

Introduction



Marianne Overton

**Leader of the Independent Group
Vice Chairman of the Local
Government Association**

**Lincolnshire County Council and
North Kesteven District Council**

The Independent Group:

A successful past and a bright future.

The Independent Group is the most diverse group of councillors, and therefore the most representative of the public. We are also generally most in touch with and committed to our communities, and that is what gets us elected. Therein resides our strength and the reason we have such a powerful contribution to make. We dare to be different, and work together to be most effective.

Our Independent Group's voices are much needed, listening, considering carefully and speaking up for our communities, our councils and our country. The LGA forms the vehicle for you to achieve more with your residents, getting national support and negotiating with government.

Success to date

➤ Raising our profile

Our members have responded brilliantly with increasing inspiration and success. More members than ever before are attending and speaking up at conferences, parliamentary briefings and Select Committees, in the press and through the LGA, bringing a sound common-sense approach, in touch with their communities and representing them well. We worked to get the BBC political policy guidelines improved to give better coverage to Independent Group members and spearheaded the grants for people with disabilities standing for election.

➤ A credible and effective voice

To raise our effectiveness at the LGA, we increased the information through conferences, briefings and newsletters, increased training, regional events and the number of Independent lead national, regional and accredited peers. Well informed and skilled, our members have played increasingly useful roles in their communities and their councils. They have worked with and attracted others. A massive 3,655 stood in the last election, including Independents and Residents Associations candidates, UKIP, Green Party Members and Plaid Cymru.

➤ Election success- the acid test

With a groundswell of support from councillors and from me nationally, we worked on supporting candidates through the PCC elections and Independent group members gained 33 per cent of the vote, overtaking all of the three main parties, and a quarter of the seats went to Independents. Bristol elected an excellent Independent Mayor at the same time.

In the May elections, Independent group members excelled, with more of *all* our groups being elected and raising our share of the national seats by 32 per cent. The three parties lost control in Councils across the country, often giving Independent group members a key role. Councils in Independent Group member leadership continue to demonstrate successful, fair and accountable local governance, driven by the needs of their communities.

What next?

- Increase the influence of our members in the decision-making process in Councils across the country and in national government.
- Keep ourselves skilled and well informed by discussions to keep our direction in tune with what our residents and councillors see is needed.
- Push for a proper share of funding for local government and real local power, without the strings that currently undermine it. At the same time we need to reshape to cope with less.
- Speak, vote and more importantly think about what our residents need and set about achieving it through work at local and national levels.
- Take a lead in shaping Local Government, drawing on the ideas and discussions of the membership. We have gained public health and re-ablement with appropriate funding; can we also bring yet more services under the umbrella of local democracy?

Thanks

Thanks to Apu Bagchi, my Deputy and to the Independent Executive Committee whose excellent attendance and contributions helped drive a very successful year. Our regional Chairmen have also supported Councillors in their areas and worked with us to organise a number of successful conferences around the country, tailored to local needs and aspirations and in reshaping local government. Many of you will know Maggie Sullivan, Head of the Independent Group office, supported by Vanessa Chagas who is on maternity leave – a huge thank you to Maggie and to Vanessa for their remarkable work.

Thank you to Jonathan Huish, our National Lead Peer, whose considerable abilities have helped us all. Thank you to our three regional peers, Tony Clarke, Graham Brown and Stuart Drummond for their excellent service.

Thank you to Cllr Hugh Evans, Leader of the Independent Group and Dyfed Edwards Leader of Plaid Cymru on the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). I had the pleasure of attending the WLGA conference recently.

Our thanks to Independent Group nominated, returning and new, LGA Vice Presidents:

- Baroness Greengross
- Lord Alton
- Lord Bichard
- Baroness Howarth
- Lord Ouseley
- Lord Walpole
- Keith Taylor MEP
- Lord Adebawale CBE
- Lord Laming
- Earl of Lytton

Thank you to the members of the Independent Group from right across England and Wales who represent us on the LGA Programme Boards, Panels, Committees, the Commissions, Special Interest Groups and external organisations, developing and tackling government legislation.

The great advantage of the LGA is that the four political groups really do sit round a table and work out how best to work for the Councils and people we represent. As we concentrate on issues rather than rhetoric, there is far more that unites us than divides us. Party political banter is taken in good humour.

My work as part of the LGA is listed in the annual report and makes impressive reading. Our Independent conferences and regional events have been the fertile ground for developing consensus for me to take forward on your behalf.

The Independent Group at the Local Government Association extends a warm welcome to all Independent Group members. Since your council is in membership of the LGA, you have the facilities and our small staff team to support your work and a route to directly influence national government, helping them keep their feet on the ground as they make laws that affect our residents.

Thanks to the LGA and to each one of you, members of the 2,427 Independent Group Councillors who have given their talents, skills and time to Local Government. This work matters to each one of the millions of people our councils serve every day. We are seeing unprecedented changes in local government. The mettle and determination of our Councillors is needed now and in the future.

Good luck and best wishes in all your many endeavours as a Councillor. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Marianne'.

Feel free to contact me if you want to talk anything through or check out the website:
www.independentvoice.org.uk 01400 273323

Dare to be different and together we can be most effective



**Councillor Bob Dutton OBE, Wrexham
Group Treasurer
Group Budget Report: 2012 - 2013**

The Independent Group had an excellent opportunity to build on its previous success as a result of an LGA central decision to afford the Group a generous financial package for its Lay Activity Budget, giving us £25,000. This enabled the Group's Leadership to embark on a stronger programme of regional meetings to promote the interests of the Group to Independent Councillors and members of smaller parties, and offer our assistance in the development, training and day to day work patterns.

The LGA itself has suffered a large reduction in the monies allocated from the top slicing of the local government settlement under the Government's hard driving Austerity Programme and this has resulted in considerable staff down-sizing. Regrettably our lay activity budget for 2012 – 2013 reflects the financial constraints being felt by the LGA.

The major part of the Group's expenditure in 2012 – 2013 is related to staff costs which amount to over £100,000 per year with overheads but which are controlled and audited centrally.

During the year with the finance available 6 regional meetings were held and (with the authority of the Executive Board and without precedents being set) certain members were supported in attending meetings if there were problems for them in taking advantage of opportunities to benefit from the presentations on offer.

The Group underspent marginally over the year which demonstrated the necessary fiscal control expected of a responsible group.

I would like to express my thanks to the Head of Group Office and Vanessa in assisting myself and the Group Executive in providing the monthly reports on progress of the Budget and commend their work in serving the Group's strong programme.

Summary of expenditure in 2011 – 2012

- Budget for the year including salaries and lay activity £126,107
- Total expenditure including salaries and lay activity £ 124,241

Key areas of lay activity spend

Computer costs and services	£884
Independent group events costs including speaker fees, venues, catering, travel, accommodation (includes member expenses and speaker expenses)	£8650
Printing, stationery and postage	£621
Couriers	£1151
Flights, taxis, rail, parking and tolls	£3503
Hotels	£4032
Subsistence expenses (members)	£504
Internal catering	£2308
Staff expenses	£753

A full financial statement is provided at Annex A of the annual report

Head of Office Activity Report – Maggie Sullivan

We have had an extremely busy year as the level of activity and engagement on the part of the Independent Group, both within the LGA and beyond, has increased. The number of general and specific enquiries to the office on all manner of issues continues apace and we have been able to provide general information to candidates outside of the three largest parties seeking to be elected in greater numbers than ever.

Independent Group members have achieved a consistent profile in FIRST, the Local Government Group fortnightly magazine, with letters and articles and postings to the FIRST blog. Our thanks, too, to colleagues who have contributed to particular LGA publications and lobbying efforts, whether by sending in views or attending LGA Parliamentary Receptions.

Jamie Davis, an A level student from Emmanuel School in Clapham joined us for a week's work experience.

We were able to support 6 regional meetings in 2012 - 2013, securing a wide range of influential and expert speakers. Our Group Annual Conference in October was well attended with the increasingly popular 'Speakers' Corner' attracting some terrific contributions. This year we invited a cohort of politics students from De Montfort University to tell delegates at the conference what they thought Local Government should be doing to improve services to communities in a speed-dating session.

We held a very successful two day, lead group members away-day event in Warwick and have facilitated two member peer accreditation events.

The Group was supported centrally to produce two guides for prospective councillors as part of the LGA's 'Be a Councillor' campaign and the group was instrumental in linking the LGA up with the Government Equalities Office 'Access to elected office for disabled people' fund.

Group elections for the posts of Leader, Deputy Leader and Treasurer saw us printing and posting some 2,000 sets of ballot papers to group members in June.

The support to our group members has picked up apace following elections on 2nd May through the offices of Jon Huish, Graham Brown, Stuart Drummond and Tony Clarke in their roles as lead group peers.

We are putting in place induction sessions for Independent Group members who were elected for the first time on 2nd May.

We welcome visits in person from Independent Group members to the Group Office, and will happily give you a guided tour to the facilities available in Local Government House. Do, please, get in touch with us with your queries and concerns. Even if we don't know the answer to a question ourselves, the Local Government Group enjoys a collective expertise which is always available to you. We can generally find a colleague who will be able to resolve any queries you have. If you want to visit the office please give us some notice so that we can re-arrange diaries accordingly. Thank you.

Vanessa Chagas went on maternity leave at the end of May and expects to return to work in January 2014 – my thanks to Vanessa for her outstanding support and all best wishes to Vanessa and Brian, her partner. Leanna Hay is now the Political Assistant for the group covering Vanessa's maternity leave and has made a terrific start in the post.

My appreciation for the support that many group members have given us in the office over the past year and our best wishes to you all for an equally successful 2013 / 2014 political year.

With kind regards,

Maggie, Vanessa and Leanna



*Jamie Davis, our work experience student in 2013
With Marianne and Maggie in the group office*

Independent Group Representative Reports

The Independent Group appoints representatives to all Local Government Group Member Structures, to outside organisations and to European and International Bodies. Reports from our representatives follow below:

Programme Boards

Children and Young People (CYP)



Councillor Apu Bagchi, Bedford Borough Council Deputy Chair

Like many other Programme Boards, it has been a busy year for the CYP Board. The Board has had to deal with some difficult issues. I would like to highlight here some of the areas where CYP Board members have been actively engaged:

- The new OFSTED role in the inspection of council school improvement services. There has been a debate about the council's role in education since the General Election. With the advent of "free schools" and sharply increasing number of academies the supposedly strong strategic role for councils has been weakened. It is quite clear that Ofsted is continuing to move into the realm of improvement of councils' safeguarding and care, with the recruitment of regional inspectors. Ofsted is currently consulting on raising expectations of quality and driving improvement in early year's education and childcare by more frequent re-inspection and monitoring of childcare and early years providers and replacing the "satisfactory" judgment with "requires improvement" category.
- The LGA has a longstanding commitment to sector led improvement in children's services and in this context the demise of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) by the DfE has been seen as harsh and unwelcome. The CYP Board has rightly recommended that support for CIB should continue to be provided by the LGA. It has to be acknowledged that the CIB was supported by a grant from the DfE and was due to receive £8.5m for its work in 2013-14. It is hoped that the co-ordinated work between LGA,

SOLACE and ADCS will be carried out in order to provide sector led improvement.

- A Children's Partnership has been set up to replace several Department of Health Programme Boards for children and young people. The core purpose of the Children's Partnership will be to bring together key national organisations accountable to policy, commissioning and delivery to improve children and young people's health outcomes.
- Child Poverty remains a critical reminder to the CYP Board that every local authority has the duty to prepare and publish child poverty needs assessment. The LGA welfare reform programme has commissioned a research project which will look at impact and typologies for those most affected including troubled families, and positive local responses.
- The Children and Families Bill has completed its commons Report Stage and the Bill is expected to progress through the House of Lords in July. The CYP Board is keen to see the Bill secures the best possible outcomes for all our children and young people.
- Last January the Government published "Further Action on Adopters: Finding more loving homes". The LGA, in partnership with SOLACE and ADCS, developed a set of actions to remove disincentives in the system and support councils to improve adopter recruitment. The recent indication points to the fact that the number of children placed for adoption has nearly doubled in the last year, demonstrating the progress being made by local authorities.
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) remains a high profile issue. The LGA has provided support to the sector and launched a "National Conversation" last February in order to raise awareness of CSE. The annual conference in July will provide online resource materials including training packs and case studies.



Community Health and Wellbeing (CHW)



Councillor Gillian Ford, London Borough of Havering Deputy Chair

The Community Health and Wellbeing Board have had a frenetic year with the Health and Care Support Act and the transference of Public Health back under the control of local authorities.

External events and attendance on behalf of the LGA have included round-table discussions on 'Tackling illicit Tobacco for better Health', Public Health 'Toolkit for Engaging Local Business' and 'Health and Human Rights'.

In relation to Dementia, events attended were, 'Dementia Action Alliance', 'Making London a Dementia friendly city' and a workshop with the BSI on the development of Dementia standards.

Lead members met with the Nuffield Trust carrying out a review of aggregate assessment of providers of health and social care in England with the intention of developing a Rating System.

Additional invitations to represent the LGA came from Action on Hearing Loss at the launch of 'Case for tackling hearing loss in care homes' and the launch of 'Hearing Screening for Life' Campaign, aimed at introducing a national screening test at the age of sixty five.

A plethora of LGA and co-signed, publications and reports have been amended and agreed by lead members including School Nurses, Hospital to Home, Fluoridation and Death Certification Reforms.

The big question being asked after the publication of Dilnot was; would the recommendations be implemented? Ministers confirmed at the National Children & Adult Services Conference that they would be; although the outcome was not at the recommended level.

The board has considered the financial implications of the Governments proposals for adult social care funding reform along with sector-led improvement for Adult Services and Health Reform, efficiency savings in Adult Social Care and Public Health funding.

Local Authorities Public Health responsibilities have been examined, including the significance of Health and Wellbeing Boards, NHS Health Check Assessment, Healthwatch, Health Protection and Health Reconfiguration.

Dignity in care has been at the heart of all work, which became more poignant when lead members agreed the joint Winterbourne concordat with key partners. Consideration was also given to the implications for Local Authorities, as a result of the Francis Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry.

The necessity to implement integrated care has grown in pace. Board discussions and the LGA conference on 'Commissioning for Integrated Health and Care' were the precursor to Minister Norman Lamb's Integrated Care pioneer programme. The programme has resulted in fortnightly meetings in Whitehall with key partners, working in collaboration to make integration work.

A Health and Wellbeing System Improvement Steering Group has been established with key stakeholders, including Lead Members, Department of Health, Department of Education, NHS England, Public Health England, and the Care Quality Commission. What has been made very clear is that **all** parties are in agreement that we need to work collaboratively for the health and wellbeing of residents and the reduction of budgets; we now need to see the implementation.

Culture, Tourism and Sport (CTS)



**Councillor Geoff Knight, Lancaster
Deputy Chair**

Spending Review

The LGA's submission to the Treasury makes the case for giving councils the powers to maximise the contribution of cultural services to enable local growth. This includes:

- Insisting on a new approach to lottery funding,
- DCMS to recognise that libraries will be a key for accessing Universal Credit.
- Suggesting a partnership approach to keeping the broadband roll-out on track
- Investment in physical activity to tackle obesity and improve public health.

Arts

- Working with VisitEngland - supporting the importance of the arts in attracting visitors to stay longer through a new partnership arrangement with Arts Council England (ACE).
- Encouraging VisitEngland to involve councils and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in the allocation of around £3m funding to local arts and events' organisations to attract visitors.
- LGA have contributed to an ACE review, ACE will replace its 9 regional councils with 5 area councils. A third of these seats will be reserved for local government representatives who will be nominated by local government.
- The Licensing Act 2003 (Amendment Order 2013) deregulates plays and dance for up to 500 strong audiences and indoor sport for up to 1,000 strong audiences. The LGA has campaigned for councils to also retain powers to ensure safety and protect residents from excessive noise and nuisance.

Superfast Broadband

- Fifteen contracts with suppliers have been signed - with more to follow.
- Remind government & telecom providers that councils wish to work with them

Sport

- LGA are working with Sport England to deliver a leadership programme for portfolio holders. We are running our sixth leadership academy in June 2013.
- Discuss with the Chairman of Sport England the opportunities that councils' new responsibilities for public health present for sport and physical activity.

Media

- Advised that the DCLG consultation on proposals "to protect the independent press from unfair competition" is contrary to Government's commitment to local decision-making. No evidence that council publications compete unfairly with local newspapers. If you include general advertising, councils subsidise the commercial newspaper industry by nearly £44 million per annum.
- We have suggested that there be an independent review.

Heritage

- Working with English Heritage - producing a publication identifying and sharing innovative approaches to deliver local historic environment services.
- Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) new scheme, Heritage Enterprise, empowers not for-profit organisations to work in partnership with the private sector to return neglected historic buildings to productive use. LGA is liaising with HLF to ensure that early discussions take place to ensure planning permission.



Environment and Housing (E&H)



Councillor Andrew Cooper, Kirklees Deputy Chair

It is impossible to go into detail of all issues covered by the Environment and Housing Board in the space available so I have just picked out a few items. Please get in touch if you would like further detail.

One issue that has been concentrating the minds of the Environment and Housing Board has been the issue of weekly bin collections for grey bins. This 'interest' is not our own but that of Local Government Minister Eric Pickles. Many councils have transferred to bi-weekly collections for grey bins for a number of years now. This has been motivated by a desire to cut costs in response to budgetary pressures and also to increase the drive for householders to recycle more of their household rubbish. To incentivise councils to go back to weekly bin collections Mr Pickles announced a £250 million fund to help councils to convert back. He has also stated that further cuts could come to councils who do not go back to weekly bin collections.

So is Mr Pickle's position reflecting a general concern amongst the population? Not really. A recent ICM poll showed 74 per cent of people were happy with their bin collections and only 9 per cent wanted a return to weekly bin collections. Changing back to weekly bin collections would put additional on-going costs back onto council tax payers for years ahead. Most Councils have realised this and only one (Stoke on Trent) is using the funding to convert from bi-weekly to weekly collections. What we do know is that if we were to go back to weekly grey bin collections that recycling rates will decline further. Nationally recycling is at around 43 per cent of household waste. There was cross party agreement on the board that Eric's view on bin collections was just plain wrong. I suggested we write to him and DEFRA requesting a meeting with Government to work together on a Waste Reduction Strategy to stop so much waste going into our bins in the first place. Measures such as taxes on packaging and plastic bags have been successful in other countries so why not here? The Board agreed with this suggestion and I'll let you know how we get on.

The issue of Shale gas was raised as a topic for the Board in the context of the Council's planning role in relation to applications to establish drilling operations. Concerns were raised about the impact on chemicals in the water table and seismic activity but the principal issues I highlighted were the impact on energy policy and carbon emissions. There is a reported 8 per cent leakage of natural gas from fracking operations which is a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. The other concern I had was the fact that extracting the last dregs of fossil fuels to fuel the

economy rather than proper investment in low carbon technologies is at best a distraction but more likely a disaster in its contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.

Meetings with Greg Barker

In my role as a Lead member I attend quarterly meeting with the Climate Change Minister Greg Barker. I have raised concerns about the Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation both of which are flagship Government policies but have significant issues with implementation. Sadly my concerns seem to be being realised with very few people taking up the Government's Green Deal.

Inland Flood Risk Working Group

Since becoming the Chair of the Local Government Association's Inland Flood Risk Working Group we have wrestled with many aspects of central and local government approaches to the issue just as some of the worst flooding events ever experienced were hitting towns and villages up and down the country. In all around 7,800 homes were flooded and some more than once. I gave evidence to the Government Select Committee on flood funding earlier this year.

One of the first issues raised by the Select Committee's Chair Ann Mcintosh MP was whether or not the funding provided by government was meeting the need for flood prevention measures. I pointed out the fact that the additional £120 million provided by government for schemes was a 'drop in the ocean' and that the flood alleviation scheme for Runnymede alone would cost around £200million. I was asked about the effectiveness of the Bellwin scheme - central government funding for flood hit councils. After a flood event it is not unusual to see government ministers giving interviews mentioning how government emergency funds will be brought in under the Bellwin scheme to help out local Councils. To qualify for the scheme the damage must cost more than around 2 per cent of a Councils annual budget. Millions of pounds worth of funds has to be incurred by Councils before they can be considered for assistance. There are also an awful lot of items not covered by the Bellwin scheme such as damage to roads and infrastructure. Calderdale incurred costs of around £2.5million following the Hebden Bridge/Todmorden Floods but under the Bellwin formula only qualified for around £80k.

After making these points one of the MP's on the Committee (Conservative I'm guessing) asked me what I would cut to pay for flood defences. As he was asking (and I was trying to be helpful) I suggested cutting the billions of pounds being allocated to HS2 and Trident. He didn't probe deeper. Maybe he agreed.



European and International Programme Board



Councillor Shirley Flint, North Kesteven Deputy Chair

Hard to believe I am coming to the end of my first year on this Board as a Deputy Chair. It has been a very interesting and challenging year, mainly because as District Councillors we do not always have a lot of input into European and International affairs.

I set out with a determination to learn as much as I could, as quickly as I could, and I think I achieved this. To go Brussels as part of a lobbying group immediately after my first Board meeting certainly fitted the criteria of learning as quickly as possible.

At each Board meeting, and Board leaders' meetings in between, I have become more confident in the subjects raised, and I have found it be extremely interesting.

Outside of Board meetings, I have had discussions with my own Economic Development officer; with County Council officers involved more directly with European funding, and have attended a training day at the LGA. I am attending a European funding seminar in July with my Economic Development officer, at Bishop Grosseteste University.

One of the main aspects of the Board's work this year has been European funding, and how to make it more localised. The good news that it is indeed to be more locally led but this could be problematic as the funding will go directly to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Some of these partnerships are extremely good and are well linked with their local authorities, and these should go on to promote a lot of success with local funding, with well thought out and achievable schemes. Some LEPs, however, have virtually no links with local authorities and there is a lot of variation in between. For the localised scheme to work effectively it is essential the LEPs do work with local authorities and this will be the biggest challenge. I have been trying to arrange a meeting with my own LEP and I will continue to try to get this. More work will certainly be needed to ensure all LEPs are open to public scrutiny, and democratically led.

On the International side, there is continual dialogue with countries such as Mexico to establish and increase strong trading links. Peer challenges, particularly in Africa, have been very successful and there is an increasing call from these nations to have

more of these peer challenges. There is, inevitably, a resources issue with this, and this will have to be looked at very carefully.

I have had tremendous support from the officers serving this Board, and from the Chairman and other Deputy Chairs, and I am very grateful for this.

To summarise, I thank the Independent group for giving me the opportunity to go 'outside my comfort zone', it has certainly given me a new interest, and I hope I am able to continue the journey. I have really enjoyed representing the Independent Group on this Board.

Improvement and Innovation



Councillor Jeremy Webb, East Lindsey Deputy Chair

Alongside the core business of the board (championing sector led improvement through the Improvement and Development Agency {IDeA}) a real push has been made to encourage innovation amongst local authorities. Two main strands have been pursued under the banners of 'Creative councils' and the 'Innovation Framework'. The case studies and experiences of councils participating are available on the LGA Knowledge Hub. Whilst some interesting ideas have emerged the major breakthrough and paradigm shift that the sector needs is not yet within our grasp.

For me, and I guess some others, a key issue is survival with rapidly diminishing income; interestingly the notion of reorganisation and the imposition of a unitary solution across the country has remained the elephant in the room. Performance reports have started to reveal a small but growing number of districts facing a financial crisis and worryingly things look to be about to get even tougher with no agreed solution to this problem – it's that elephant again.

The hugely popular and successful leadership programme has survived the cuts although there has been some tweaking to save costs and a(nother) review is currently underway. If you have not been on one of the courses tackle your group leader and get on one, they are well worth the effort.

Performance across the sector has been solid with many authorities making use of the free peer review offered by the LGA and recently a flood of requests have come in – make sure your authority has had or is having a review. A persistent area of concern has been adults' and children's services which are under an increasingly severe inspection regime which many authorities find challenging. There is good

practise and innovation out there and the LGA is making every effort to identify it and share it.

Finally the hopes at the beginning of the year (and last year) that freedom from reporting vast quantities of data and a new approach to audit are being realised but in a watered down format – c'est la vie!

Economy and Transport



Councillor Mike Haines, Teignbridge Deputy Chair

There are a range of views on the Board over the issue of HS2, which reflects the different views nationally. The LGA has been offered 2 places at the HS2 Roundtable in order to accommodate this situation (i.e., one representative for and one against).

The Local Growth Campaign that ran last year has continued, but with meetings around the country now focusing on specific aspects of the work (e.g., Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs), innovation & Higher Education (HE), skills (youth & adult), transport, etc. There has been overlap between this work and the Heseltine Review - *No Stone Unturned* - and the City Deals, including the second wave. Greater economic devolution has been welcomed, but the size of the 'single pot' may not be as large as was originally hoped, and should be known before the end of June.

There has been joint working with the Children & Young People Board on the on-going *Hidden Talents* campaign, and with the Safer and Stronger Communities Board on helping growth through better regulation (I also spoke at a Licensing conference on this issue).

The *Streetworks* campaign was launched in December with a report looking at the cost to councils and businesses of poor road works by utility companies, and this was followed by a summit in March with representation from the various sectors, but also attended by the Transport Minister and Chair of the Transport Select Committee. This was then followed by the first task group meeting (which I chaired) in May, and this work is on-going.

Earlier this year Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) established a 'Future High Streets Forum' and I have represented the Board on this. The Forum follows on from the work that was undertaken in the Portas Review, and details are on the DCLG website. In addition I have been a member of the working group on retail markets (also from DCLG) which has been particularly involved

recently in the 'Love your local market' campaign. I represented the Board at a joint event of the London Boroughs of Camden and Brent at the Kilburn Empire which involved public debate on the future of Kilburn High Road.

Things have been relatively quiet on the transport front, with announcements from the Department for Transport (DfT) still anticipated. The Transport Secretary is due to attend the November meeting of the Board. The Commons Transport Select Committee has recently been looking at local authority parking policy, and I would expect this to gain more media attention soon.

I was recently appointed as a member of the Independent Approvals Panel for Business in the Community's 'CommunityMark':

<http://www.bitc.org.uk/services/awards-recognition/communitymark/about-communitymark>

This involves scrutiny of applications by businesses (ranging from large well-known names to others you may not have heard of) for the CommunityMark award.



Safer and Stronger Communities (SSCB)



Councillor Philip Evans, Conwy Deputy Chair

This was my first year as an Independent Group Deputy Chair on this Programme Board and I attended all the Board meetings and all except one of the Lead members' meetings.

This is a larger Board – 18 members – and it has been interesting to meet a broad cross-section of councillors from a wide geographical area. I have also served concurrently as a director of the Local Authorities Co-ordinator of Regulatory Services (LACORS). This board is on the point of being finally wound-up as its functions have been transferred elsewhere within the LGA.

In my SSCB role, I gave an interview to the Director of a body called "Transform Justice". My contribution formed the main local government input into their recently published report on Management of Magistrates' Courts.

The main work of the SSCB is commenting on and trying to influence legislation as it passes through its various stages. It has been rewarding to see we have had positive outcomes in many instances all of which will be of benefit to local government. Examples include changes to the Scrap Metal Dealers Act; review of the dated Pedlars' legislation; the new Anti-social behaviour provisions; and the ability to suspend premises licences where fees are unpaid. I managed to curtail a suggestion that Personal Licences be abolished.

The sheer volume of legislation affecting Community Safety and kindred areas is quite significant and can be daunting. It is very important that the impact on local government is identified and appropriate comments made.

I have been encouraged in the role by the Group Officers whose advice and guidance is invaluable. I am also very grateful to Maggie and her colleagues in the Group Office for their help and support at all times.



Workforce and pay and pensions negotiations



Councillor Norman Murphy Deputy Chair

The Workforce Board, the Local Government Pensions Committee, the National Employers of Teachers (NEOST) and the Fire National Joint Council (NJC) have all, as usual, been involved over the past year in a wide variety of discussions and negotiations on a number of very contentious issues. The main areas covered related to pay, pensions and the terms and conditions of employment for our workforce. These negotiations and discussions with the Trade Unions, Local Authorities and many other Stakeholder Groups covered a wide variety of topics and involved much behind the scenes, and therefore often very confidential, bargaining which in the main, I feel, has resulted in a favourable settlement for all parties.

That being said discussions and negotiations continue and the coming years will present many new challenges. However, I anticipate that we will continue to make useful contributions to the negotiations and, as normal, punch well beyond our weight. In regard to the work of my boards and committees, as mentioned, many of the topics under discussion are confidential nonetheless as some of these discussions are now in the public domain I feel that I may share with you details of some of the issues which have been discussed.

LGS NJC

Our officers, after consulting members, asked the trade unions to consider their stance of being unable to discuss changes to terms and conditions in return for an across-the-board offer. Our officers also told them that if they could not move from their current position then this might affect pay negotiations in future years. Following these discussions the National Joint Council (NJC) Executive met on 21 February, at this meeting the National Employers asked the Trade Union Side to consider two options with a view to securing an eventual agreement for this financial year. The trade unions rejected both options so after further consideration and in recognition that the vast majority of councils want their employees to get a pay rise, an offer of 1 per cent and deletion of the bottom pay point has been made. We anticipate this will be the basis of an agreement with the trade unions.

NEOST

The NEOST secretariat has submitted a response to the Department for Education's (DfE) consultation on the draft 2013 School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document. The consultation ended on 14 March and the Department intend to publish the Document "early in the summer term" in order to give schools and local authorities time to prepare for the new arrangements, in particular for differentiated pay progression. These arrangements will apply to pay decisions from September 2014 but will be based upon the outcomes of appraisals taking place in the school year 2013/14. It is yet to be seen whether these arrangements will be successful.

Fire and Rescue Service

The Fire NJC has been heavily involved in pay and terms and conditions discussions and has instigated a review of these issues. This is a joint review under the auspices of the NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services. Members, myself included, in order to fully understand the issues were invited to a workshop earlier in the year and a second workshop for members of the Employers' Side and its advisers was held recently to continue formulation of Employers' Side aspirations as part of this joint piece of work. Meanwhile a pay deal has been reached with the Fire Brigades Union for an increase of 1 per cent across the board and a move to HMRC car mileage rates.

Local Government Pensions Committee (LGPC)

The LGPS 2014 project has been working to agree the major design elements and governance mechanisms for the new pension's scheme which it is anticipated will be implemented in April 2014. Following a statutory consultation published on 21 December 2012 (with a closing date of 8 February) a further consultation followed and was reported to members at the end of March. This next consultation will include a further set of draft benefit regulations together with draft regulations covering transition. The benefit regulations will require another draft due to the complexity of replicating certain elements of the current final salary scheme (for example purchase of extra membership) into a career average scheme. Much of this work has now been done, and discussed with members, and the new regulations will allow actuaries to take account of their impact in the 2013 valuation exercises. Further regulations covering governance, cost management and administration will follow later in the year.



LGA Panels

Finance



Alderman Matthew Luder, City of London Deputy Chair

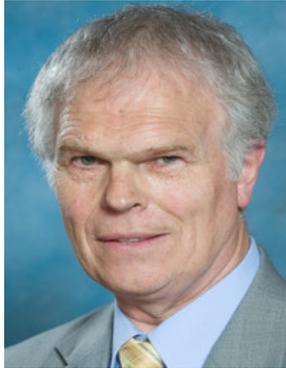
This year I have been the Independent Group representative on the Finance Panel. I have attended all of the meetings of the panel. The purpose of the panel is to review and consider ways in which local government is funded and ways in which that funding can be maximised.

Sadly, central government does not take local government seriously enough. This year I and the panel have felt somewhat like King Cnut trying to hold back the tide of government cuts and unfunded new burdens on local government. At every turn it seems like the DCLG do not have the respect for local government that they ought to.

This lack of respect was never more clearly manifested than in the “Graph of Doom” incident in which a fully evidence based report demonstrating the problems in funding that local government has was completely rubbished by the Select Committee. Perhaps it will take a council to go bankrupt for the government to listen. Sadly on the numbers this may be closer than many think.

In my view the solution is simply to keep batting, so long as the LGA continues to produce high quality evidence based reports on the problems, and solutions, for local government then we are doing our job and when the problems that are predicted start to occur it will be easy for the LGA to start taking a more leading position in remedying those problems. The most recent spending review submissions are an excellent example. Sadly I fear that once again central government will continue to ignore and shift its problems on to local government. It is this dynamic that make the work of the LGA so vital.

Resources



Councillor Colin Mann, Caerphilly Deputy Chair

Four meetings have been held since I was nominated to the panel last year.

The main focus of the Panel was to ensure that a robust budget was agreed for 2013-14. The Panel also oversees the LGA's approach to Treasury Management, has focussed on the Liberata contract, the overall LGA financial strategy and pension deficits. Recommendations are also made on member subscription levels.

The work programme for 2013-14 was agreed at the October meeting. Members also agreed to focus on the Medium Term Financial Plan, the Liberata contract and the review of LGA subscriptions. Agreement was reached to encourage authorities in membership not to 'roll-over' a membership withdrawal notice. It was agreed to offer a 2.5 per cent discount for prompt payment.

The November meeting concentrated on the Liberata contract re-negotiation. Target net savings of £5.4 million were to be sought over the remaining five years of the contract with a minimum target of £4.75m. Achievement of the target would save £535k in comparison to termination of the contract. It was agreed that a Heads of Terms Agreement be signed by the end of December and a revised contract put in place by 1.4.13.

Free LGA membership for the current year was to be offered to Police and Crime Commissioners with a £12,000 fee for next year.

The in-year financial performance was projecting a £645k underspend for the current year.

The February meeting was told that the Heads of Terms agreement was signed in December, as agreed by the November meeting. Good progress was being made on completing the contract and it was expected to generate total savings of more than £5 million for the next five years. Provision was being made for future contract renegotiation, dependant on the future turnover of the Association.

The expectation in February was that turnover was expected to reduce by around £2m (around 4 per cent) in 2013-14. Turnover had nearly halved since 2010-11 with employee numbers reduced from 447 to 285.

The Association's ICT strategy has been agreed and progress made on strengthening governance arrangements.

The June meeting was the last one of the Panel due to the reorganisation of internal structures in the light of top slice funding cuts and the work of the Panel being moved to the LGA Leadership Board.

The consolidated financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2013 has received an unqualified opinion from the external auditors.

The Panel approved the financial statements for the year ended 31.3.13 and also authorised the Chair to sign the letter of representation to the auditors at the appropriate stage.

The Panel noted the LGA's performance in delivering its priorities for 2012-13 which will be used as part of the communications campaign for annual conference.

Members discussed arrangements in hand to deal with the reduction of £2 million in RSG and the withdrawal of funding of £8.5m pa for the Children's Improvement Programme. Members noted that this will lead to reductions in the staffing establishment at the LGA and that funding for the different work streams will be reviewed to see where savings can be achieved.

The Leadership Board had decided that the key issues were governance arrangements, property management, subscription levels and treatment of pension liabilities. Panel members have asked for a strong focus on membership levels as a total of 21 councils are currently on notice to leave the Association in 2014-15.

The Panel noted the revised budget and officers' assurances that a balanced budget position could be achieved.

The Panel considered its Annual Report for 2012-13. Thanks were given to the officer team who had supported the Panel's work over the years.

Resources Panel members were willing to pass on constructive advice to aid the Leadership Board in its work to ensure continuing scrutiny of the LGA. In addition to the subjects highlighted in the Annual Report (item 6) members added two elements – firstly, to include a timetabled programme of work and, secondly, that a mid-year review of the revised governance arrangements be undertaken by an external body to ensure that proper scrutiny takes place.



Committees

Audit and Scrutiny



Alderman Ian Luder CBE Deputy Chair

The Committee met on June 4th and June 13th. All four members of the Committee were in attendance on both occasions, making what might be a unique LGA record of 100 per cent attendance throughout a year!

The purpose of the meetings was to review, with both the Internal and external auditors, the LGA Report and Accounts and recommend their approval to the Resources Panel. The Audit Committee undertook a similar exercise for each individual organisation and made recommendations to the respective Boards of Directors.

The points perhaps worth noting are

- A. The auditors intend to give a "clean" audit certificate.
- B. There were fewer adjustments which had to be made to the draft accounts (this is only the second year for which consolidated accounts were prepared). The Lead Partner of the external auditors noted that there had been an improvement in year-end processes.
- C. LGIH which became dormant immediately after the year-end, owns the intellectual property which is licensed to GeoPlace LLP, as part of the joint venture with IDEA. It stands in the balance sheet at NIL. I proposed, and the committee agreed, that it should be retained at a figure of £1000 so that its existence was not lost over time. The external auditors concurred.
- D. We received the Annual Fraud report, and noted the instance where an LGA credit card allocated to a member of staff had been cloned. The loss was borne by the card issuer and not the LGA.

- E. We considered the report of the work of the auditors, and spent an inside table amount of the discussion on the two areas where the work highlighted some weaknesses and where only "adequate" assurance was given, including ICT strategy in considering the internal audit work programme for 2013-14, the Committee requested a further review of this area to ensure that recommendations had been implemented.

As ever, I would be happy to provide further information.

LGA Fire Services Management Committee & Fire Commission



Councillor Brian Copping, Shepway Deputy Chair

Retained Firefighter Pensions

Members were made aware that the Retained Firefighter Pensions Employment Tribunal decision to grant retrospective access to the firefighter pension scheme creates potentially large non-employee scheme liabilities. This ruling, laudable as it is, places a great, unknown quantity, financial burden on Fire Authority revenue sources.

Why? Successive governments maintain that the revenue costs associated with this decision should be financed from Fire Authorities revenue streams. The LGA, always aware of the complexity of public service pension schemes, has debated this issue many times within the FC and FSMC meeting Agendas. The FC and FSMC, with Independent Group support, believe fire service budgets, already overwhelmingly `pay and pension` oriented, cannot possibly sustain further unknown pension costs.

The next steps are gathering information on the potential impact of fire authorities have to bear the scheme liability. And, continue to press the Minister and Treasury for a more sustainable solution.

Domestic and non-domestic sprinkler systems

Since fire authorities began debating sprinkler systems before the turn of the century, firefighters, elected members to the authorities and professional safety experts have always maintained, for domestic and non-domestic fire safety, sprinkler systems

have a proven record towards alleviating fire injuries and fire damage. Again, successive governments have not supported providing secondary legislation within the Planning and Building Regulation Acts, aimed to provide planning authorities with the authority to require a sprinkler system to be installed. It is worthwhile to comment that successive fire conferences have never suggested anything other than a sprinkler system in all domestic and non-domestic new build and refurbished developments.

Because successive governments believe developers 'should be encouraged' to install sprinklers, and because the Chief Fire Officers Association believe 'should be encouraged' is not a solution, the CFOA believe there is an overwhelming argument for the introduction of sprinklers, particularly in high risk areas such as **schools, care homes, high rise accommodation and hospitals**. At the FSMC meeting on 25th January I suggested the FSMC should formally endorse the CFOA submission. The minutes of this meeting did not reflect my contribution. I will continue to raise and support this issue speaking on behalf of the Independent Group.

Flooding

We know the fire service, with our partners in the emergency services, have been overwhelmed by the large increase of incidents due to serious weather related flooding. The LGA, Fire Authorities and professional fire officers associations support the position, endorsed by Sir Michael Pitt in his recent report on the flooding events of 2007, that the government should urgently put in place a fully funded national capability for flood rescue, with Fire and Rescue Authorities playing a leading role, underpinned, if necessary, **by a statutory duty**. The Independent Group supports this proposal to government and will continue to raise the subject when the Minister attends meetings of the LGA FC and FSMC.

Firefighter Safety

I have raised, at every opportunity, issues surrounding firefighter safety. Planning and Building Regulation legislation is, in my opinion, not helpful within the areas of safety and risk. Recent past events highlight the need for secondary legislation to give fire authorities a greatly enhanced consultee role when District planning authorities consider certain domestic and most definitely non-domestic hybrid planning applications and building regulations assessments. Firefighters require their 'data streams' to be completely up to date especially in large, complex, domestic and non-domestic buildings and new developments. I will continue to raise these issues.

Operational Efficiency

The fire Minister, Brandon Lewis, has commissioned Sir Ken Knight, immediate past Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor to lead a short review into the operational efficiency of the services delivered by fire and rescue authorities in England. Although 'short' it is likely to be 'broad'. The Fire Commission agenda for 14th June 2013 includes an item on key points from the review report. The review reports details where financial savings could be found which, it seems to me, does not take into account the areas of non-statutory duty and most definitely the heightened awareness of homeland security and the nature of complex 'major fire and road traffic' incidents. It seems to me that the government, in the form of the Minister, has embarked on a journey which will provide the LGA FC and FSMC with more than a little 'soul searching' debate. I will report more when I submit my briefing notes to Maggie at the conclusion of FC and FSMC meetings.

During the course of September 2012 to June 2013 period the FC and FSMC have had placed before them item for debate and to note. The subjects include; equality and diversity, industrial relations, spending reviews, The Fire Service College as well as presentations from fire authorities on, for example, safe and independent living and a complex fire incident.

Commissions

Rural Commission



Councillor Bertie Mackay, Warwick Deputy Chair

Looking back over the last municipal year, we start with the Commission and Conference in the autumn. We met at Low Wood Bay, Windermere on 11/12 September.

The Commission meeting offered Workshops on the National Policy Planning Framework (PPF) in practice; using data to inform priorities led by Norfolk Rural Community Council; and National Parks and Rural Economies.

Implementing the Green Deal was the subject of some scepticism. The Conference featured a Breakfast fringe meeting on “fairer funding”. The Ministerial Address was given by Owen Paterson MP newly appointed Secretary of State for DEFRA. He brought The Rural Statement which was published that day. He covered a wide range of topics by answering questions rather than giving a set speech. Housing, Broadband, Rural Energy, Rural Proofing, the Rural Growth Network all featured.

Finally, Local Government’s Public Health Responsibilities and Rural growth – the latter producing interesting insights into historical changes in the pattern of rural growth from Ivan Annibal.

The Commission met on 6 March 2013 and the Policy Review Group on 27 November 2012 and 6 June 2013. It must be said that the Officers worked hard to set a topical and challenging agenda. The Commission is in good health. I am looking forward to 3/4 September when the Commission and Conference take place at the Hilton Hotel Warwick within Warwick District Council. I hope to see some of you there.

Urban Commission



Councillor Clarence Barrett, Havering Chair

I have been very privileged to chair the Urban Commission and the Urban Commission Steering Committee for a second year in which we have covered a wide range of issues that impact upon urban and semi-urban councils. The Commission provides a forum where views and suggestions can be fed through to the LGA leadership and boards in order to help formulate and promote LGA policy.

City Deals was a major area of interest where 20 'City Deals' were agreed back in February with Brighton & Hove, Hull & Humber and Reading among the successful applicants. Aligned to City Deals, we had some excellent presentations from Cllr Peter Box (Chair of the Economy & Transport Board), Cllr Tony Ball (leader of Basildon Council), Andrew Carter (Centre for Cities) and Miatta Fahnbulleh (Head of Cities Policy Unit, Cabinet Office). Work is on-going to extend the 'City Deal' concept to counties and rural areas with an emphasis on the need to focus on economic areas rather than authority boundaries.

Local Government Finance featured prominently in our work programme, particularly around retained business rates, community budgets, shared services, social care and the localisation of council tax support schemes. We had excellent presentations from LGA advisors and Cllr Catherine West (LGA Finance Panel) where the LGA's [Funding outlook for councils](#) document was discussed.

The Growth and Infrastructure Bill and its impact on Housing and Planning was also visited, particularly how proposed planning changes would impact on economic growth. Relaxation of planning permission for larger extensions and the centralising nature of the Bill were some of the areas where delegates expressed concern. This was fed through to the LGA leadership which led to modifications in the Bill.

Workshops covered issues such as Transport, Housing, Roads and Buses, Skills reform, Shared Services and a follow up on the 'High Streets' and local economies.

Last year we introduced the Urban Commission '**Bulletin**' which keeps members updated as to policy development, LGA campaigns and any issues which impact on urban authorities. The most recent Bulletin was published in May and included updates on the Queen's Speech, EU Growth Programme, Hidden Talents and the LGA Spending Round submission.

The next Full Urban Commission meeting is on 8th October at LGA House, London. Further information, including agendas, reports and presentations on the topics set out above can be found at <http://www.local.gov.uk/urban-commission> .



Local Partnerships (LP)



Councillor Keith Ross, West Somerset

Our board meeting started with the news that RSG for the LGA had been reduced by £2.2m in year and our Chief Executive and Chairman had met with the LGA Chairman and Chief Executive to explore the possibilities for LP to support the LGA at this time. LP has a top slice allowance, which has slowly reduced from a 2011/12 figure of £2.5m to and expected £1.7m in the 2014/5 year.

It is worth mentioning here that in 2012/13 our major activities were:

- Working with 65 councils directly in a wide range of pilot projects, as were clusters of Councils in London, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, West Midlands and the East of England
- Key work with DCMS to put in place a support platform for urban broadband and digital exploitation with £100m funding from the urban broadband fund
- Collaborating with the LGA to develop the LG Collective Agency. Three of our board members, including me, were nominated by the LGA political groups to

work up the possibilities and since we started, LP has joined us with their expert knowledge

- Pioneering work to create a network of support for Social Enterprises offering peer support, learning, joint procurement and funding information
- The development, with DECC joint funding, of a national roll-out of the GLA Re-Fit programme introducing self-financing energy efficiency programmes in public buildings
- Working with London Waste and Recycling Board and West Midlands Alliance in providing hands on support
- Working with Wirral B.B. and the LGA on new models of service delivery
- Working with the LGA on initiatives to improve procurement in local government

So, with the prospect of a funding reduction we have to look carefully at our programme to seek efficiencies whilst trying to maintain support for councils and government departments. Fair to say here that although we are a not for profit body we aim to make capital from paid for work (mainly for HM Government) to subsidise our work with councils.

Our proposals for this year have therefore been addressed in the light of the potential reduction. We still have a substantial programme centred on four themes:

- Growth
- Innovative funding
- Energy/Waste
- Public Service reform

This will form the basis for reports as the year progresses.

The chief Executive's report highlighted all the current programmes, which include:

- The rural broadband programme
- Re-negotiating PFI contracts which already have found savings of £200m for local councils
- The Re-Fit programme
- The Waste Infrastructure Development Programme
- Working with the Welsh Assembly mainly on Waste and new schools.
- These last two programmes are likely to make an income of c. £3m this year.

Looking forward, we have work in the pipeline with Stoke on Trent and Sheffield Councils under the DCLG Capital Asset Pathfinder programme. Working with the LGA we have now been commissioned to undertake work with 12 pilot authorities in the One Public Estate programme to rationalise assets across the public sector. The LGA have asked specifically for us to work with Leeds and Nottingham.

We are at the beginning of supporting Local Enterprise Partnerships in relation to economic growth, more on that as it develops.

We are raising our profile within the sector. LP will have a stand at the LGA conference and I have offered to help on the stand, so please come and see me!

Local Authorities Mutual Investment Trust (LAMIT)



Councillor Roger Dennison, Lancaster

I am currently a board member on behalf of the independent group for The Local Authorities Mutual Investment Trust (LAMIT). I was appointed on 6th September 2012.

Its last meeting was in May 2013 and it usually meets around four times per year at Senator House 85 Queen Victoria Street London. Currently the Public Sector Deposit Fund [PSDF] reached over £180 million in January 2013 It is hoped to re-commence the payment of dividends in this financial year.

Regulatory developments: CCLA who act on behalf of LAMIT Will be affected by the Alternative Investment Fund Managers Directive [AIFMD] This European Legislation will impact on the way CCLA manage the LAMIT funds. The full effect of this will not be clear for a number of months until the final rules become clear.

Changes have been made in financial management and IT systems to ensure an effective monitoring system is in Place for the future.

The report of the independent external auditor Ernst & Young indicated the accounts showed "a true and fair view of the financial position" subject to final information and explanations being received.

The property portfolio performs above the industry average in returns and occupancy in these difficult financial times.

Overall, currently a satisfactory situation..

European and international Appointments

UK Delegation to the Committee of the Regions



Councillor Linda Gillham, Runnymede

My role on the Committee of the Regions (CoR) principally involves being the political coordinator for our group on the ENVE committee (Environment and Climate change). This has been busy with many opinions but the most interesting have been on energy efficiency, smart metering and of course renewable energies. We are looking at shale gas and fracking which will be controversial as it is seen as a windfall by some and environmentally damaging by others.

Another area of considerable importance is the review of targets for waste. A study has been commissioned and targets for 2030 are under review. Some countries are close to achieving zero waste to landfill already.

I have been appointed Rapporteur on an opinion on "Plastic waste in the Environment" This is a Green Paper from the Commission and poses some very interesting questions on plastic bags, marine plastic waste and recycling or energy from waste.

I have also played a part in the 2020 Monitoring group on the Flagship initiatives looking at youth unemployment and various schemes that are being developed throughout Europe to help with this terrible problem affecting young people.



Council of the Congress of Europe



former Councillor Vanessa Churchman, Isle of Wight

UK Delegation

The UK has one of the largest delegations in the Congress and UK members have important role to play in contributing to policy formulations, election monitoring and development of local democracy in Europe. Moreover, UK members have opportunity to participate in debates in areas of particular interest to UK local authorities (migration, trafficking, climate change etc..) and learn from experiences elsewhere in Europe.

The UK has a delegation of 18 members, of whom 13 are nominated by LGA, who also provides the UK-wide secretariat. The UK Delegation meets before each of the two Congress plenary sessions, and holds an AGM in London each winter. In January 2013 the Delegation met in the presence of UK Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Baroness Joan Hanham. The Delegation elected a new Leader: Cllr John Warmisham (Labour, Salford).

Independent Group

Independent members are affiliated to the Congress Group of Independents & Liberal Democrats, which is the third largest of the four Congress political groupings

(the others are the EPP Christian-Democrats, the Socialist Group and the Group of European Conservatives and Reformists)

Congress President

The Congress President in 2012 was LGA Liberal Democrat, Keith Whitmore (Manchester). His two-year term ended in October, and during that period he oversaw many internal reforms to make the Congress more effective, more cost-efficient, more transparent, and more connected to the rest of the CoE and more relevant to the concerns of local councils. In particular he made the Congress focus more directly on its core duties of safeguarding local democracy and promoting good governance.

Mr Whitmore stood down in October 2012 after many years of service, and was succeeded as Congress President by Mr Van Staa (Austrian Christian Democrat).

Congress scrutiny of UK local government (peer review)

As stated above, a major role for the Congress is to monitor and safeguard local democracy in individual member states. It does this by scrutinising their compliance with various principles and benchmarks enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

In 2013 the Congress is scrutinising the UK for the first time since 1998. It is focusing its enquiry on central government controls on local councils and the adequacy of local government finance. This spring the LGA commissioned an independent report to assess the state of UK compliance, which found that whilst it respects European benchmarks in most areas, in a small number it is in breach.

The Congress sent a delegation to visit leading LGA members in May 2013 including Councillor Overton, and will send a second delegation in the autumn to interview UK ministers and civil servants. Their recommendations will be published in spring 2014, with a follow-up report to assess their implementation in 2015. Although essentially a "peer review" and therefore not binding, national governments generally strive hard to avoid criticism that they have failed to implement Council of Europe recommendations.

The lead Congress committee for this UK peer review is the "Monitoring Committee".

Other activities

In 2012-13, the Congress issued reports and recommendations on the following countries: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Italy, Macedonia and Spain

It also observed local and regional elections in the following countries: Armenia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia

It prepared reports and/or organised debates on the following issues:

- The right of local authorities to be consulted by other levels of government
- Congress post-monitoring and post-observation of elections :
- The governance of macro-regions in Europe
- Second-tier local authorities – intermediate governance in Europe
- Regionalisation and devolution in Europe in a context of economic crisis
- Fostering active citizenship: new forms of democratic participation
- Smart cities: new technologies serving democracy
- Regional legislation and action to combat sexual exploitation and abuse of children
- Youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement
- Combating social exclusion
- Launch of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion
- The participation of foreigners in local political life
- Local and regional democracy in the Arab countries
- The situation of local and regional politicians in Turkey
- Policy of the Council of Europe towards neighbouring regions
- Promoting ethics, preventing corruption

+++++

Did you know..

*Local councils face a funding black hole
by 2019*

it could be more than £14 billion

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

District Councils Network (DCN)



Executive Mayor Tony Egginton, Mansfield

This year was always going to be a difficult time financially for all members of the DCN but I feel the information that has been circulated to our members has assisted them greatly.

Housing Reform

It was decided that there should be a paper produced – “Sharing Best Practice” that explored different housing management options with a view hooking key features of an “ideal model”. This has fallen behind schedule but is anticipated to be completed by November of this year.

Business Rates Retention

All members are well aware how complicated these became with the capping of other benefits and the infamous “bedroom tax”, henceforth to be known as the “spare room subsidy” - the message is watch this space.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

A very successful event was held in September which all attendees, including those from DCLG found extremely useful for information sharing with a full report being on the website.

Universal Credit Local Support Framework.

District Councils provided information which enabled a very strong response to Government along with a summary and covering letter – all found in the DCN website.

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFGS)

The Society of District Council Treasurers (SDCT) did a tremendous amount of work on this and the findings and recommendations were launched at an event on the 3rd June at the LGA.

I could write much more – particularly re the Planning Reform, but rest assured Nick Bates MP, the Minister for Planning had a pretty tough time when he came to Smith Square. We also had a presentation from Brendan Lewis MP and Hilary Benn MP at the January Assembly with a full summary again on the web site.

It was also good to welcome Helen Powell for South Kesteven as an additional Independent on the DCN Executive.

Looking forward to seeing you all Conference..

County Councils Network (CCN)



Councillor Chris Townsend, Mole Valley and Surrey

A number of Government speakers came to various CCN meetings over the past year. Topics covered Council Tax Freeze Grant ; Business Rates Retention Scheme: Dedicated Schools Grant and Pupil Premium ; LACSEG Transfer for the Education Services Grant ; Social Care Funding – NHS Transfer and Local Government Pension Scheme Reforms. Norman Lamb MP the Minister for Care covered a number of these topics earlier this year.

Whilst at the 2012 CCN Conference a number of high-profile ministerial and national speakers were featured - then Health Secretary, Andrew Lansley MP ; Business Secretary, Vince Cable MP; Tim Loughton MP (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families) and Secretary of State for Local Government Eric Pickles MP.

A significant area pursued subsequently in March this year by the CCN was Economic Growth and we received a presentation from Phil Swann, Chief Executive of Shared Intelligence, on some work the CCN commissioned to take forward the Counties and Economic Growth agenda – this followed on from our /Counties: Driving Economic Growth /Publication. This covered how government could better support and enable Counties to drive economic growth including through the extension of freedoms and flexibilities such as those offered through the current "City Deal" approach. Members very much welcomed the presentation and recommended that it be shared more widely across the network, as soon as possible, so that members can use the information to support their lobbying and advocacy on the essential role of counties in driving economic recovery and growth. The following is worth noting - CCN Member councils account for:-

- 43 per cent of Total employment
- 54 per cent of manufacturing employment
- 57 per cent of construction employment
- 57 per cent of motor industry employment
- 55 per cent of Scientific R&D employment
- 60 per cent of Pharmaceutical employment

Half of the high performing innovative areas as identified by the Work Foundation 2011.

Perhaps most importantly of all CCN member councils account for 43 per cent of Gross Value Added (GVA) or if you take London out of the figures a massive 54 per cent!! Our members also include 10 of the top 16 most productive areas by GVA (also excluding London).

This information and resultant work by the CCN will articulate a County “offer” which CCN and member councils can use to engage MPs, Ministers and Officials.

As you can see a challenging yet productive year..

Centre for Public Scrutiny Advisory Board



Councillor Alan Seldon, Herefordshire

There is widespread concern that has been expressed by many people in Local Government about the state of accountability in the time of austerity. Many authorities are reducing the resources available to scrutiny bodies and this is having an impact. The Francis report in to the Stafford Hospital scandal exposed the shortcomings in scrutiny where the scrutiny committee accepted the answers they were given without question. The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) will be highlighting the importance of rigorous scrutiny with publications and workshops

There is also concern about the proliferation of arms-length companies wholly owned by or which provide services to local authorities but are not open to public scrutiny. The sum of all the changes to the health service, introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners and arms-length companies is the fragmentation of the services that are provided to the public. Despite a pledge from Government to reduce

bureaucracy, additional layers are being introduced that seem not to be accountable. The CfPS is one body that is trying to make a difference.

Reports from National and Regional Lead Member Peers

Jon Huish National Lead Peer



Well, what a year!

As always, the year has had both challenges and opportunities, ending with a great set of election results for the Independent Group as a whole, though some sad losses to the Group along the way.

At the start of the year, the Group undertook the Lead Peer refresh process, led by our Executive and Improvement Board, and whilst I retained the position of National Lead Peer, saw the appointment of three new Regional Lead Peers – Mayor Stuart Drummond of Hartlepool, Councillor Graham Brown of Powys, and Councillor Tony Clarke of Northampton.

Here I also have to pay tribute to our outgoing Regional Lead Peers, Michael Gage of Braintree, and Frank Rosamond of Mid Devon - both of whom had a real impact on our group, the LGA at large, and the authorities they worked with.

Over the year, issues facing the group and our members have had much to do with dealing with broader politics, and the issues of the economy. Times have got no easier, and this is likely to continue. As a result, much of the support work has focused on dealing with related matters.

The Regional Meetings of our Group have grown in size and impact, with more and more members gaining insight into the work of the LGA, and participating in the Independent Talent Academy sessions that run alongside them - a great initiative that lets us spread development activity right across the country, reaching groups and members we would otherwise find difficult to support.

And then the May elections.... as you will no doubt know, the increase in Independent Group councillors both as individuals, groups and those with party affiliations, was outstanding. Well done to all.

But that's where the hard work begins! Not only were more Independent Group Councillors returned, increasing our role and impact at the LGA, our Group Members have also achieved roles of great influence at a number of authorities.

Special note from me must go to colleagues I have supported at Cornwall - well done to John Pollard, now Leader of Cornwall Council, and John Wood who led the Independent Group through the election there and is now Chairman of the Council.

Success also on the Isle of Wight, where following strong opposition for many years the administration is similarly now Independent led. The Council of the Isles of Scilly retain Independent Leadership. Our members on Northumberland, led by Councillor Paul Kelly, now have a controlling influence. And, unrelated to elections we now have the leader of Torridge! The hard work, and our support, is already commenced..

And as I write this, we move into an election period for our group itself, for Leader, Deputy, and Treasurer, and then then on to board appointments et al. I wish all participants luck, and look forward to working with those who are successful later this year.

But before that and irrespective of the outcome of the election, I feel we must congratulate Councillor Marianne Overton and Apu Bagchi for their work and leadership of the Group over the last two years. You have created an atmosphere of engagement and inclusivity in the group, and given many more members the chance to participate, develop and have a voice. Your impact and dynamism have been well felt across the LGA itself and beyond - superb job, fantastically well done!

And last but never least, my sincere thanks to Maggie and the team at the office. We may not have group associations like the other groups do - but your support and guidance always make us feel as if we do. You are, simply put, lifesavers, every day. Without you, we would grind to a halt - rather than that which you enable us to do, punch above our weight wherever we engage. You empower us to win battles that we shouldn't be able to win, and help us reach for the stars when we feel like reaching for the bottle! Well done you!



Councillor Graham Brown, Powys Regional Lead Member Peer for the South West, Wales and the West Midlands



The last twelve months have shown what a wide range of issues face Councils and Councillors. It has also shown that the issues are ones that can and will affect almost all of us at one time or another, either directly or indirectly. Covering the South West, West Midlands and Wales, the first obvious point to make is that it is a considerable area, covering urban, rural, District, County and Unitary authorities but it is fair to say that, as Councillors, we face similar issues, irrespective of the type of authority we represent. Meetings with the other Regional Lead Peers also showed this to be the case.

My first job was to try and contact as many colleagues as possible to introduce myself, no mean task given the number of Independent Group Councillors in the Region. I therefore sent a number of e-mails out to individual Councillors or Group Leaders introducing myself and explaining the support the LGA and the Independent Group Office is able to offer to individual Councillors, Groups and Councils as a whole. It is surprising how many people do not respond to e-mails! There were some very positive contacts made and I took it that all was well with those who did not respond. The main point of referral, however, was through Maggie in the Independent Group Office and it was this route most Councillors tended to use.

I also tried to attend as many Regional meetings as I could but this did not always prove practical due to other commitments – or the weather! In addition to e-mail support, I also visited individual Councillors to discuss various issues. Obviously I am not going to give information about individuals or authorities but the issues covered were varied and I believe individuals found it beneficial to talk matters through with someone from outside their authority, who understood what they were talking about but who were not a part of the local political scene and could look at things objectively, uninfluenced by personalities or history.

For those members able to receive the support of the Independent Group Office who are not members of the three largest political parties, being an Independent Group Councillor raises its own particular challenges, not least the fact we do not have large party machinery to support us. This can lead to a sense of isolation and this is where I would urge everyone to please make use of Maggie and the LGA Independent Group Office to seek any advice and support you may need – she and the accredited Peer network are there to support and help and I would ask that you use us as often as you want!

Two themes which became prevalent during the year were the issue of the new Standards Committee regime and the use of social media. With regards to the former, this is an issue the LGA is looking at and I believe there is growing awareness of the potential conflicts where judge and jury are the majority of one Group - and this applies equally where the complained-about is from that majority group or from the opposition. With regards to social media, we are all increasingly using it, be it Facebook, Twitter or blogs etc. Equally, other members are also scrutinising very closely what we write to see if they can find grounds for a breach of the Code of Conduct and so we all have to be very careful about what we write to make sure it is factual and also make it clear whether we are writing in our capacity as Councillor or not. There are some useful guidelines available if anyone is unsure of the do's and don'ts in the virtual world!

Finally, I can only emphasize that the Peers and the Independent Group Office is there to help and support you. Please make full use of the system.

Stuart Drummond **Regional Lead Peer for the North West, Yorkshire & Humberside and the North West**



I have had a busy time getting in contact with Independent Group members in the North East, North West and Yorkshire and Humberside, the regions I am responsible for. It has been great to begin to get to know colleagues and learn the issues of key concern to them.

I have focused my attention on both the general introduction to members and some specific work with individual colleagues or groups of colleagues, whether at their request or as asked by the Independent Group Office.

While I am not in a position to name the councillors and groups of councillors whom I am supporting, issues of common interest are becoming apparent, in particular that of member / officer relations, and how we begin to build engagement on the part of members across the regions with the work of the LGA and the LGA Independent Group.

I have supported the Independent Group in finding and suggesting group colleagues who may want to consider becoming accredited peers as well as taken part in an accreditation session. I am working with other lead group peers to ensure that our members get as much opportunity as possible to have a role in peer work once they have been accredited.

Tony Clarke

Regional Lead Peer for the South East, London, East of England and East Midlands



The continued growth in the number of Independent Group candidates and elected councillors within the Midlands, South, South East and London areas has certainly kept me busy in my first year as the Independent Group's Regional Peer and whilst the demand for support continues to grow the part time nature of the post and limited availability leads at times to a rationing of input.

Over the last 12 months I have attended Regional Meetings in the South East and in Lincolnshire, attended group meetings of Independent members across the patch and offered individual support to a number of groups dealing with a wide range of needs.

Support in the first instance is given via telephone and or email, and many Independent Group members have found it useful simply to have an email address to forward on documents for appraisal or for comment. Often a fresh pair of eyes onto a problem or a proof read of a document can help out enormously.

In addition to what is an arms' length support mechanism I have also been able to visit groups to give broader support and to provide training and or deliver presentations on topics which are of interest to their members.

Following the recent County Council Elections in May 2013 I have also had the pleasure of working and communicating with many of our newly elected members and newly elected administrations in order to offer advice and support for their new roles.

Often the support I am able to provide as a regional peer is augmented and enhanced by additional input from full time LGA staff and I have enjoyed joint visits to authorities for the purpose of identifying specific needs and assisting groups and Councils to scope Corporate Peer Challenges, and/or identify other input which may be possible from either the LGA direct or through the peer process.

It would be indiscrete to mention individuals or groups but to assist members to understand the variety of questions asked, tasks undertaken and requests made I would offer the following as an insight to current trends.

Many groups and individual councillors still feel isolated and or undervalued within their Council setting, often the ruling administration and opposition will equally try to

isolate Independent members as they see them as a threat to the status quo. On some but not all councils this has also caused problems with officer and member relationships with our members feeling that they are not always taken seriously or given equal access to information.

Planning issues also continue to trouble many members and groups as Independent Group members are often at the forefront of campaigns against developments as either part of their election campaign rally call or simply in many cases because the public have lost faith in the three party system and approach Independents to take up their cause.

Proportionality is also a continued cause of unrest amongst our members as councils often look to Independent members last when filling committee places, meaning that whilst the rules on proportionality are in most cases met or adhered to, Independent members are often given Hobson's Choice on committees and feel undervalued. Many Independent Group members I speak to and, indeed, groups are part of campaigns on their councils to reintroduce a Committee style system of Local Government in preference to the prevailing Cabinet Style which only suits the ruling party.

There is also no doubt that as the full effect of cuts to local government funding are felt within all councils this also is leading to members feeling that councils are being disproportionate or biased in their geographical spending patterns, and many members complain of Councils feathering and protecting their own vote at a cost to local democracy and ward representation.

I think I would compare my first year in post as "plate spinning" with far too many plates and as soon as you steady one plate another wobbles on the other side of the stage. I often end up frustrated that I cannot commit the time required in some cases to the tasks in hand, I see the role as Regional Peer member as advisory and supportive, however as a "hands on" sort of person I often want to get stuck into a problem not simply signpost members to the solution.

One failure of mine which time alone has prevented me from achieving but I have often said it would be useful if we had a series of one page A4 fact sheets and guidance notes of recurring topics which could be sent to groups and members when issues are identified and this is something I would wish to develop further.

I look forward to the year ahead, and I take the opportunity to say a big thank you for the kindness and hospitality I have encountered on my travels.

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge: A view from Councillor Shirley Flint

When I was asked to be an Independent Councillor member of this peer challenge team, I was delighted. My own Council had undergone a peer challenge some time ago which I had been part of as Chairman of the Tenant Liaison Panel, and I knew how challenging, but also successful, this had been for North Kesteven.

Torrige is based in a breath-taking part of North Devon, and the view from the Council Office was spectacular, so we had to ensure we were not distracted. It is in a very rural area, much like my own council area, with all the challenges rural areas face.

We started at 1pm on the Monday afternoon, and by 7pm at their Annual meeting, they had elected a new Leader! I am not sure if this has happened at any other peer challenges, but it certainly made it all the more interesting.

The decision was made to carry on as planned, with certain changes to the timetable to allow for a new Leader being in place who is an Independent.

The whole peer challenge was both fascinating and enlightening. To interview both internal staff and members, and individuals from outside partnerships gave us extra insight into how the council was being run. I was fortunate enough to be able to conduct some interviews connected with housing, which has always been a special interest of mine.

The Challenge was very intense and required a lot of work, both during the day and indeed over breakfast, dinner and well into each evening, but I totally enjoyed it. I feel I learnt a lot from Torrridge and it was certainly a two way process. We were made to feel very welcome in the Council and it was certainly in a most beautiful part of England. As a team we got on very well, we had our own opinions in many cases but worked really closely to prepare the presentation to the council and the following report. We were led exceptionally well by Chris Bowron from the LGA.

A very big thank you to the Independent Group, the LGA and to Torrridge Council for giving me the opportunity to be part of this Peer Challenge. It was a privilege to represent the Independent Group.

To any Independent Councillor given the opportunity to be part of a Peer Challenge team, my advice would be – go for it.

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If you would like to know more about becoming an accredited Peer, contact the Head of Group Office, Maggie Sullivan on 020 7664 3206 – email maggie.sullivan@local.gov.uk.



ASSOCIATION OF GREEN COUNCILLORS



Councillor Andrew Cooper - Kirklees Chair of the Association of Green Councillors

The Association of Green Councillors represents the 140 or so Green Party Councillors that form part of the LGA Independent Group. The AGC provides advice and assistance to members via our internal email lists, annual conference and peer to peer support. Controlling Brighton Council has been a huge opportunity and challenge for Green Councillors particularly at a time of draconian government cuts. The support of the LGA Independent Group to Brighton and other Green Councillors across the country has been much appreciated. In recent years the AGC has become a more comfortable member of the LGA Independent Group due to the valued support of the Group Office and that of the Independent Group Leader Marianne Overton.

The LGA Independent Group works with you and for you

*For each individual council in membership of the LGA direct
benefits are summarised in the documents*

“Benefits of membership”

Contact the group office for your council’s benefits summary

Independent Group Achievements in the past year

- We were instrumental in linking the LGA to the Government Equalities Office: access to elected office for disabled people initiative, with extra support available for candidates who have to incur additional costs in campaigning.
- We met with Lord Laming, Convenor of the Cross Bench and Independent Peers in the House of Lords, and briefed this group of peers in order to win more support from them for in promoting local government.
- We held six regional meetings, well attended and with some key speakers including, for example, Dr Maggie Atkinson, the Children's Commissioner.
- We held an extremely successful annual conference on 22 October 2012, among a full range of guests were some 45 politics students from De Montfort University who took part in a fantastic speed dating session with councillors to tell us what they thought of local government today.
- We accredited new group member peers and we are working hard to ensure that our member peers are given every opportunity to engage in the sector-led improvement drive through LGA Corporate Peer Challenges. Our National and Regional Lead Peers have been extremely busy contacting members in their respective regions, providing support across a range of issues.
- Maggie and Vanessa continue to answer a large range of individual queries from Group members and they have provided general advice on standing for election as a councillor to 60 prospective Independent candidates.
- Group members in receipt of Independent Group Appointments and our member peers met in Warwick at an away-day to support the Group Executive in building its business plan for the coming political year.
- I and other LGA Group Leaders furthered our links to local government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland via a meeting of the UK Forum.
- We are extending our reach in Europe and Internationally. I visited Brussels recently and we have taken part in a pan African peer event, supporting five countries in Africa to develop their local governance.
- The Group was well represented at Parliamentary Receptions on Community Budgets and Independent Local Government.
- We have set up Facebook and Knowledge Hub sites for our group members to share views. Councillors Clarence Barrett, Bertie MacKay and Gillian Ford have built their own networks with our group members on issues do to with Urban, Rural and Community Wellbeing service planning and delivery
- We have lobbied the BBC and other national Broadcasters to ensure that our group members receive a more equitable slice of air time.
- I, Sir Merrick Cockell, other LGA Group Leaders and Carolyn Downs have kept up a busy diary of ministerial meetings.
- We have supported the LGA drive to have as many councils as possible in membership of the LGA, resulting in only two councils being out of membership for 2013/14.
- We provided strong Independent Group representation at the recent LGA New Models of Local Government road-shows designed to help the LGA influence manifestos in favour of local government ahead of the 2015 General election.
- We have opened up the LGA to enable more councillors to benefit; on boards, training events, Councillor's Forum and via the updated web and internet connections.
- We have enabled you to have more influence, putting Independents more clearly on the map; in negotiations with ministers, giving evidence at select

committees, at conferences and in the press. Whenever your voices were needed, you have given us the support that makes us effective.

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A student from De Montfort University gives his views on local government to delegates during the Speaker's Corner slot at the Independent Group Annual Conference in October 2012

***we look forward
to hearing from you***