of many others - often for the first time.



Councillor Howard Sykes MBE

on behalf of the Leadership Team: Councillor Ruth Dombey OBE, Councillor Heather Kidd and Councillor Alan Connett

Party conferences

We were also involved with running key meetings at the Bournemouth Liberal Democrat autumn conference, once again welcoming the then party leader to meet with our councillors at a key reception. Also, we launched new good practice booklets on rural issues and our achievements in running the London Borough of Sutton.

We saw the first General Election in December since the 1920s. We had a range of events planned at York's Spring Liberal Democrat Conference, but then as we all know COVID-19 struck.

COVID-19

This is the first year in living memory that April and early May has not seen a local election in some form or other. The agenda continues to be dominated by the COVID-19 crisis, but other issues are coming to the fore once again, for example the future of social care and Brexit.

COVID-19 has personally hit my family and would like to take this opportunity to thank the "Liberal Democrat family" for their kind words and support. So many of our councillors have been in touch to tell me how many of their lives have been touched by this terrible disease, both personally or in their role as community leaders.

I am pleased that the LGA has continued to provide up to the minute advice and guidance on its COVID-19 hub and has refreshed and updated its guide for councillors.

Council funding has been at the top of my agenda, both pre and post COVID.

As I write, the latest LGA data estimates a £7.4 billion funding gap as a result of the pandemic. This includes the funding pressures on social care, which reinforces our call for a long-term settlement and plan to tackle the problem. Will the spotlight that was shone on our care system actually get the Government coming up with a long-term solution? I'm not holding my breath!

And if social care gets transferred to the NHS, which is currently being mooted, it will be the death of it!

As we try and move forward in dealing with the pandemic, testing; tracing and isolation will be the key.

Councils encountered serious problems with the quality of the data provided by Government and for too long the expertise of local government was not listened to.

But I am so proud of the hard work our Liberal Democrat councils and councillors have done since March 2020 in supporting their communities both during lockdown and as we emerge from it – no matter if that is making thousands of phone calls to check if people need anything, to making sure businesses got relief grants paid out on time, to planning on getting more people cycling and walking post-lockdown.

Office and group spokespeople

The office and leadership team have continued to work closely with parliamentary colleagues on scrutinising pre and post COVID-19 legislation, ensuring they understand local government's asks and challenging the Government where we as Liberal Democrats in local government feel there needs to be more scrutiny and challenge.

We flag issues of concern for the sector. A good example of this is around the Leicester lockdown where we linked up the area's Liberal Democrat Council Leaders and Group Leaders with our Parliamentary Health Team.

I am extremely pleased that several of our spokespeople have been meeting with parliamentary colleagues on a range of subjects centred on COVID-19 or other issues that are important to us and the local government family. For example, Adele Morris' meeting with housing leads and Richard Kemp's meeting of social care leads.

Schools wider opening has been a big issue for colleagues. I am glad the Liberal Democrats' key theme that recurs throughout is the safety of children and staff. I am delighted with the role that Lucy Nethsingha has played in highlighting this. She has used her regular meeting with Education and children leads, which her and the office team feed in to Layla Moran's office.

The office has been proactively promoting what our councils and councillors have been doing on the ground during the COVID-19 crisis within the party - for example we have seen articles on Lib Dem Voice from colleagues in York and Eastbourne.

The first virtual LGA Conference has taken place, which was a great success - thanks to Ruth who covered for me in the opening session and chairing the session with Ed Davey. Ruth's speech from the opening session can be found here: <https://local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/re-thinking-local/re-thinking-local-vision-future-tuesday-30-june/re-thinking-1>

Local Government unitarisation

Re-organisation by the back door is coming for Districts and Counties. We are looking at a devolution white paper in early autumn, which I will put money on it include a major push for combined authorities/ Mayors and reorganisation in the shires. Do not get conned – there will be no more money or real powers!

Finance

The LGA Economic Recovery group meets every fortnight with minister Simon Clarke. The Government must continue to demonstrate a rock-solid commitment that it will meet the extra costs local authorities are facing due to the additional demands created by COVID-19, any additional costs of delivering 'business as usual' and the loss of income resulting from the lockdown.

Cake needs to be bigger – not how we cut the cake

Our councils continue to work all day and night to protect the most vulnerable from COVID-19, support local businesses and try and keep normal services running. The package announced during the LGA virtual conference is a drop in the ocean to what we need. £500M goes nowhere near filling the £7.5 billion funding gap councils face this financial year. It's like filling the leaking bucket with an egg cup!

We desperately need to fully address the severe financial challenges facing councils and our local services as a result. The alternative will be major redundancies; the impact that will have on families and local economies; never mind the services we provide.

The Government's commitment to fund a portion of councils lost income from fees and charges is a step in the right direction. However, it does not cover the full losses, nor does it extend to

commercial and other income losses and is likely to still leave councils having to absorb a substantial and unforeseen loss of funding, in particular addressing the loss of local taxes.

Also, we need to make sure that going forward there is a fair way of distributing funding. We don't need to see more of the Government's divide and rule strategy pitting borough against county, north against south, rural against urban.

Elections 2021

The Government/Cabinet Office has started discussing next year's local elections (and by-elections) and the arrangements. We have some real concerns about the plans. We have co-ordinated our response.

Keeping in touch

We continue to have weekly zoom calls for Council leaders/deputies and for group leaders, chaired by Ruth Dombey and Alan Connett respectively. I try and join when I can. The conclusions of these has fed in to my regular meetings with other senior political leaders here at the LGA and with government ministers.

In addition to meeting with other group leaders here at the LGA I hold regular meetings with Tim Farron MP as Local Government Spokesperson, Tim Pickstone and Dave Hodgson – as Chief Executive and Chair of ALDC; Mark Pack as Liberal Democrat President and Ed Davey as acting Leader.

The future for local government

In addition to dealing with possible local government re-organisation, councils need to start thinking seriously about the future of their local economies, and we as Liberal Democrats need to as well.

While there were no elections this May, we plan to be back to winning ways in 2021!

Our high streets will never look the same, and unemployment will be the highest it has been for decades. What is the role of councils, and how can we ensure that links in with things like the green economy and climate change?

We have a real opportunity to wind the clock forward not backwards in terms of climate change. Liberal Democrats need to lead the charge on such issues as we have in the past.

The LGA's political balance

As a cross-party membership organisation, the LGA's governance is determined by the strength of its four political groups.

Following the local elections each year, Plymouth University's Elections Centre calculates the proportionality figures using a formula that takes account of the number of council seats held by each group and the population and type of authority that they represent. There were of course no elections this year.

Political Balance of the LGA at the time of calculation is:

CON 38.4 per cent

LAB 37.8 per cent

LIB DEM 12.5 per cent

IND 11.3 per cent

The LGA Liberal Democrat Group representation strengthened slightly in 2019, gaining one place on the People and Places Board and one place on Fire Services Management. No group has majority control of the LGA.



The LGA Liberal Democrat Group Leadership Team, Executive and Board places

Elected in August 2019 for two years, the Liberal Democrat Group Executive represent the political leadership of Liberal Democrats in local government inside and outside the LGA Group. The Executive consists of the Leadership Team and the lead Liberal Democrat members of the LGA Group boards and panels, along with the Liberal Democrat representative on each of the other bodies in the LGA. The Leadership team, listed below, were returned to serve another two years from 2019-2021.



Councillor Howard Sykes MBE
Group Leader (and LGA Vice Chair)
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Heather Kidd
Group Chair Councillor
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Councillor Ruth Dombey OBE
Deputy Group Leader
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Councillor Alan Connett
Group Whip
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LGA Liberal Democrat Board members 2019-2021

LGA Boards cover all areas of a local authority's remit and provides guidance to the LGA as it represents local government at Westminster and advises councils around the country. The newly elected members to serve from 2019-2021 are as follows:

(Note: Those marked with an asterix (*) are also members of the LGA Liberal Democrat Group Executive alongside the Group Leadership team)

Children and Young People

Lucy Nethsingha*

Cambridgeshire (lead from 01/03/2020)
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Mark Cory

Colchester (Lead until 01/03/2020)
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Nick Cott

Newcastle (sub from 01/03/2020)
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Community Wellbeing

Richard Kemp*

Liverpool (Lead)
richard.kemp@liverpool.gov.uk

Doreen Huddart

Newcastle
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Rob Rotchell

Cornwall (sub)
rob.rotchell@cornwallcouncillors.org.uk

Culture Tourism and Sport

Gerald Vernon-Jackson*

Portsmouth (Lead)
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Chris White

St Albans and Hertfordshire
chris.white.stalbans@gmail.com

Chris Hogg

Cumbria (Sub)
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Environment Economy Housing and Transport

Adele Morris*

Southwark (Lead)
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Peter Thornton

South Lakeland & Cumbria
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Stewart Golton

Leeds City (Sub)
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Improvement and Innovation

Liz Green*

Kingston Upon Thames (Lead)
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Dave Hodgson

Bedford
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Caroline Leaver

North Devon (Sub)
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Resources

Keith House*

Eastleigh and Hampshire (Lead)
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Adam Paynter

Cornwall
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Mike Bell

North Somerset (Sub)
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Safer Communities

Bridget Smith*

South Cambridgeshire (Lead)
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Jeremy Hilton

Gloucestershire
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Jon Ball

Ealing (Sub)
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City Regions

Anita Lower*

Newcastle (Lead)
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Gareth Roberts

Richmond
cllr.groberts@richmond.gov.uk

Roger Helmer

Birmingham
rogerharmer1@aol.com

People and Places

Heather Kidd*

Shropshire (Lead)
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Sarah Osborne

East Sussex
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Stan Collins

South Lakeland and Cumbria
stanstheman@cix.co.uk

Alan Knox

Ribble Valley (sub)
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Fire Services

Keith Aspden*

York (Lead)
Councillor.kaspden@york.gov.uk

Carolyn Lambert

East Sussex
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Roger Price

Hampshire (Sub)
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District Councils Network

Sara Bedford*

Three Rivers
sara.bedford@threerivers.gov.uk

County Councils Network

Jerry Roodhouse*

Warwickshire and Rugby
jerryroodhouse@warwickshire.gov.uk

Policy Co-ordinator and LGA Brexit working group rep

Chris White*

Hertfordshire and St Albans
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Federal Policy Committee rep

Peter Thornton*

Cumbria
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LGA Properties Board and Audit lead

David Neighbour*

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(Notes: Elections are underway for lead member on the District Councils Network. Lucy Nethsingha was on sabbatical from her position as lead member on the Children and Young People's Board until January 2020 following several months serving in the European Parliament).

LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Children and Young People Board

Councillor Lucy Nethsingha



It has been a very strange year for me personally, and my first task is to say a huge thank you to Mark Cory, Nick Cott and Ed Maxfield, who between them took over as Lead and Members of the Children and Young People's Board while I

was in Brussels from September until January. They are a great team, and did a superb job! We are lucky to have so many talented Councillors in our party.

It has also been a year of two halves for CYP Board. Up until January "normal" issues dominated, with the rising and unfunded costs of special educational needs, and placements for children in need of care being the most urgent.

The gap between the government funding available for the high needs children, and the actual cost of providing for those needs continues to increase. Many councils now have enormous unfunded deficits in their SEND budgets, and it remains unclear how these growing "negative balances" are supposed to be dealt with. The findings of the ISOS report last year remain as valid as ever.

The second part of the year has been dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the responses of councils, schools and government to this unprecedented crisis.

The pandemic emphasised for me the key role councils still play in supporting schools, and the importance of a whole system approach across an area. Reports are that academy schools have been very keen to work with councils at this time, and I hope that the close working which has been developed in many areas will continue.

The response by government in the education sector has been utterly chaotic, with advice coming out from the DfE on a daily basis, sometimes contradicting earlier advice.

One of the most serious cases of conflicting advice, which is likely to have long term consequences has been for early years providers.

Early years providers were told at the start of the lockdown period that they could furlough staff, even though they would continue to get income from government for a portion of their costs. As a result many chose to close, (as the numbers attending at the start were very low). This advice was then reversed, and settings were told they would only be able to furlough staff for the portion of money which came from additional fees. This advice only came after many nurseries had closed, and the children were no longer attending, leaving the nurseries with no furlough money and no income. The resulting closure of many early years providers may leave a major problem as people begin to return to work.

This is just one example of the chaotic changes in advice which have come from the DfE, with equally rapid changes in school re-opening, advice to after school clubs, and many other areas. It is still far from clear whether or how secondary schools will be able to re-open from September.

We have set up a WhatsApp group for Education portfolio holders and have held regular Zoom meetings with children's lead members from across the country. These have been hugely helpful and I hope will continue.

lucynethsingha@icloud.com

LEAD MEMBER REPORT

LGA Liberal Democrat Group Whip

Councillor Alan Connett



Standards remain an issue

The dark cloud of a Standards complaint continues to be allowed to hang over a councillor's head without time limit on a resolution being achieved.

At a time when the sector says it wants to support the mental health and wellbeing of councillors, this grim reality often goes unnoticed and uncommented on.

The sad truth is that once a complaint is found to have merit for investigation, it can take an absolute age to investigate and conclude.

I have continued supporting colleagues who find themselves facing a Standards complaint. Unless councillors have substantial funds available, they can find they are at the mercy of the council's legal machine with all its resources.

Councillors often do not have access to good legal counsel or representation. This is not a match of 'equal arms'

I have taken part in the LGA's work to prepare a new Draft Code of Conduct. I believe it will help councils and councillors. However, what we also need are time limits for a complaint to be brought forward, and a timed process for dealing with them.

Reports and attendance

I am grateful to all colleagues who submitted their reports on time. We should not underestimate the value of a crisp, well written report which summarises action to date and action planned, along with the key political issues arising.

The 'report template' is working well and this allows us to feed into the campaigning ideas and briefs via the All Councillor email and the ALDC campaigner email.

In the coming year I will be giving increased attention to the reports, for timeliness and quality.

A summary of attendance is included within this report. I remind all colleagues of the need to attend their Board and Panel meetings and if they are not able to, for whatever reason, they MUST ensure they arrange for the substitute to attend.

Joining up the dots

Outside of the reports to Executive, all colleagues on Boards and Panels can play their part in ensuring more urgent policy issues and news is shared appropriately.

Earlier this year we hit a problem with our own internal communications regarding the Local Government Pay discussions.

I looked into the events and have reported to the Group's officers. We now have in place additional arrangements which I believe will improve the flow of communications. Overall, it is important to keep our Group Office informed when 'urgent' issues arise and 'quick call' decisions need to be made.

And finally

My appreciation and thanks to Terry Stacy, Rob Banks & Amy Haldane in the Group Office for their help and support and also to the Executive Team of Howard Sykes, Group Leader, Ruth Dombey, Deputy Leader, and Heather Kidd, Chair. I am also grateful to all of my colleagues on the Boards and Panels for their support.

alan.connett@btinternet.com

Record of Attendance 2019-2020

Executive member	12/09/19	31/10/19	23/01/2020	12/03/2020	14/05/2020	04/06/2020	16/07/2020
Howard Sykes	Y	Y	Apologies	Apologies	Y	Y	Apologies
Ruth Dombey	Y	Apologies	Y	Y	Apologies	Y	Y
Heather Kidd	Apologies	Y	Y	Apologies	Y	Y	Y
Alan Connett	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Mark Cory (Lucy Nethsingha from March 2020)	Y	Y	Apologies	Y	Y	Apologies	Y
Richard Kemp	Apologies	Y	Apologies	Apologies	Y	Y	Y
Gerald Vernon-Jackson	Y	Y (apols for lateness)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Adele Morris	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Liz Green	Apologies	Y	Y	Apologies	Apologies	Y	Y
Keith House	Y	Apologies	Apologies	Apologies	Apologies	Y	Apologies
Bridget Smith	Y	Y	Y	Apologies	Y	Y	Y
Anita Lower	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Keith Aspden	Apologies	Apologies	Apologies	Apologies	Apologies	Y	Apologies
Dave Neighbour	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Apologies
Sara Bedford	Apologies	Apologies	Y	Y	Apologies	Y	Apologies
Chris White	Apologies	Apologies	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Doreen Huddart	Y	Apologies	Apologies	NA	NA	N/A	NA
Jerry Roodhouse	Apologies	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Reports received

Lead member	23/10/2019	15/01/2020	12/03/2020	14/05/2020	04/06/2020	16/07/2020
Howard Sykes	NA	NA	NA	Y	Y	Y
Ruth Dombey	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Heather Kidd	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Alan Connett	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Lucy Nethsingha	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Richard Kemp	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Gerald Vernon-Jackson	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Adele Morris	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Liz Green	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Keith House	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Bridget Smith	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Anita Lower	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Heather Kidd	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Keith Aspden	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Dave Neighbour	N	N	N	N	N	N
Jerry Roodhouse	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Sara Bedford	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Chris White	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Doreen Huddart	N	Y	N	NA	NA	NA

LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Community Wellbeing Board

Councillor Richard Kemp



Everything was going as per normal – then we got news from China. This report, therefore, is split into two sections. Pre COVID and COVID!

Pre-COVID

The areas that we were dealing with were the huge issues which have bedevilled our work for the past 10 years:

Adult social care. Following up the huge pressures on ASC, which the Government has failed to provide any long-term answers. We have continually pressed the Government to come up with the ASC Green Paper which was promised in July 2017. The team to review this inside the Government has been formed and disbanded twice. In the meantime, the LGA has produced three substantive reports which have been widely approved by those throughout the sector.

Public health. The final distribution of the PH grant actually took place just after every relevant council had completed their budget process. It included a 1 per cent terms increase which was not evenly distributed. It no way made up for the £800 million that the sector's base PH budget has been reduced by since 2015.

Health inequalities. We have been keeping abreast of the discussions on health inequalities by continually pressuring the Government and NHS on issues relating to the social determinants of health.

Primary care. Linked to the latter point we have been exploring the relationships between councils and their Health and Wellbeing Boards and the NHS and particularly the new Primary Care Networks.

Support to Lib Dem spokespersons. To make all the above and more work we have supported our Portfolio Holders both opposition and controlling through social media support, our Facebook page now has 108 participants; 1:1 meetings and formal training and support through the LGA's CHIP programme.

Relationships with the Party. Even before the virus struck, we had established a relationship with the Party Spokes in the Commons and Lords (Munira Wilson and Sal Brinton), FPC reps and their respective support staff. This has enabled us to provide help for them all when requested and to keep them abreast of the LGA view and other support available to them. Much of what the LGA proposes has the full support of the LGA Lib Dem Group so this provides valuable research for them which their own support staff cannot do.

The COVID era

Much of what we have done can be seen on the LGA website with the councillors and LGA Lib Dem staff teams fully involved in work inside the LGA. The work has been split into two functions:

Lobbying

The money allocated to the sector is simply inadequate. The sector has spent more than the Government has allocated after receiving assurances that the Government would meet our spending. There is a general problem throughout local government but to date the ASC authorities have not even received enough to cover their enhanced spending due to CV activities.

We had to make sure that the Residential and Domiciliary Care sectors were adequately supported. It is a fact that people were sent home from hospitals to die and there was no thought that the care homes and those domiciliary workers that go from home to home needed adequate PPE.

The failure to respond adequately by central government push infection into the community and failed to control it. That is why so many of our elderly and their carers have died in distressing circumstances, alone and in pain. It is why the outbreak has been more severe here than in most countries because the infection spread out from these virus breeding centres.

We had to fight to ensure that our specialist Public Health teams were included in the Government's 'test and trace' programme. They have the specialist knowledge and the local contacts to make it work and are still doing the heavy lifting of making the scheme effective.

On all these and many issues we have worked alongside our delivery colleagues such as ADASS and ADPH as well as our sectoral colleagues such as care providers to bring light to bear on the appalling misjudgements of the Government. We have contributed to policy discussions, delivery discussions and support discussions in a variety of different ways.

Supporting

Having got some changes and improvements in Government positions we have been providing practical support to our front-line teams.

We have produced advisory documents on aspects of delivery such as our relationship with the two ASC delivery sectors and how to get Health and Wellbeing Boards up and running again.

Much of this has then been followed up with those teams where we have supplemented the work of the professional bodies in providing a range of practical and emotional support services to those teams. I am very proud of how the sector has responded in very difficult circumstances to the COVID-19 problems.

We have been ready as a Lib Dem Group to help colleagues. This has been achieved through the virtual meetings with Leaders in both control and opposition and specialist discussions with portfolio holders.

My thanks

My thanks go to:

The health teams within the LGA who have worked tirelessly alongside their politicians to deliver real results for our sector;

Our Lib Dem staff team of Terry, Rob and Amy who are always ready to help me and anyone else if they can.

Doreen Huddart who is my colleague on the committee and all the portfolio holders who have always been ready to help me and each other particularly in the past 4 months.

Always feel free to contact me:

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07885 626913

Facebook: Lib Dem Councillors Health & Social Care

LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Culture, Tourism and Sport Board

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson



Over the last year the Culture, Tourism and Sport Board that I chair has worked on several areas.

We have continued our work on cultural led regeneration and published a report which included many case studies from different councils. This

was to allow councils, urban and rural, big and small, to find examples of things they could replicate in their own areas.

We are currently working on the area of social prescribing to work with colleagues in public health to widen the take up of this route out of illness. It is well known for the use of sport and exercise, but the work on how this could work with the arts and community sector is much less developed.

The Culture, Tourism and Sport Board has worked with the Arts Council to produce a "Cultural Strategy in a Box" for all councils. This is to try to address the hollowing out of the arts and cultural side of many smaller councils and to give the officers concerned pointers about how to produce a Cultural Strategy for their areas. We have had good feedback that councils have found this useful.

We aim to look to do a similar "Sporting Strategy in a Box" in conjunction with Sport England in the same way in the future.

The Culture, Tourism and Sport LGA Board is the only one that still has its own 24-hour conference, and this year we held this in Portsmouth. It was good to be able to showcase some of the things this Lib Dem led city has been able to achieve.

Likewise this Board is the only LGA Board to hold meetings outside of London, something that I introduced. I have also organised monthly informal meetings of the Board, via Zoom, to allow board members to exchange ideas and information.

The COVID-19 crisis has put greater pressures on many councils. Many now have significant budget problems and both council run and private/voluntary sector museums, sports centres, theatres, music venues and other cultural and sporting organisations are under significant threat. The cultural industries have been one of fastest growing parts of the economy. The LGA have repeatedly called on the Government to take this seriously but DCMS have not seen a role for local government in their recovery plans and have excluded local government from its recovery groups. I have been included in some meetings with Ministers and this has been useful, but this has not been systematic.

I have been included in several Lib Dem groups looking at these issues and I'm grateful to them for their invitations.

This Board is a collegiate, co-operative and good-natured board and I can't remember the last time we have had a vote. My thanks to my other Lib Dem colleagues in the team, Chris and Chris and it's been good to welcome a new substitute member, Sean, when he joined the Lib Dems from the Independents.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board

Councillor Adele Morris



This has been another busy year for me and Peter Thornton on the EEHT board.

The Annual LGA Conference 2019 passed a motion declaring a Climate Emergency, and I spoke on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group. Councils across the country

have declared Climate Emergencies, and supporting them has been a focus for the EEHT board. I sat on a Climate Emergency Sounding Board, whose recommendations were adopted by the LGA Executive. We looked at the existing work of local authorities and environmental groups and shared best practice through our networks, and restarted the Climate Local forum. Officers have been working with other LGA boards and external stakeholders to develop a comprehensive support package for councillors.

I co-chaired our Climate Conference with Councillor David Renard and have represented LGA at external events on climate change. I attend Wera Hobhouse MP's weekly meetings with other leading Liberal Democrats, where we discuss how we can support councils with their climate change agenda. I wrote to the Minister for Communities to request that councils be given the ability to decide locally whether to allow extended working hours for construction sites to catch up after lockdown.

Peter has been representing LGA on the SUSTRANS "Paths For All" Steering Group and is expecting a renewed focus on their work as a result of COVID-19.

He is also LGA representative on The Canal Trust Council. As a share owner of a narrowboat, he is looking forward to engaging with the trust and is interested in issues around the delivery of social care and health services to canal dwellers and the challenge of achieving carbon neutrality on narrowboats powered by diesel, coal and bottled gas.

Other board/board related activities:

- Published a joint report with National Housing Federation on working together to tackle homelessness. Developed a protocol relating to out of borough placements for homeless families, and advice for local authorities on making homelessness strategies.
- Discussed the competing demands on the HRA, which include removing cladding, energy efficient retrofitting and building new homes.
- Responded to multiple government consultations, including reforms to permitted development rights and the future homes standard.
- Planning Advisory Service quickly produced support for all aspects of planning – including advice on how to keep online planning committees as open and transparent as possible.
- NAO presented their work on a journey time mapping and value for money study on improving bus services in England however, since then there are new challenges for buses services. We recently received a presentation on decarbonising transport and discussed the impact that COVID-19 has had, and will have going forward, on travel patterns.

Our board covers the Economy, Environment, Housing and Transport and there are many activities I haven't space to cover here.

One positive from the COVID-19 crisis is the opportunity to create positive change from a health and wellbeing and environmental perspective. We must try to prevent people from returning to live on the streets, and support those who are now at risk of homelessness due to loss of earnings. We have improved air quality and should continue to promote walking and cycling, and better investment in public transport. And we must also find ways to support economic recovery in our towns and cities – ideally with a green agenda at the heart.

The year ahead promises to be even busier!

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Improvement and Innovation Board

Councillor Liz Green



The Improvement and Innovation Board oversees the sector-led improvement offer from the LGA.

What is sector-led improvement?

The Government gives a grant to the LGA to support sector-led improvement, through a Memorandum of Understanding.

It does this as the best way for councils collectively to improve their performance, and hence their services to residents. The work is led through the Improvement and Innovation Board, working with other service specific boards. Recent independent research shows that almost 80 per cent of respondents value the sector-led improvement work from the LGA and it is considerably cheaper and better than when the Government tries to manage improvement in local government directly.

The most widely known part of sector-led improvement (SLI) by the LGA is possibly the corporate peer challenges, but there are many more ways in which the LGA supports member councils.

The grant covers this and other peer support, regional principal advisors, leadership and development programmes, self-assessment and best practice tools, practical support and advice such as on commercialisation, income generation etc. If your council doesn't use the services on offer, you should take a look at local.gov.uk/our-support.

Key Highlights this year:

- 111 peer challenges undertaken, including 61 corporate or financial challenges
- 958 councillors participating in leadership programmes
- 149 graduates recruited for the National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP)
- 8 new policy specific Leadership Essentials programmes
- Relunched the shared services map which now identifies in excess of £1.34billion from 628 partnerships
- Supported 43 councils through productivity experts helping councils save or generate income in excess of £38.5m
- LG Inform had over 1.5m views

Climate change support

I take the lead on the board for climate change support, innovation and best practice.

Whilst the LGA has worked with councils on climate change for many years, as more and more Councils declare a Climate Emergency, this has increased dramatically this year.

Key highlights this year:

- Development of the Climate Emergency Network Knowledge Hub
- Two climate change Leadership Essentials programme
- Working with the Centre for Public Scrutiny to produce guidance on '10 Questions to ask when scrutinising services to tackle climate change'
- An LGA climate change baseline survey
- New cross-party climate change working group established
- LGA green webinar series including Green Reset webinar during LGA virtual conference

Refocused COVID-19 Sector Support

The LGA moved quickly to refocus its sector led improvement service to support councils' response to COVID-19.

Key highlights:

- Upgraded our councillor e-learning platform and made it easier to access, including a new module 'Holding council meetings online'.
- A series of webinars to support councillors and political leaders that will aid their vital community leadership role during COVID-19 and beyond.
- Guidance on the role of individual ward councillors during the crisis
- A guidebook on 'Being an effective cabinet member'.
- One-to-one leadership development coaching with Leadership Academy trainers
- Guidance for finance portfolio holders when assessing the impact of COVID-19 on council finances.
- Refocusing principal advisors.
- New remote peer support offer being launched this month.

Case studies and best practice

The LGA has always collected best practice examples, but too few of these are from Liberal Democrat run councils. Please consider adding to the LGA best practice case studies with your examples.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Resources Board

Councillor Keith House



The Resources Board leads for the LGA on a range of financial issues for local government: pay, terms and conditions, workforce, welfare reform and EU funding. Back in the world before March 2020, we all anticipated a year that

would be dominated by the 2020 Spending Review, Fair Funding Review, Business Rates Reform and changes to welfare.

So much has changed, with the majority of the Board's recent business being in reaction to Covid-19. That's been about securing more finance from government and beginning to consider issues around recovery. At the time of writing, the Government has funded through various means between £3.5-£4bn of additional council costs, against a real assessed impact of between £6-9bn. The gap is alarming, and disproportionately affects social care authorities and those with major losses of income from tourism, parking and commercial activity. There is much work to do. Staying united as a sector is vital. Divisions in local government will see government picking winners and pushing its own agenda.

The Board started work on a major piece of work on future local government funding. This is continuing in the background to respond to future business rate and spending reviews, as is work on the challenges arising from the implementation of Universal Credit and making the case for the private sector Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate to adequately and appropriately meet housing costs for low income households.

In the meantime, ongoing pay negotiations have resulted in a final Employers' offer of 2.75per cent being rejected by unions. As employers, affordability has been the key issue while at the same time wishing to make a fair proposal in line with other areas in the public sector. The Board has responded to a range of consultations, including the recent pernicious proposals to restrict local authorities' access to the Public Works Loan Board.

Finally, to record my thanks to Adam Paynter, and to our team at the LGA in Smith Square (and now at home!), who have given me fulsome support on the Board in a year of rapid change.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Councillor Bridget Smith



Anita Lower has been a hard act to follow on this committee and I am very pleased that she has been able to retain her role on the FGM National Advisory Committee.

The last few months have been almost entirely focused on

the Covid pandemic with the post-Grenfell work also taking up considerable time.

The Committee has had regular briefings on the emergency response to CV but is likely to have an even more significant role once we start to look back and assess what went well and what could have gone better. It has been suggested that we review failings of local emergency plans and also set up a working group to look at all the volunteer support that has emerged and how it can be captured to help future sustainability and resilience.

The response to Grenfell is deeply concerning both in terms of the speed at which inspections and remediation work is being completed and the indication that the initial predicted cost of £1 billion is likely to rise over £14 billion. There are additionally a number of unforeseen consequences including the risk that leaseholders and landlords are bankrupted and emerging issues over mortgage companies and insurers requiring new fire certificates if existing ones are deemed invalid. We are calling for mental health support for people having to live in dangerous buildings since Fire Authorities have judged people to be safer during Covid remaining in these buildings than being moved to temporary accommodation.

Dame Sara Thornton, the Anti-Slavery Commissioner, presented to us. Her role arose as a result of the Anti-Slavery Act. She published her strategic plan last October with a welcome focus on prevention and victim support resulting from evidence that many people in prison are victims rather than perpetrators especially in regards to county lines activity. Consideration is being given to devolving responsibility for identifying victims to LAs from the National Referral Body as we already identify 19 per cent of victims.

The consultation on Travellers closed in March with the committee having a disappointing focus on enforcement and little attention to needs of the Traveller community though there may be a call for Government to provide money for transit sites.

Dame Vera Baird, QC, the Victim Support Commissioner was a strong advocate for the use of Community Triggers to deal with local issues of ASB. All LAs are required to have CTs in place but there appear to be few councils which use them or councillors who are aware of them. The advantage is that they involved residents and a degree of reparation and resolution rather than just police enforcement. Dame Vera has produced an excellent report: ASB 'A Living Nightmare' which most critically highlights that ASB is not 'low level' which is often the police view and that it does damage peoples' mental health due to its cumulative effect.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Fire Service Management Committee and Fire Commission

Councillor Keith Aspden



It has been another busy year for the LGA Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) and Fire Commission, including virtually!

During this year we have:

- Continued to lobby against unwanted 'take overs' from Police and Crime Commissioners of Fire and Rescue Authorities, including supporting affected fire services with professional advice.
- Made building safety one of our key priorities, responding to the Fire Safety Bill and Grenfell Tower tragedy, including through the Hackitt Review.
- Engaged with the new Fire and Building Safety Minister and Senior Sector Group with the Home Office, in order to respond for the fire sector to spending reviews, the national fire inspection report and push for resources to match responsibilities.
- The national fire inspection report has focused our recent work on culture and diversity in the fire services, fire services pay (the National Joint Council), chief fire officer operational independence and the suggestion of common standards for the sector. LGA members are actively working with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) to respond on these issues, whilst reminding the new minister to tackle the big areas for improvement (culture, professionalism and funding), that will improve services, rather than get distracted.

- Hundreds of councillors, including an active Lib Dem Group, attended the LGA Fire Conference in Blackpool, just before lockdown.
- We launched a best practice guide to fire services tackling the climate emergency, from responding to flooding to suggestions for what more fire authorities can do.
- Held FSMC and Fire Commission meetings virtually
- I have sent occasional E-Bulletins for Lib Dem fire spokespersons and held group meetings for our team of Fire Commission members. This had included advice on how to turn fire service issues into local and national campaigns.
- As well as chairing the climate emergency keynote session, I spoke at the LGA Fire Conference to outline the Lib Dem and LGA view on the issue of the operational independence of chief fire officers, following the national fire inspection report.

As we approach 2021, our priorities at the LGA will focus on implementation following the national reviews of fire safety and regulations and the national fire inspection. This must include culture, professionalism, funding and workforce issues. We will also continue to keep governance under review, supporting local areas. I would welcome any input or questions on these priorities that councillors have.

I would like to thank all those that have been involved with fire service issues this year. My thanks go to Councillor Carolyn Lambert, my colleague on FSMC, and to Councillor Roger Price, our substitute member, who regularly attends and chaired a Fire Conference seminar, alongside all Lib Dem members of the Fire Commission.

Councillor Keith Aspden, City of York Council
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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

City Regions Board

Councillor Anita Lower



I would like to start by thanking my predecessor Councillor Abi Bell for all her hard work and to Councillor Gareth Roberts who joined the board last year.

The Board represents the interests of cities and city-regions. It encompasses place

based inclusive growth, devolution, Brexit relating to metropolitan areas, skills and employment support, public service reform and wider issues relating to urban leadership and development.

The direction of the work has changed and is changing due to the Pandemic.

At the start of this year the priorities were:

Devolution

This is one of the Board's core issues through devolution deals, combined authorities and directly elected Mayors, pressing forward for greater devolution and making deals available to all urban areas that want it.

The board is continuing its work on empowering councils as leader of place by engaging individual Departments on devolving power and funding.

Alongside this is the input of local government to the formulation of legislation following our departure from the EU and subsequent ending of our membership of the EU Committee of the Regions.

The Board will work to ensure elements of the Government's national economic strategy:- Local Industrial Strategies, UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the LEP Review. As well as lobbying on our well established Work Local policy to develop a plan for its practical implementation working with key stakeholders to develop plans for youth participation and lifelong learning.

Since March there has been a change of emphasis for the board with all meetings being held remotely, work is now focussed on the response from local government to COVID-19 and the work of the LGA has been focussed almost exclusively on supporting councils as they serve their communities.

The board has reviewed its priorities; and has 5 overarching themes for our work.

Hope; councils need to develop work to address communities' concerns. With place leadership playing a central part.

Strong Communities; recognising the work of our communities and businesses their extraordinary resilience to keep services running.

Councils have stepped up; local government has become the fourth emergency service, convening place and working at speed to set up new services. All of this demonstrates our leadership of place.

Finance; working towards stable finances for local government without this national recovery is not possible.

Reconfiguring public services and place leadership; We need a speedy reconfiguring of public services which recognises place difference we need to demonstrate the tangible examples and evidence of the benefits of localism and to describe what success looks like.

I am a member of the Active Board's Devolution Task and Finish Group working on some of these issues.

Finally, I would like to thank the staff in the Liberal Democrat Office at the LGA for all their support at such challenging times.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

People and Places Board

Councillor Heather Kidd



The Lib Dem group on the People and Places Board has increased to three members since the 2019 elections.

Councillor Sarah Osborne – formerly of Lewes District and now East Sussex County Council – has continued to work

on rural transport issues especially around home to school transport for 16-18-year olds. She also represents us on the Rural Digital Connectivity working group. We continue to make our voices heard in a sea of blue but which has a remarkable amount of consensus.

Karen Ward from North Norfolk District Council briefly joined us but stood down having secured a job too good to turn down. We congratulate her and wish her well.

Councillor Stan Collins from Cumbria has now joined the team and attended his first meeting

Councillor Alan Knox has stepped up to substitute.

COVID-19 and lock down have curtailed many functions for a while. The Board meetings and Lead member meetings have continued now via Zoom

Group zoom meetings are also now set up and we have been successful in also having Baroness Cathy Bakewell join us for the last one. We will be continuing this.

COVID issues being raised with the Lib Dem team include:

- Broadband and mobile coverage now even more important and band width a significant issue.
- Rural tourism and COVID impact
- Public transport now
- Support for community groups
- Impact of COVID on Agriculture, rights of way, milk and meat prices etc. Countryside Code.

- People moving out of cities to work at home more and going to areas without enough infrastructure and house price pressures.

Major issues for the Board continue to be:

- Broadband and mobile phone signal
- Brexit and its impact on the rural economy – now including COVID impacts.
- Food, farming and the Environment and a green rural Brexit. Post Brexit England Commission report. This will be presented at the LGA Conference this July.
- Rural transport
- Skills and employment – updated for COVID
- Devolution – which now appears to be Local Government re-organisation.

Your Lib Dem People and Places Board members are working to raise the groups profile and engaging with rural Councillors and Campaigners. We will be posting more on Facebook on Lib Dem Campaigners and ALDC's Facebook to get some feedback on items going to the Board but also to gather more rural information.

The Rural Fringe and booklet were a huge success in Bournemouth with many attending.

Other work

I have also been an active member of the ALDC Management committee. I have continually argued for rural campaigns and have fed into a rural Housing needs survey for rural Campaigners and Councillors. I continue to mentor at Kickstart so that we have as many Councillors elected as possible. This all compliments the People and Places role.

Peer mentoring has also given me a good insight into other Lib Dem rural authorities and what we can deliver.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Liberal Democrat Retained Peers Report

Councillor Alan Connett



Responding to the National Emergency

No-one will have been a councillor for long before they encounter a 'crisis'. Perhaps it's a large local employer closing, a dead whale

washing up on a local beach, or an awful event in their ward or division.

Nothing could have prepared us for the events in March and the ongoing COVID-19 national emergency. It is a unique event (thankfully), for which there was no manual on the shelf to refer to.

However, many of us and our colleagues across the country will have referred back to the training we enjoyed through the LGAs Highlighting Leadership programme to draw down the lessons and adapt them to the local circumstances.

Community cohesion, building on the swell in numbers of volunteers, intentional relationships, building partnerships – strategic and the not so strategic. Finding again the zest to 'let's get it done' and worry about procedure later.

And now, I'd be surprised if there is a council in the country for which economic development and climate change are not two of the key priorities.

The investment over many years in the Leadership Academy and the range of Leadership Essential short programmes is, I suggest, returning a rich dividend to the sector.

Within the Liberal Democrat Group, we have been supporting all our Council and Group Leaders. Council Leaders take part in a weekly conference call dealing with the hot topics.

I chair a weekly conference call for Liberal Democrat opposition group leaders. Joined by around 45-50 Leaders, we cover the topical issues, share 'questions to ask' the council, tackle scrutiny (or the desire to avoid it!), planning changes, and so much more. The calls have become a real community, giving demonstrable benefit and support.

Peer Assignments and Mentoring

Throughout the year we have provided Member Peers for a range of assignments including Corporate Peer Challenges, skill related member development, planning & finance support, along with much more.

In addition, with more councils now being Liberal Democrat led or with us in partnership administration, we have been providing more Peer Mentors.

Our Peer Mentors are experienced councillors who have also attended the LGA mentor development event, which is co-delivered with our Group Leader, Howard Sykes.

If you are interested in joining the Peer Pool, or would like to recommend a colleague, please get in touch. We would particularly welcome expressions of interest from women, young councillors, councillors with good experience in planning, adult and children's services, finance and housing.

Help and Support throughout the Year

We are a team of three – Councillor Alan Connett, National Lead member Peer, and Regional Lead Members Councillor Lisa Smart and Councillor Sarah Butikofer.

We work to support our Council and Group Leaders, councillors and groups across the country. That support ranges from preparing to take control of the council, putting that planning into reality, group issues, general advice and arranging mentoring.

We work closely with colleagues at ALDC to support training and development for councillors at Kickstart, for example, and Party conferences.

Thank you

My thanks to Sarah and Lisa, the Group Office and all our Member Peers for their help and support throughout the year. Also, my thanks to the LGA Principal Advisors and the Improvement Team who have helped so much throughout the year.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

District Councils Network Report

Councillor Sara Bedford



The work of the District Councils' Network (DCN) over the past year has been based in three key areas:

1. The cross-cutting work themes of Stronger Economies, Better Lives, Enhancing Quality of Life, and Sustainable Finance and Workforce. The Liberal Democrat leads in each area have been Councillor Joe Harris (Cotswold DC), Councillor Giles Archibald (South Lakeland DC), Councillor Bridget Smith (South Cambridgeshire DC) and Councillor Sara Bedford (Three Rivers DC).
2. The hugely increased workload due to COVID-19 and the consequent losses of income and increases in expenditure.
3. The now defined threat of the loss of the entire second tier of local government and the probable introduction of large, county-based unitary councils.

Key activities and outcomes of work undertaken in the last year:

1. In responding to the COVID-19 crisis, the DCN has:
 - Made successful representations on a range of critical issues for District councils during the pandemic and the recovery, including:
 - Making the case on the impact of lost income, leading to much increased payments to Districts in the second tranche of grants.
 - Supporting vulnerable groups, requesting Hardship Fund payments and securing an extension of the eviction ban.

- Conducting a survey evidencing the financial impact of the lockdown on the sustainability of leisure services.
 - Shaping BEIS guidance on business grants.
 - Highlighting the impact on towns and gaining funding for adaptations of facilities.
 - A vital role in Test and Trace, giving the case for support to EHOs
2. Stepped up engagement with all District Councils using weekly video conferences with all Leaders and Chief Executives, involving Ministers and senior Civil Servants from MHCLG, DEFRA, BEIS and DCMS, on leading the response to the recovery and the crisis. Further support was provided through policy templates, and other informative speakers.
 3. Published a manifesto for the recovery, entitled Power in Place. This had a wide range of national and local media coverage on priority issues such as finance, waste, leisure, high streets, homelessness, planning. The DCN held a virtual APPG, and engaged MPs through a series of briefings, and submitted written evidence which has been accepted to Parliamentary committees over a range of issues.
 4. Worked productively within the LGA as part of the wider local government family. We have also built relationships with organisations across our workstreams, from Sport England, Local Partnerships, Shelter, Crisis St Mungo's, and dozens more.

In the preceding months before COVID-19 hit the DCN had a number of successes including contributing to:

- Confirmation that grants, including the New Homes Bonus, would be rolled over for another year.
- The elimination of Negative RSG, which benefited Districts by £56.2 million across 2019/20.
- Delay to the Business Rates Reset, which would have seen 65 per cent of business rates growth removed at a stroke. Our analysis with LG Futures and engagement with Ministers resulted in the average district receiving £1.79 million on average compared with current levels.

The DCN has also continued with its usual range of services, including:

- Commissioning a range of analysis, including on supply of affordable housing, the challenges for low income renters, the options for devolving financial levers to councils, and more.
- Highlighting the influential role and significant contribution of Districts in improving public health outcomes. 'Shaping healthy places: exploring the district role in health', published by the DCN in collaboration with the Local Government Association, details innovative prevention initiatives by district councils to improve people's lives and save long-term costs to the public purse.
- Engaging with parliamentarians through the APPG for district councils on LEPs, housing, finance and devolution.
- Ensuring that 2020/21 Disabled Facilities Grant allocations have a welcome requirement that the £191m should be passported from counties to districts unless expressly agreed by districts.
- Organising a DCN Annual Conference with over 250 attendees and a range of speakers across crucial issues for the sector.

My individual workload has been around the financial issues both in general and since the start of the pandemic, and more recently as part of the devolution working party.

My thanks to Nick Porter and the team at the DCN for their support and to all the brilliant Lib Dem councillors who have supported our work over the past 12 months.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

County Councils Network Report

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse



CCN is a cross party group and is made up of 26 county councils and 10 unitary councils representing 26 million residents, account for 41 per cent of England's GVA, and deliver high-quality services that matter the most to local communities.

It lobbies Government and works with the LGA on numerous fronts.

I became the group leader in late autumn 2019 taking over from Jon Hubbard. Since then we have had a series of meetings which changed the governance of CCN and a new work programme established. Policy development by CCN has been used in a range of campaigning opportunities for example the Low Carbon Homes and Home To School transport reports.

Councillor Stephen Giles Medhurst is leading on the Transport & Infrastructure Portfolio, he has already had some good media specifically on roads and potholes. Stephen will also act as my deputy if I am not available.

The annual CCN conference was held in Guildford and the Liberal Democrat group met to discuss 2021 elections plus at that time up and coming General Election. Following the election CCN submitted a paper 'Unleashing the Potential' and was presented to the Government.

The Liberal Democrat group met in March to start the policy discussion for 2021 County elections which give the party a massive opportunity to build its local base.

Presentations were received from the CCN Director on the emerging political landscape, devolution paper and finance especially adult social care and children services. It was agreed to start developing a policy document focusing on the 2021 county elections.

Something called COVID-19 moved in and we have been enabling a virtual world via the LGA. Improving communication is key to going forward as well as seeing the County Council Network as part of the Local government family within the Liberal Democrats.

Recent documents

www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Analysing-the-impact-of-Covid-19-on-county-authority-finances.pdf

Our challenges going forward will be the post Covid financial implications and the talk of a devolution paper in the autumn.

CCN Work Programme

- Fair Funding Review: Pixel Financial Management (Pixel) modelling on the impact of the Fair Funding Review proposals.
- Devolution: commissioned work under-take a study on devolution
- County APPG: Inquiry into rural bus services undertake extensive internal research and conduct call for evidence alongside new empirical evidence and analysis from LG Futures.
- Children's Social Care: Promoting Prevention report; extensive new study on children's services funding and the role of prevention in the future delivery of children's social care.
- Adult Social Care: Extra Care Housing; A new report exploring the role of extra care housing in managing social care demand and reforming planning to increase supply.
- Adult Social Care: Effective Practice & Systems in Adult Care and Health; Commissioning a major study focusing on making the case for the continuing role of local government in commissioning and providing services, alongside investment.
- Economic Growth: Broadband; a new report on the rollout of super-fast broadband based on new analysis of speeds in county and rural areas, alongside a survey on the barriers and challenges faced by member councils in improving digital infrastructure.

- Shared Prosperity Fund: research and analysis undertaken with CCN member councils on EU funding streams to influence how the new Shared Prosperity Fund is directed.
- Housing: undertake our annual analysis of the house price index and affordability statistics, producing a CCN analysis research report.
- Climate Change: Facilitate best practice sharing, to be promoted through a publication, with the option of working with an external agency to provide an overview of work that is being done across the sector.

Contact phone 07768 058353

Facebook Page www.facebook.com/groups/ccnlibdems – closed group you need to ask to join.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Policy Coordinator and Brexit Working Group

Councillor Chris White



2020 saw many changes, not least a new Party President, (in due course) a new leader of the party and, of course, COVID-19.

The move to a virtual party conference after the cancellation of York will potentially see a whole new approach

to the way councillors interact with the party and hopefully this will be for the better. Indeed it may give more councillors the ability to participate.

The General Election review, led by a former council leader (and indeed directly elected mayor), delivered stinging criticisms of the 2019 campaign, with little to disagree with. Change must follow but it is not yet clear whether the cultural as opposed to organisational changes necessary to make the party fighting fit will follow easily: local government is routinely overlooked, belittled or seen more as a stepping-stone to parliament than something of value in its right. The party still talks more easily about the NHS than social care while the role of councils in the front-line of the war against COVID-19 is even now not fully understood.

The Federal Board also plans to overhaul the party's multifarious IT systems, some of which are suboptimal and many of which duplicate (but imperfectly) lists of data. Work must be done here: but it must be work involving ALDC.

Brexit has not gone away but no real progress has been made and the LGAs working party is still looking at the issues that it was trying to raise with government a year ago. The likelihood of a no deal Brexit in December will mean more pressures on councils: but this time they will be financially weaker and less able to pick up the pieces of fractured supply chains and increased costs.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Audit, Commercial Advisory Board, Local Government Management Board and LGA Properties

Councillor David Neighbour



The committee has one representative from each of the political groups on the LGA. It meets twice a year to receive reports on performance against KPIs as well as the reports from internal audit on their investigations which range across

everything from fraud prevention to processes for conference bookings. The main piece of work is to receive the annual accounts from the LGA and its subsidiary companies. We also review the LGAs Risk Assessment reports and make recommendations for future challenges, which of course has included the work around the affect of COVID on the work of the LGA.

Commercial Advisory Board

The board is made up of one member from each of the political groups on the LGA. It's main remit is to provide oversight on the exploration of work streams which provide income to offset the base budget of the LGAs core work. This year saw the first bond from the Municipal Bond Agency and the LGA continues to work in partnership with REGIS to develop the Local Government Insurance Mutual. This has been a stop/start journey and progress has been slow. The principal is still sound but the effect of COVID on the insurance industry remains to be seen. The members of the board form the directors of LGA Commercial Services Ltd joined by the LGA Deputy Chief Executive.

LGMB (Local Government Management Board)

The board is responsible for Layden House and is served by 5 directors, one from each of the political groups of the LGA as well as the Deputy Chief Executive of the LGA. The board has overseen the complete refurbishment of the building which we are now on the verge of letting, helping to put the LGA on a more sustainable financial footing.

LGA (Properties)

The board is responsible for the running of the LGA main building at Smith Square. The board is made up of 5 directors, one from each of the political groups plus the Deputy Chief Executive. Last year we oversaw the refurbishment of the building, which has lead to the subletting of several floors. Again, the motivation has been to help secure the financial sustainability of the LGA. It has also had the added benefit of providing a significant uplift in the value of the two properties which has made for a vastly improved position regarding the pension liabilities of the organisation.

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The LGA Liberal Democrat Group Office

The Liberal Democrat Group office provides direct support and advice to Liberal Democrat council groups and councillors whilst also acting as the day-to-day voice of the Liberal Democrats within the LGA. We currently have two full-time members of staff. Terry Stacy, the head of office and Rob Banks. They both have experience as Liberal Democrat Councillors.

We help the Group to achieve its political objectives within the LGA and the party, working closely with LGA officers, Liberal Democrat HQ, our parliamentarians in both the House of Commons and House of Lords and with our colleagues at the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors with whom we organise joint events as well as sessions and fringes at both spring and autumn party conferences.

In addition to supporting the LGA Liberal Democrat Group we are also the first port of call for Liberal Democrat councillors in relation to a variety of policy, governance or legal issues.

We do weekly joint emails with ALDC to all councillors and ALDC members on a range of issues, news from the Liberal Democrats, local government news, good practice from council groups and councillors, highlight lobbying successes and details of events for councillors and campaigners. We also use twitter to keep our followers up to date, follow us on @libdemlocalgov.



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Head of the Group Office

Terry is responsible for the operation of the LGA Liberal Democrat Group. He also provides specific support on housing, welfare, fire and children's services. 020 7664 3295



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Political Adviser

Rob provides support for: environment; economy and transport; community wellbeing, culture, tourism and sport; and safer communities. 020 7664 3204

Amy Haldane has recently moved on from the Liberal Democrat Group Office to another position within the LGA. Our thanks to her for all her hard work as our Political Assistant and we look forward to working with her in the future in her new role.

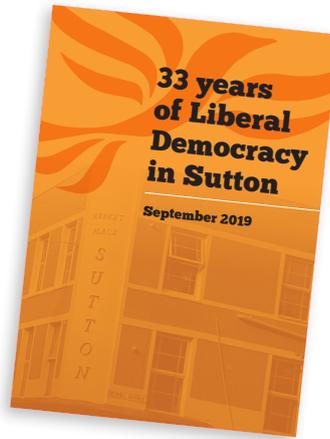
Our thanks also to Emma Morgan, our intern, for her help and assistance during the first three months of 2020.

Just some of the publications on our website...



Think Global, Act Local – Liberal Democrat Local Action for our Environment

Take a look at some case studies from Liberal Democrat councils and Liberal Democrat Groups on what they are doing to take action on environmental issues ranging from tackling climate change, reducing plastic waste and improving our local environment.



33 years of Liberal Democracy in Sutton

Sutton Council's system of Local Area Committees plays a very important role, transferring local decision-making back to the areas that we as councillors represent.

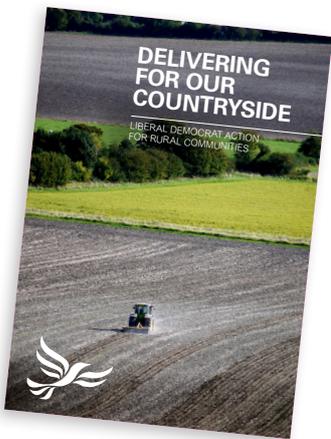


Stand for what you believe in: be a Liberal Democrat county councillor

Thinking of standing as a Lib Dem county councillor? The LGA Liberal Democrat Group working with the Association of Lib Dem

Councillors have put together a booklet giving more information on what the job involves.

Visit www.local.gov.uk/lga-libdem-group/our-publications for more!



Delivering for our countryside

Rural and coastal communities are individual and have characters of their own. How do the Liberal Democrats work with that and make it work?



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We consider requests on an individual basis.