

Daring to be different

Annual Report 2018/19





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Group Executive Summary

2018/19 was an excellent year for our members. You will read in this report how we fought and won elections, increased our membership and directly influenced policy at all levels.

Although they technically fall outside the remit of this annual report, the May 2019 elections have been extremely successful for the majority of our members and, on behalf of us all, congratulations to everyone who stood and were successful at the ballot box. Our members truly stood for what they believed in and demonstrated that a local focus is what people are looking for, tired of party politics.

The May 2019 elections followed successful elections in May 2018, when many of our London colleagues fought hotly contested seats and triumphed, and there were many by-election wins.

Our group is stronger than ever. It remains a broad church, but it is our diversity of views, interests and approaches, alongside our commitment to and connection with our communities, that gives our group strength. When we work together, our impact is powerful.

The success of the group's work in supporting members and prospective candidates, helping to raise skills, profile and reputation, is demonstrated in remarkable successes in all corners across our two countries and in all of our groups.

Through the Local Government Association's (LGA) Independent Group, members from across England and Wales stand for what they believe in and work together to be a positive voice for their residents and for local government.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to our Group's work over the last 12 months. We look forward to even greater success in 2019/20.





Leader of the LGA Independent Group Councillor Marianne Overton MBE

Vice-Chairman of the Local Government Association
Lincolnshire County Council and North Kesteven
District Council

The almost wholly brilliant recent election results have demonstrated the importance of sound community work done by our councillors. One of the few exceptions was the result in Mansfield, where Independents competed, losing the talented Mayor Kate Allsop by just two votes to Labour.

We also say goodbye to Councillor Robert Bucke, who stood down after many years' service on his council in Tendring, and on the Independent Group and LGA Executive committees, along with other valued colleagues who contributed to our Group over the years.

Our Independent Group has worked solidly to help our members seek and find good candidates, to be skilled and well informed. It is no accident that in May 2019 we increased by 622 councillors. We now have over 2,770 members, making us the third most numerous group in the LGA.

The suffocating blanket of the big party political control in our areas has slipped, revealing more of our talented members than ever before. Now the lid is off, we are here to stay. With strong local networks and developing candidates, we are well placed for a steady continued rise. That means we can do more for our communities, our country and our planet. It is our future.



2018/19: a year in review

2018/19 was an extremely busy and successful year for our members. We marked the centenary of some women getting the right to vote with a range of activities that celebrated the trail-blazers that opened the door for today's female leaders. This year we've shared the experience of the inspiring women in our group and encouraged more women and under-represented groups to stand for election.

We increased our regional and 'Be a Councillor' activity, with over 40 events held across our two countries. Without doubt our 'Be a Councillor' efforts led to members being elected in the May 2019 elections. We also supported candidates to apply for the EnAble Fund and agreed grants which led to two new councillors being elected into our group. A fantastic achievement, and programmes we plan to continue supporting.

We held our fifth 'Next Generation' programme and supported more members to undertake the LGA's leadership and development programmes than ever before.

Our board representatives have been extremely effective, leading negotiations with the Home Office, influencing national and international policy, challenging ministers and speaking at conferences. Our think tanks have been busy this year, influencing, amongst others, the Resources and Waste Strategy, which has been significantly shaped by our group contributions.

Our influence hasn't stopped there. We have supported parliamentary lobbying which led to the raising of the HRA (housing revenue account) borrowing cap; more money for housing, infrastructure and social care; and the introduction of a £2 maximum stake for fixed odds betting terminals, to name just a few of our successes. You will read more about our board work in our board reports, as well as the significant contribution we've made in Europe, specifically on environmental and youth policy.

The Independent Group is a powerful force in the LGA. Getting involved in the activities of the group enables you to influence the positions and activities of the LGA, which in turn allows you to achieve more for your residents, leveraging the influence of the LGA to effect government policy.

In memorium

In a year of great success, members were shocked and saddened to lose Councillor Clarence Barrett in March 2019, after his election as Group Treasurer in June 2018 and many years contributing to the group. Thank you for all your kind comments, which were compiled into a lovely book for his family. His children also sent thanks for your generous donations, used to buy a defibrillator in Clarence's home area. We will mark Clarence's contribution to our group and local government more widely with the introduction of the Clarence Barrett Award this year.

Thank you

It has been my honour to lead the group for another two years, but we have a fantastic team driving change forward. Thank you to my Deputy, Clive Woodbridge and to the Executive members, the engine of our group. Thank you to our team of lead members and peers, working with councils and councillors at the LGA and across the country. Thank you to Sarah Woodhouse, Noleen Rosen and Aimee Wittam-Smith for a frankly superb job running our very busy office.

Councillors, thank you. You do a fantastic job for our communities. Sometimes that is working quietly for individuals, changing lives for the better; sometimes in a public way that brings our communities together to improve the quality of life in our home areas. We can do a great deal locally as individuals, and more with council resources. Some things need solutions from Government or from Europe, and that is where we councillors from across the country combine forces through the LGA, to make a powerful voice for good. I wish you every success through the coming year.



LGA Independent Group budget report

In the last financial year the budget for 2018/19 was £21,275. We ended the year with a small overspend of £940, pre-agreed with the LGA, due to unexpected staffing costs. Other than this, the budget was spent in line with our forecast, focusing on increased regional activity; the creation of new online resources as part of our 'Campaign Corner'; our annual conference; and a range of new development events for current and prospective members.

We again utilised other sources of funding made available to us to deliver bespoke programmes for our members, including a fifth annual Next Generation programme for aspiring leaders, and various events for aspiring councillors through the 'Be a Councillor' campaign.

2019/20 budget

Our budget for the 2019/20 financial year is set at £23,310. This slight increase is linked to expected activity at 18 Smith Square, which we forecast for at the beginning of each year. Along with our information and development seminars and other networking and skills events in London, we plan to further develop our regional activity, online resources and published guides.

We will also be delivering our sixth Next Generation programme, likely to be our biggest yet, and more 'Be a Councillor' activity.



An update from our lead member peers

Councillor Mike Haines

National Lead Member Peer
Teignbridge District Council

Independent Group peers have continued to give support and advice to our members across England and Wales. This year we started with five regional lead peers following Shirley Pannell's retirement, but during the year we were able to appoint Councillor Judy Jennings as a new additional peer.

At a regional level our work has included providing support for lone members, helping to resolve ongoing disagreements, advice to group members where there was a change of control, leadership support and mentoring, advice on policy issues and advice on protocols. There have also been regular peer meetings as part of the LGA's sector improvement discussions. Our peers have also attended various development days along with the LGA's peer conference last November.

In addition to our regional peers, we have a strong pool of 34 member peers who have supported councillors in various ways. This year, peers have undertaken three corporate peer challenges, one planning policy and planning application, and one strategic care and health peer challenge. The team have provided one-to-one mentoring support and advice in areas including budget setting, social care and regeneration, as well as co-facilitating workshops on issues such as prevention and health, children's services, planning, finance and new councillor inductions.

This year the regional team of peers has been:



Councillor Paul Cullen

Regional Lead Peer:
North East and Yorkshire & Humberside



Councillor Judy Jennings

Regional Lead Peer:
East England and East Midlands



Councillor Phelim Mac Cafferty

Regional Lead Peer:
London and the South East



Councillor Colin Mann

Regional Lead Peer:
Wales



Councillor Alan Seldon

Regional Lead Peer:
West Midlands and North West

Next Generation

I helped facilitate the Independent Group's fifth 'Next Generation' programme for future leaders. This involved three weekend residential modules in Warwick attended by 11 councillors. The feedback from this was once again encouraging, and it is good to see many former participants go on to leadership roles within their councils and the LGA.

Corporate peer challenges

One of the key benefits of LGA membership continues to be the sector-led support on offer, including the corporate peer challenge (CPC). I would encourage all councillors to check whether their council has had a CPC in the last five years and if not, request one via your leader or chief executive.

Looking forward

We are always keen to do more, and we continue to receive many requests for peer support, via the group and the LGA more widely. I am writing this report soon after the local elections in May, and am pleased to see that Independent Group councillors have had great success. They have taken control at three councils and now hold the balance of power in many more NOC (no overall control) councils, in some cases as the largest group.

If you are interested in receiving support from any of our member peers or would like to become a peer, please contact Sarah Woodhouse, Head of the Group Office (contact details are at the end of this report).



LGA Fire Services Management Committee Councillor Ian Stephens

Isle of Wight

Chair, LGA Fire Services Management Committee

The Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) has had a challenging year responding to the national fire reform and building safety agendas.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services published the first tranche of service inspections. Results showed that services were good at what matters most – using their local knowledge to prevent fires and respond to emergencies. Culture and inclusivity were noted for improvement within the majority of the first tranche results. Through the inspectorate's external reference group, we are continuing to assist in developing the inspection programme, which will include a governance model.

Support for fire and rescue authorities included two LGA Fire Leadership Essentials programmes, a new scrutiny toolkit to assist members in this key role, and five regional inclusion and diversity masterclasses. To aid recruitment into the fire and rescue service we have hosted Home Office promotional material, including 'role model' and fitness resources, on our [LGA fire webpage](#).

Building safety has continued to be a significant area of interest this year. Although the final Hackitt report stopped short of calling for a ban of combustible materials in cladding systems, successful LGA lobbying resulted in the Government ban that came into effect in December.

The LGA has been involved in the Joint Regulators Group, which was set up by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to inform its thinking about the new regulatory system being developed from the Hackitt review, including the form of the new Joint Competent Authority, and the role of fire services and building control teams alongside it.

The Automatic Fire Suppression Systems Working Group, of which I was part, also reported this year. Its recommendations have been adopted as LGA policy and used to brief parliamentarians about our proposals for using sprinklers to improve building safety.

With MHCLG due to consult in more detail on the new building safety regulatory regime shortly and new legislation expected later in the year, this will continue to be an important area of work for Fire Services Management Committee.

In the Spring Statement, the Chancellor confirmed that the Government will hold a spending review this year to conclude alongside the Budget. FSMC has been working hard alongside the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Home Office to outline the case for proper and ongoing funding for the fire sector to address the changing risks and demands it faces.

The LGA Annual Fire Conference, in Brighton, was hosted by the East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service. It was very successful, with over 200 delegates attending to hear key speakers from across the sector.

FSMC's work continues at pace and is likely to continue to focus on inclusion, governance, standards, workforce collaboration, building safety, and funding and value for money.

It has been a demanding year. As well as chairing FSMC and Fire Commission, I attended various external groups and boards; I also sit on the National Joint Council (NJC), looking at firefighters' pay and conditions, and the Firefighters' Pension Scheme Advisory Board.

Over the last year, the NJC has continued talks around a potential deal to broaden the role of firefighters in the UK. Such a deal could see the day-to-day duties of firefighters expanded to cover a wider range of humanitarian and community-focused activities and providing emergency medical support, and resolve the question of involvement around 'marauding terrorist' response. The national employers have produced a draft proposal which was put to the employees' side and which included a proposed pay uplift of 13.57 per cent over three years. During this time, the employers' side have also been lobbying the four UK governments for the extra funding required to fund such a pay award. They are working with the National Fire Chiefs Council to strengthen the business case to Government in order to best make the case for that additional funding. In addition, the NJC has provided joint industrial relations training to a number of services. It has also facilitated resolution to a number of local disputes, including one accompanied by a 'yes' vote to undertake strike action.



Children and Young People Board

Councillor Gillian Ford

London Borough of Havering

Deputy Chair, Children and Young People Board

Delivering children's services when government funding has fallen by £2.4 billion since 2010, with analysis showing an additional £2 billion funding gap by 2020, and with a rise in demand and more complex needs, is clearly not sustainable. Reflecting on these pressures, the Children and Young People (CYP) Board policy priorities for 2018/19 focused on children's social care, early years, children's services improvement, the council role in education and school improvement, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), school funding, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

As Chair of the Task and Finish Group for SEND, the LGA commissioned Isos to look at early help research and SEND, and Isos updated the board on their high needs funding research in 'Have we reached a 'tipping point'? Trends in spending for children and young people with SEND in England'. SEND work continues, including consideration of SEND transport. The board also contributed to the LGA-commissioned Isos report 'Action research into improvement in local children's services'.

Children and young people's health was considered jointly with the Community Well Being Board, focusing on obesity prevention, learning disability and autism. Lobbying continues for additional funding to support children's mental health and the need for greater oversight by members and health and wellbeing boards.

The civil society strategy was considered, highlighting the universal offer local authorities could provide in delivering youth services if appropriately funded, as the current Government model targets a small minority. Representing the LGA on the National Youth Agency (NYA) included attendance at board meetings, the NYA summit, and the launch of the All Party Parliamentary Group inquiry into youth work.

Membership and the work of the Children's Social Care Task Group continued, with the publication of 'Bright futures: what next?'. The National Children's and Adults Social Care Conference included attendance by the minister for children, where members made strong representation on the pressures local authorities are facing. Although the LGA have produced very robust evidence, the message we received was the need for even more evidence.

Attendance at a number of all-party parliamentary groups included providing evidence on the future of maintained nurseries, support for children with special needs, childcare, early education and financial stability. The board considered the current development of a new outcomes framework for children's social care services, with a meaningful way for local authorities to measure the quality and impact of their services.

As the CYP Board and Independent member representative on the LGA's Asylum, Refugee and Migration Task Group, work included ministerial meetings and feedback to the CYP Board. Successes included additional funding for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, with a continued call for funding to meet full costs, including for care leavers.

Chairing roles included the Education Endowment Foundation Conference and sessions at the National Children and Adult Services Conference.

Appointed as Rapporteur-General for the opinion Building a Stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies, the communication considered the mutual recognition of higher education and secondary diplomas, early childhood and language and teaching. The opinion was adopted unanimously.

As can be expected, in-depth discussions took place around the spending review, and lobbying and evidence gathering continues to secure an improved funding position.

Finally, I would like to thank the CYP Think Tank for their interaction over the year.



City Regions Board Councillor Jason Zadrozny

Ashfield District Council and Nottinghamshire County Council, Deputy Chair, City Regions Board

With the sad loss of Councillor Clarence Barratt, Councillor Jason Zadrozny (Ashfield) stepped in as the full Independent board member. Key priorities this year have been around the Local Industrial Strategy, the establishment of a Skills Taskforce between this and the People and Places Board, and a push for cities to attract foreign investment into local capital projects.

Industrial strategies

All areas in England will agree a Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) with Government by early 2020, and the first trailblazer LIS for the West Midlands was published in May.

In support of these efforts, the City Regions Board has helped to deliver a comprehensive improvement support offer to councils looking to play an active role supporting local enterprise partnerships and combined authorities in the development of a LIS.

Activity delivered to date has included LIS masterclass sessions, LIS action learning sets for council officers, and extensive engagement with local and national stakeholders to better understand the role of councils in LIS development. Learning outputs from this offer will be hosted on an online hub to be launched in June.

Trade and investment

The board has been working closely with the Department for International Trade (DIT) to discuss the department's regional work. The board has been discussing how it could most effectively contribute to the Department's work, and highlighted examples from across the country of the important role for councils in supporting exports and inward investment.

The board has also worked with DIT on improvement support to councils on this agenda, and we will shortly be publishing a guide for local authorities looking to attract investment, from both domestic and foreign sources, into local capital projects. We will continue to work with DIT to explore opportunities for further commissioned work that would support the efforts of the sector in this area.

Skills and employment

In response to the board's discussions on skills and employment, this board, along with the People and Places Board, established a Skills Taskforce to make the current system more integrated and localised, and for the sector to benefit from a devolution deal process offering real freedom and flexibility. It convened three roundtables that brought together industry experts and sector representatives with an interest in making the skills and employment system as effective as possible. The final report is expected to be published this summer.

The UK2070 Commission

The UK2070 Commission is an independent inquiry into city and regional inequalities in the UK. Chaired by Lord Kerslake, it has been set up to conduct a review of the policy and spatial issues related to the UK's long-term city and regional development. The commission will run in four phases, until January 2020, with a formal launch event having taken place at the House of Lords in October 2018. The commission will publish its final report in January 2020.



Community Wellbeing Board

Councillor Claire Wright

Devon County Council

Deputy Chair, Community Wellbeing Board

I took over as the Independent Group lead member on the Community Wellbeing Board following Kate Allsop's surprise election loss in May 2019. Kate was a superb Deputy Chair of the board and I greatly enjoyed working with and learning from her. Her contribution to this board, and the LGA, cannot be underestimated.

This year, Kate and I attended all meetings of the board and the September Community Wellbeing Board away day, where Caroline Dinenage MP, Minister of State for Care, was in attendance.

In the absence of the Government's Green Paper (and following further delay to this), the LGA launched our own Green Paper to stimulate a nationwide debate about how best to fund the care we want to see in all our communities for adults of all ages. It sets out findings from the consultation along with implications and 14 recommendations to Government.

The recommendations span two broad objectives: sustaining the 'here and now' and countering some of the immediate consequences of underfunding that are apparent across the system; and laying the ground for delivering a social care and support system that we know could be better in the long term. This is the product of a lot of valuable board discussion, the hard work of our policy officers and the many responses we received from public polling on this issue. It was launched in November at the annual National Children and Adult Services Conference (NCAS). The response to our Green Paper has been an enormous success and will continue to be used by the board to influence the Government's own, long overdue adult social care Green Paper.

At NCAS Conference, Kate chaired a workshop on the links between health, housing and social care, which shared good practice from Central Bedfordshire, Housing LIN and Care and Repair England.

The LGA has submitted written evidence on sexual health to the Health and Social Care Committee. Our submission highlighted the record demand for sexual health services, which is adding to the existing pressures faced by local authorities, particularly as public health budgets continue to be constrained by the £533 million reduction to the public health grant.

We also continued to engage Parliamentarians over the Mental Capacity (Amendment) Bill over the course of the year.

Kate and other board office-holders met senior members of the NHS Clinical Commissioners Executive to discuss how we could continue to promote our joint messages on person-centred place-based care and support, develop our joint support and improvement offer, and influence the NHS Long Term Plan. I will be attending follow-up meetings so the board can continue to influence this work.

Kate Allsop also served as the board digital and data lead across adult social care and health. Over the last year, Kate provided input into some of the Care and Health Improvement Programme's digital programme of work, which provides support to councils and other partners in the area of innovation and transformation – including the [Social Care Digital Innovation Programme](#) and [Design in Social Care Programme](#).

Kate also represented the LGA as a member of the Department of Health and Social Care's Data Security Assurance Board, which looks at progress in this area across the sector – including the [Social Care Discovery Programme](#) that took place in 2018/19. In this role she represented the voice of local government in areas relating to data security and information sharing between care and health.

Kate and I have signed off many documents and final versions of letters to ministers and commented on consultation documents over the course of the year.



Culture, Tourism and Sport Councillor Julian German

Cornwall County Council
Vice Chair, Culture, Tourism and Sport Board

It has been a busy first year as Vice Chair of the LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport (CTS) Board. We have a wide remit, which is challenging to cover and leads to very full board meetings. The Think Tank has been great to assist with covering the ground, both in terms of content and examples from different types of councils and places around the country.

We had the pleasure of a board meeting in Sheffield earlier this year, hearing about the Sheffield Culture Consortium. Transmitting how different councils have supported great art and culture for everyone in the face of ongoing austerity gives examples of working differently that councillors can try in their areas. Our work on culture-led regeneration was launched at the Annual Culture, Tourism and Sport Conference. The conference was hosted by the City of London Corporation and featured a keynote speech by Sir Nick Serota, along with the Hearts for the Arts Award presentations. I hope to see more colleagues at next year's conference.

A major piece of work this year has been in relation to tourism skills. The wider hospitality industry is the fourth biggest employer in the UK, with 3.2 million jobs. Based upon the growth of the last three years (2014-16), it has the potential to create a further 500,000 new jobs by 2021. Unlike some sectors that have a significant regional bias, the hospitality industry is a major employer across every region and nation of the UK. Hospitality ranks as a top six employer in every region and nation, accounting for up to 10 per cent of the regional workforce. We have reviewed and assessed councils' role in developing a pipeline of skills for the tourism and hospitality sectors. Case studies have been used to draw out common themes and approaches. Best practice in addressing the employment and skills challenges will be disseminated through a report being launched at this year's LGA Annual Conference.

Social prescribing has been a key area of work. The board has discussed a series of proposed initiatives that could clarify the benefits of social prescribing with regards to arts- and sports-related activities. LGA policy on social prescribing is led by the Community and Wellbeing Board, which felt that input from the CTS Board would be beneficial; they also wished to flag up concerns about NHS strategy. The latter, it was felt, could lead to duplication of effort around social prescribing, and could also make the local government involvement in social prescribing unsustainable. There was a strong agreement that social prescribing was a positive initiative and should be a key priority for the CTS Board, provided it was aligned with the Community and Wellbeing Board. The concerns around NHS long-term strategy were shared. There was a belief that the NHS lacked the connections with, for example, the voluntary and community sector and others that local government has; and so local government should have a key role to play with regards to social prescribing, with arts- and sports-related activity falling very much in its remit.

Perhaps the most controversial area of work this year has been the investigation of a tourism levy. We have had good initial discussions on this, with a wide variety of views around the board. We have commissioned a piece of research that seeks to provide a 'blueprint' for the practical implementation of a tourism levy, as well as exploring the potential mechanisms to introducing a local levy – with a focus on what is achievable now using existing powers and legislation. The findings will be reported on in the coming year.

We heard from Sport England how sport can deliver a range of outcomes: physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Colleagues should be aware of Sport England's improvement and development offer. This includes their leadership essential events, masterclasses and regional events. From the Arts Council there are leadership essential events, culture peer challenges, library peer challenges and a museums handbook. Further details on these can be obtained through our group office.



Economy, Environment, Housing and Transport Board Councillor Rachel Eburne

Mid Suffolk District Council, Deputy Chair, Economy,
Environment, Housing and Transport Board

This board, as ever, covered a wide variety of topics – from rail to homelessness to town centres to clean air to drones, for example. We have to ensure we are fully briefed for each meeting and can put across the views of the Independent Group.

Within this plethora of policy areas, many are discussed as consultations or briefings come forward, and others in direct response to, or lobbying of, Government. This year there has been a particular focus on housing and waste.

The board heard from the MHCLG as they discussed the LGA response to the Social Housing Green Paper and the ‘Right to Buy’ consultation. In line with the views from the Independent Group’s Think Tank, we argued to keep all Right to Buy receipts and review this locally; and ensure the Decent Homes standard meant homes were energy efficient. There was universal agreement that we must follow up with lessons learnt from the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

Following the 2018 Budget, the board was pleased to see lobbying had meant restrictions on council house financing had been relaxed, and later meetings with Homes England and Sir Oliver Letwin MP followed up on this. With the former, there was a feeling that more needed to be done to help councils deliver local plans. With the latter, some interesting proposals were put forward that really would help local authorities. It is expected that the board will follow up on this.

The Government launched its Resources and Waste Strategy and I was pleased to be able to represent the board at a roundtable discussion with the Secretary of State, Michael Gove. At this meeting the issues of consistency of what can be collected from different councils and collection of food waste were discussed. Later, the

board discussed the consultations in detail. It was agreed councils must be able to decide how they collect waste – while Government is dictating what should be collected (such as food waste). Overall, there is still the issue of falling recycling rates and how is this being addressed.

The board heard from the Grimsey Review 2 on the future of town centres, and we supported the view of town centre visits being an experience and not just about retail. This is being followed up by a series of visits to towns that have successfully rejuvenated their town centres.

On transport we discussed modal shift with the view that transport is still fragmented down to the local level. We also heard from the Williams Rail Review looking at ways to improve how local government engages with the rail industry.

The board also heard from the Planning Advisory Service with their annual review. An agenda item on fly-tipping led to the board asking what further punitive measures councils can take, especially given this is an emotive subject amongst the public.

At the end of my second year serving as Deputy Chair on the board I would like to thank members of the Independent Group for their support. I would particularly like to thank Councillor Linda Gillham, who has stepped in for me for part of the year and who has continued to put forward the views of the Independent Group in a strong and positive manner, supported by Councillor David Beaman. I would also like to thank the Independent Group office for all their help and guidance.



Improvement and Innovation Board Councillor Ron Woodley

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Deputy Chair, Improvement and Innovation Board

This has been my third year as one of the deputy chairs for the Improvement and Innovation Board, and my role is currently the productivity portfolio. The board covers a wide range of areas, helping councils to innovate, improve, and share best practice and lessons learned.

Increasingly, councils are looking to the LGA for support in managing the increasing demand pressures with reduced resources. Our efficiency and productivity programme has provided support to help councils reduce costs, generate additional income and work more efficiently. We have also undertaken work on innovation, digital and data issues, and demand management

As part of our work on innovation, the LGA hosted our second 'Behavioural insights in local government' event in March. With council resources under increasing pressure, officers and members were able to hear how behavioural insights have been practically applied to council services. At the event we launched our 'Nudges for social good: practical learning and tips from the LGA behavioural insights programme' learning document. A key success was Kent County Council, Kent Police and Victim Support's project, which has resulted in a 2.3 per cent increase in victims of domestic violence taking up support offers from Victim Support. The lessons learned have been shared to communicate how the trial was run, in order for other local areas to take it up.

In November we hosted a digital showcase conference showcasing the work being done by councils to transform their services using digital tools and solutions. Over the past year the LGA has worked with one of the successful projects, led by Tunbridge Wells Borough

Council, to reuse the assets developed in the digital housing programme. The council has supported five councils across England to develop and implement a series of online forms for homelessness, a self-assessment form for housing and a housing application form.

In addition to our cyber security work directly with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the LGA successfully bid for funding from the Cabinet Office under the National Cyber Security Programme, securing £1.5 million for 2018/19. This funding was used to help capture the current arrangements in councils, identifying risks as well as good practice, and using this to help shape a programme of support for the sector. The LGA carried out a cyber security stocktake of all 353 English councils. This captured each council's current arrangements and provided them with their own self-assessment tool. A grant funding scheme was put in place to enable the councils at greatest risk to bid for funding to address issues that can be fixed quickly.

The National Advisory Group for Local Government launched a new national procurement strategy at the LGA Conference in July. This included a 'maturity model' enabling councils to self-assess their performance. With over 60 per cent of councils completing the self-assessment, the information gleaned has been used to develop a forward plan of activities. This includes measuring social value, contract management and strategic supplier relationship management.

Every year we produce an interactive map of shared services, providing a compendium of council shared service and collaboration examples across England. This year we evidenced £971 million of cumulative efficiency savings across 559 partnerships, re-emphasising councils' reputation as the most efficient part of the public sector.

Once again I would like to thank the officers within the productivity team for their help and support to this board over the past year.



People and Places Board Councillor Robert Jennings

Epping Forest District Council
Deputy Chair, People and Places Board

The People and Places Board represents the interests of non-metropolitan local authorities in England and Wales.

The main driver of the 2018/19 political cycle has been the Post-Brexit England Commission, which focuses on the current and future challenges faced by non-metropolitan England, specifically:

- a better-skilled workforce
- more effective employment support services
- more housing of all tenures
- better transport and digital infrastructure
- improved productivity linked to a healthier population
- increasing locally driven growth
- a greater role for local areas supporting exports and foreign direct investment.

I chaired one of the eight regional road shows, aimed at gauging the views and opinions of the public, private and voluntary sectors. The commission's interim report was presented to the LGA Annual Conference last July. Since then four areas have been examined in depth, namely assessing the impact of the national Industrial Strategy, replacing the Common Agricultural Policy, improving digital connectivity in rural and coastal areas, and strengthening a sub-national trade and investment framework.

In relation to the Industrial Strategy, the board focused its attention on:

- a review of local enterprise partnerships
- the introduction of local industrial strategies
- the creation of a UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

In June, Alexandra Jones (Director of Industrial Strategy at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) provided an update on the design and implementation of these three key place-based policies.

In November, the board commissioned Savills Rural Research to:

- undertake a strategic overview of the role councils play in the current land management policy framework
- explore the role councils could play in a reformed land management policy framework, including transitional and post-2024 Common Agricultural Policy successor arrangements
- explore the future growth funding landscape in non-metropolitan areas.

The board also created the Rural Digital Connectivity Working Group. Issues addressed included ensuring fast and reliable digital connectivity is provided to all new builds (which has since been taken up by Government) and that mobile coverage data accurately reflects consumer experience. The board also responded to the Government's 'New build developments: delivering gigabite-capable connections' survey.

Local authorities were also surveyed to better understand the depth and diversity of trade and other international links between councils and global partners. In March, Marian Sudbury (Director of UK Regions at the Department of International Trade) outlined Government's approach to increasing exports from, and investment into, the UK's regions.

The future of devolution in England, which offers the opportunity to transfer both powers and resources to local areas, was also considered. I made the board aware of the lead being taken by Cornwall Council in its 'New frontiers – fiscal freedoms' document, which outlined the council's proposals for 100 per cent business rates retention, a VAT escalator and a better roads fund, together with owners of second homes contributing towards essential services, which was very well received.

All in all, it's been a very interesting and productive year, and I look forward to the publication of the Post-Brexit England Commission's final report at the LGA Annual Conference in July in Bournemouth.

Finally, I would like to thank Councillor Helen Grant (North Yorkshire County Council) for both her input as a board member and her work on the Digital Connectivity Working Group. I would also thank Think Tank members for their contributions, and of course the Independent Group office.



Resources Board Councillor Geoff Knight

Lancaster City Council
Deputy Chair, Resources Board

Prior to the local elections, Councillor Gillian Corr from Stockton-on-Tees was the Independent Group board lead, and the LGA Executive would like to thank Gillian for her work. Since then, Councillor Geoff Knight (Lancaster) has taken the lead.

This year, the board has continued to represent the LGA on all matters related to local government finance, the local government workforce, the future of EU funding, and welfare matters – including Universal Credit and the Local Housing Allowance.

In total the board has, so far during this political cycle, signed off on seven consultations for local government finance and workforce. The board also led the publication of the LGA's [Workforce Focus](#).

The board continues to receive updates on the Budget and Spring Statement, as well as being at the forefront commenting on the implications these Treasury announcements have on local government.

In February, the board received a comprehensive update from colleagues at the MHCLG on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This allowed members to comment and recommend to MHCLG the future of the ERDF in a 'deal' and 'no deal' scenario. This discussion also included preparing for the introduction of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

More recently, the board signed off on a briefing regarding the Local Housing Allowance for the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. This followed on from a meeting between the board Chair and the Secretary of State, Amber Rudd.



Workforce Employer Bodies

Councillor Goronwy Edwards

Conwy County Council

It has been both a challenging and, on the whole, successful year as the Independent representative on the local government services (LGS) employers NJC and the association bodies of the Local Government Pensions Committee and CEEP UK.

I believe that last year's process, which led to us deciding to make an offer to the LGS national executive of 2+2 per cent pay increase to local government employees, was both fair and justified, and ultimately accepted by employees' representatives.

Inevitably this has resulted in additional challenges for local authorities as they wrestle to maintain services in these times of continued Government austerity policies, but as councillors I think we would all agree that our employees are our most valuable resource and therefore deserve to be fairly rewarded.

During the year we have also had several meetings to discuss the issues around the review of employees' pensions legislation.



Safer and Stronger Communities Board Councillor Hannah Dalton

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Deputy Chair, Safer and Stronger Communities Board

The Safer and Stronger Communities Board (SSCB) has a wide remit promoting safe and secure local communities. I, along with the other lead members, have provided input and comment on a number of consultation requests from the MHCLG the Home Office, Department for Transport and other government bodies. This input ensures that the views and interests of councils are represented in shaping future legislation and statutory guidance.

The Domestic Abuse Bill has the potential to make important changes to help improve the lives of victims of domestic abuse, though the ultimate aim is preventing domestic abuse from occurring altogether. SSCB has fed back that tackling domestic abuse is a multi-agency issue, not one which can be lead solely by councils or police and crime commissioners.

Violent crime, the reasons for its increase and its impact on society, has continued to make the headlines. SSCB has been involved in the work of the Home Office taskforce on the issue, which announced its intention to introduce a duty to address serious violence through a public health approach. SSCB fed back that a statutory duty will not create the required momentum or culture change to tackle this important issue. Instead it has emphasised the importance of early intervention and prevention, with a focus on how education and health partners can tackle the root causes of serious violence, whilst recognising the acute funding pressures facing children's services and youth services teams.

The Home Office published their consultation on preventing forced marriage, which proposed the introduction of a mandatory duty and updating the Government guidance. In providing its input, the Independent Group has highlighted the need for mandatory reporting of forced marriage where anyone under 16 has been obliged to enter into sexual relations with an adult, even where that act took place outside the UK.

The Department for Transport accepted a number of recommendations made by the SSCB, and intend to bring forward legislation to introduce national minimum standards for taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) licensing, national enforcement powers and a national licensing database. In their most recent consultation they have sought opinion on the draft statutory guidance around how councils, as licensing authorities, should exercise their powers to safeguard passengers. Again, the principles set out in the guidance reflect what SSCB has called for and are broadly supported, whilst highlighting issues of practical application for some councils.

The board helped shape the LGA's input into the final recommendations from Dame Judith Hackitt's review of building regulations and fire safety. Even though they did include a ban on the use of combustible materials in the external walls of tower blocks, the LGA's lobbying helped persuade MHCLG to introduce the ban, which came into effect in December. SSCB has also been involved in the development of the new building regulations system the Hackitt report recommended, and how remediation of private tower blocks can be sped up.

'Friends Against Scams' has been established to raise awareness and signpost residents who are victims of a scam to support. Currently, only 5 per cent of victims report it. Our late friend and colleague Councillor Clarence Barrett was a 'Scambassador' and would have encouraged each of you to join this initiative. As local community leaders, we are ideally placed to spread the word about the myriad of scams out there – how to spot them, deal with them and report them. More information can be found at: <https://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/how-can-you-help>

The SSCB also continues its work around female genital mutilation and the 'cutting season', as well as the critical role of councils in counter-extremism and cohesion.

At the end of my first year as Deputy Chair, I would like to thank members of the Independent Think Tank and Independent Group for all their support.



EU Committee of the Regions

Councillor Andrew Cooper

Kirklees Council

The EU Committee of the Regions (CoR) is the body that provides local and regional input into EU legislation, and I am one of 24 full members in the UK delegation.

With the uncertainty surrounding the UK's membership of the European Union, it would be understandable if the UK were sidelined in our work at the EU Committee of the Regions, but this hasn't been the case and members of the UK delegation have continued to play a full part in giving input into EU legislation.

Over the last year the focus of my work has been as Rapporteur on 'Post 2020 climate governance'. Through this I have been developing proposals to improve the mechanisms we need to successfully address climate change. Proposals I made to give more power to local and regional authorities to address climate change were agreed by the CoR, then the European Parliament followed the LGMA, the body that represents the views of local authorities globally. I then took these proposals as part of the EU delegation to the global climate talks, COP24, in Katowice, Poland, last December.

My mission at COP24 was to get more action at the local and regional level and push the United Nations to acknowledge the need for national governments to do much more to reduce carbon emissions. What we knew before the climate talks was that national governments had not agreed enough carbon savings to limit a global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees, to ensure we had a reasonably stable climate to pass on to future generations.



Countries' carbon emission targets are described under UN rules as 'nationally determined contributions'. I had proposed, and got EU backing, to call for a new category of 'locally and regionally determined contributions' to encourage local and regional governments, below the state level, to take more action to reduce their carbon emissions. There was real progress towards this goal in the final statement signed up to by world leaders in Katowice.

There is now a statement in the final text on how to assess nationally determined contributions that refers to preparing implementation plans to include "domestic institutional arrangements, public participation and engagement with local communities". This statement gives a much greater role to local councils and regional bodies in the UK and around the world. It will be interesting to see how the UK Government responds.

It occurs to me that if the UK had not been a member of the European Union then I would never have had the opportunity to develop the concept of locally determined contributions, nor see it influence a UN-backed agreement. It saddens me that it is not fully understood what we will lose if we exit our membership of the EU.



Congress of the Council of Europe

Councillor Martin Fodor

Bristol Council

I am part of the 18-strong UK delegation of local and regional government representatives to the Congress. This is part of the 47-nation Council of Europe, which has promoted its three themes of democracy, human rights and the rule of law for 70 years now.

On our twice-yearly visits to Strasbourg there is a meeting of the UK delegation with our permanent representative, plus plenaries of the Congress, meetings of the local and regional chambers, party groups and the committees of the Congress. The UK delegates also include our UK youth representative in our formal and informal meetings. Youth delegates take part in all the plenary and committee meetings of the Congress and their input is always refreshing.

The Government's permanent representative has emphasised how important participation in Congress is in the event of Brexit, as the Council of Europe will become the main collaborative link between the UK and other countries of Europe. Unitary authorities sit in the Chamber of Regions in Congress, along with the devolved nations, so discussions there cover issues like border areas and migration, plus regions where minority languages are used.

During the year I moved from the Current Affairs Committee to the Governance Committee and was appointed its Rapporteur for a new project on 'smart cities'. This followed my speech in May 2018 on smart cities when I represented Congress at the Central and Eastern Europe eGovernment and Smart Cities Conference in Budapest. I drew on experiences in Bristol as an internationally recognised city developing smart technologies and an open data initiative. I referred to the work done to make sure smart city projects are inclusive and that grassroots input is made into the technologies being deployed.

I also started serving on the Council of Europe e-democracy working group, which met twice in the year, as its Congress representative. This brings together European governments to develop thinking and assess progress on electronic aspects of democracy – both opportunities and pitfalls, which can complement other ways people engage in democratic processes. There are many ways new technologies can enable access to democracy, and a toolkit is being developed by the working group. I've promoted the case for local government being an ideal basis for piloting of new initiatives before national elections. However, the UK Government representative has made clear that e-voting is not currently supported.

Another opportunity to discuss democracy came when I was invited to represent Congress in Armenia to discuss participation and partnership working as part of the international work supporting the transition to democracy there. This involved role playing between mayors and civil society organisations, to encourage understanding of the frustrations for those newly engaged in governance.

Participation in plenary meetings, political groups and committees has been an opportunity to take part in debates and discussions about issues like transparency in public procurement, remuneration of local government representatives (and how this can affect how well politicians represent our communities), and involvement in European Local Democracy Day, plus reports of monitoring groups that have observed local elections in many countries. The most politicised debates have touched on what has been going on in Catalonia, the situation in Turkey regarding mayors and press detentions, and the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

For the first time the Regional Chamber had an open agenda session in 2019 and I took the opportunity to initiate a debate on climate breakdown and how it threatens democracy, human rights and the rule of law.



Council of European Municipalities and Regions Councillor Marianne Overton MBE

North Kesteven District Council
and Lincolnshire County Council

2018 was the middle year of Councillor Overton's three-year term as Environment Spokesperson for the CEMR (Council of European Municipalities and Regions). The CEMR is in effect the 'European LGA', bringing together 60-plus associations from across Europe to lobby on behalf of their 150,000 local councils to ensure that new EU laws are fit for purpose and to set the European policy agenda for years to come, and to promote exchange of experience and best practice. Green issues are at the top of their priorities.

In 2018, the scourge of plastic waste rose to the top of the political agenda across Europe and globally. Ahead of the vote on the directive on single-use plastics, CEMR prepared a joint statement seeking to ensure a balanced share of the responsibilities in the management of plastic waste between the producers and the public authorities (extended producer responsibility or EPR schemes). CEMR particularly advocated for the inclusion of littering costs within these schemes.

Additionally, the CEMR continued work on the circular economy, seeking greater involvement and recognition of local and regional governments and strengthening their expertise in this area. Negotiations between the European Parliament, the CEMR and the European Commission came to an end in spring 2018. The result was quite positive: CEMR's nine main key messages were taken into account, particularly the definition of municipal waste and the introduction of a derogation to separate collection of waste when it does not deliver the best environmental outcome (in sparsely populated areas, for example).

The 'Clean energy for all' package was also a major topic: CEMR focussed its advocacy on the directive on energy efficiency in buildings and the renewable energies directive. CEMR were successful in preventing the introduction of a binding renovation

rate of 3 per cent for public buildings, leaving it to local councils to decide the appropriate rate for themselves. Councillor Marianne Overton represented CEMR at a meeting organised with partner networks on the governance regulation of the EU strategy on energy with key MEPs and the Bulgarian deputy minister for energy, representing the rotating EU presidency.

CEMR has been very active in relation to climate matters, and in December 2018 Councillor Overton moderated a session of the CEMR Policy Committee which debated climate change strategies. During the year, the CEMR has provided input to the structured dialogue with the Directorate-Generale for Climate Action to implement the Paris Agreement and to formalise the Talanoa dialogues; response to the consultation of the EU Adaptation Strategy; input to the activities of the urban partnership on climate adaptation and finalisation of the action plan; input to the outlook report on the energy transition urban partnership and the preparation of the draft action plan; response to the consultation of the EU long-term strategy on emissions reduction; and preparation of a CEMR draft orientation paper on climate change engagements.



Independent Group contact details

We have an expert team of officers supporting LGA Independent Group councillors across the country.

We always want to hear from our members, prospective councillors and those interested in the work of the Independent Group.

You can find out more about our work on our website, on social media or by contacting a member of the team.

Website: www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent

Twitter: www.twitter.com/LGA_Independent

Facebook: www.facebook.com/LGAIndependentGroup

Email: independent.groupLGA@local.gov.uk

Head of Group Office

Sarah Woodhouse

Telephone: 020 7664 3206

Email: sarah.woodhouse@local.gov.uk

Political Officer

Aimee Wittams-Smith

Telephone: 020 7664 3224

Email: aimee.wittams-smith@local.gov.uk

Mobile: 07825 531 207

Political Assistant

Noleen Rosen

Telephone: 020 7664 3215

Email: noleen.rosen@local.gov.uk







Local Government Association

18 Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000

Email info@local.gov.uk

www.local.gov.uk

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please contact us on 020 7664 3000.
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