

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT GROUP

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION



Liberal Democrats gained council seats across the country from Barnsley down to West Berkshire and south to Guildford, Mid Sussex and Lewes



Front page: We were delighted to see the Lib Dems return to the Leadership of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council with 28 councillors.

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www.libdemgroup.lga.gov.uk/lga-lib-dem-group

A message from the **Leader of the LGA Liberal Democrat Group**



Councillor Joe Harris

Leader of the LGA Liberal Democrat Group

Once again it has been another very busy year both for the LGA Liberal Democrat Group and myself as Group Leader. I have enjoyed visiting more council groups across the country and continue to be inspired by the hard work you carry out in your communities and your councils.

Thank you for everything you do to help our local areas.

Winning here – again!

This May saw a fantastic set of results for the Liberal Democrats.

Twelve new majority Lib Dem Councils were elected: Chichester, Dacorum, Guildford, Horsham, Mid Devon, South Hams, South Oxfordshire, Stratford on Avon, Surrey Heath, Teignbridge, West Berkshire & Windsor and Maidenhead. The “Blue Wall” is no more.

We kept control of Bath and North East Somerset, Chelmsford, Cotswold, Eastbourne, Eastleigh, Hinckley & Bosworth, Hull, Mole Valley, North Devon, North Norfolk, Oadby & Wigston, St Albans, Three Rivers, Vale of White Horse, Watford, Winchester and Woking.

We won against Labour, gaining seats in Hull, Liverpool and Manchester.

There are many councils facing no overall control where Liberal Democrats will be in positions of influence, be that leading the council, part of an alliance or coalition, or providing constructive yet robust opposition. We have been busy providing advice and support for those groups facing changed circumstances.

Commiserations to those who, despite working very hard, did not make it this time. For example due to the Government changing the voting system for directly elected Mayors, the excellent Mayor Dave Hodgson did not win re-election in Bedford, missing out by just 145 votes.

Across the county we gained over 400 councillors, bringing up our total across the UK to just under 3,000 Lib Dems on principal authorities.

This means the Lib Dem Group have grows in strength at the LGA and will be chairing one extra LGA Board. We will use that extra voice to fight hard for local communities across the country.

Keeping in touch with our groups and the wider party

We have run regular zoom calls for opposition leaders and council leaders, making sure that leading parliamentarians such as party leader Ed Davey MP and our Local Government Spokesperson, Helen Morgan MP, have a chance to speak with our councillors. We have run events at the LGA such as our one day conference for smaller groups. We have kept in touch week in and week out with all our Lib Dem councillors via our weekly email.

Our peer support team have been busy not just after elections but with all year round advice. We continue to support the Councillors Weekend and have regular catch-ups with our partners in ALDC.

We held fringe meetings at the Lib Dem Federal Conference including a good practice session from Lib Dem Councils on fighting climate change and protecting the environment. We have continued our work with ALDC on submitting amendments to motions.

We take part in regular cluster meetings with the parliamentary Lib Dem teams and the media and communications team.

In addition to the work above, I hold regular catch ups with Ed Davey, Party president Mark Pack and Mike Dixon, CEO of the Liberal Democrats.

Working within the LGA

Our Group Executive and Board members continue to meet and promote Liberal Democrat values within the Local Government Association and their work is detailed in this report. The LGA remains with no one party in overall control and another key part of our work is feeding into corporate LGA policy and press comments on a daily basis.

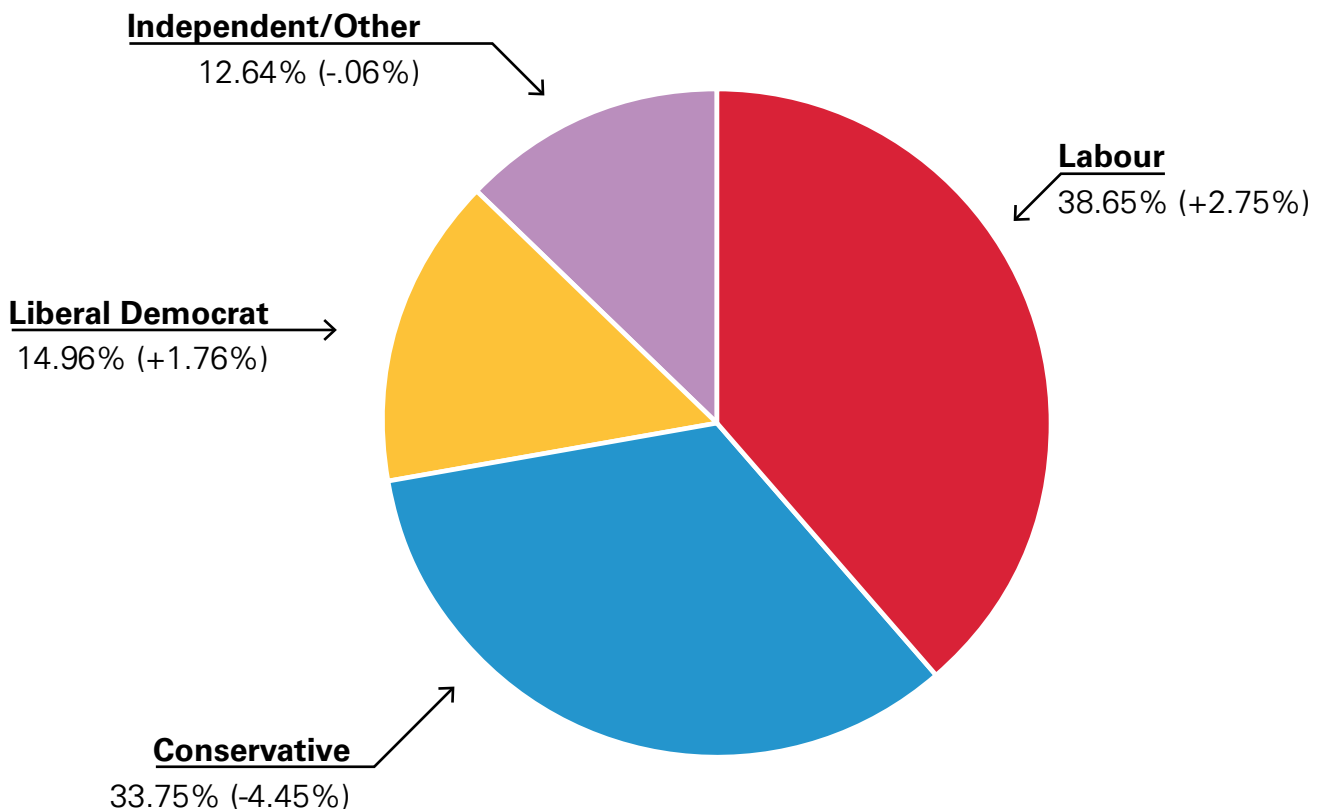
My thanks to them all and to the LGA Lib Dem leadership team – Bridget Smith (Deputy Leader); Heather Kidd (Group Chair), Alan Connett (Group Whip); alongside our Liberal Democrat Office staff team – Terry Stacy, Rob Banks and Ryan Priest.

The 2023 political balance at the LGA

As a cross party organisation the LGA governance is determined by the strength of its 4 political groups. No single party has a majority at the LGA Every year once the local election results are known, Plymouth University's Elections Centre works out the balance using a formula that takes into account the number of council seats held by each group and the population and type of authority that they represent.

The formula for 2023 means an increase in voting strength for the LGA Liberal Democrat Group. We gained a second Chair of an LGA Board, and an extra place on the People and Places and the LGA Policy Boards, giving greater profile for the Lib Dem Group.

The LGA's new political balance is:



The LGA Liberal Democrat Group Leadership Team



Group Leader

Councillor Joe Harris

Cotswold District Council and
Gloucestershire County Council

joe.harris@cotswold.gov.uk



Group Deputy Leader

Councillor Bridget Smith

South Cambridgeshire District Council

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Group Chair

Councillor Heather Kidd

Shropshire Council

heather.kidd@shropshire.gov.uk



Group Whip

Councillor Alan Connett

Devon County Council

alan.connett@btinternet.com

LGA Liberal Democrat Board members 2021-2023

LGA Boards cover all areas of a local authority's remit and provides guidance to the LGA as it represents local government at Westminster and advises councils around the country. Those elected members who served from 2021-2023 were as follows:

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

Children and Young People



Councillor Lucy Nethsingha (Lead)*

Cambridgeshire City Council
lucynethsingha@icloud.com



Councillor Mark Cory

Colchester District Council and Essex County Council
mark.cory@colchester.gov.uk



Councillor Dine Romero (Sub)

Bath & North East Somerset Council
dine_romero@bathnes.gov.uk

City Regions



Councillor Gareth Roberts (Lead)*

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
cldr.groberts@richmond.gov.uk



Councillor Greg Stone

Newcastle City Council
greg.stone@newcastle.gov.uk

Community Wellbeing



Councillor Sarah Osborne (Lead)*

East Sussex County Council
sarahosborne2000@yahoo.co.uk



Councillor Mike Bell
North Somerset Council
mike.bell@n-somerset.gov.uk



Councillor Dr Wendy Taylor (Sub)
Newcastle City Council
wendy.taylor@newcastle-libdems.org.uk

Culture, Tourism and Sport



Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE (Lead)*
Portsmouth City Council
geraldvj@gmail.com



Councillor Chris White
St Albans City District Council and Hertfordshire
County Council
chris.white.stalbans@gmail.com



Councillor Sean Macleod (Sub)
Lewes Distric Council
sean.macleod@lewes.gov.uk

Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport



Councillor Pippa Heylings (Lead)*
South Cambridgeshire District Council
pippaheylings@gmail.com



Councillor Vikki Slade
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council
vikki.slade@bcpcouncil.gov.uk



Councillor Stewart Golton (Sub)
Leeds City Council
stewart.golton@leeds.gov.uk

Fire Services



Councillor Keith Aspden (Lead)* Until May 2023
City of York Council and North Yorks Fire Panel
cllr.kaspden@york.gov.uk



Councillor Jeremy Hilton Lead from May 2023
Gloucestershire County Council and Gloucester City Council
jeremy.hilton@gloucestershire.gov.uk



Councillor Roger Price (Sub)
Hampshire County Council
roger.price@hants.gov.uk

Improvement and Innovation



Councillor Liz Green (Lead)*
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
liz.green@kingston.gov.uk



Councillor Peter Taylor
Watford Borough Council
peter.taylor@watford.gov.uk



Councillor Paul Crossley (Sub)
Bath and North East Somerset Council
paul.n.crossley@btinternet.com

People and Places



Councillor Emily Smith (Lead)*
Vale of White Horse District Council
emilysmithld@gmail.com



Councillor Caroline Leaver
North Devon District Council and Devon County Council
caroline.ndlibdems@gmail.com



Councillor Stan Collins until April 2023
Cumbria County Council
stanstheman@cix.co.uk



Councillor Michael Mullaney
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council and Leicestershire CC
michael.mullaney@hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk

Resources



Councillor Keith House (Lead)*
Eastleigh District Council and Hampshire County Council
keith.house@eastleigh.gov.uk



Councillor Richard Kemp
Liverpool City Council
richard.kemp@liverpool.gov.uk



Councillor Michael Headley (Sub)
Bedford Council
michael@mheadley.co.uk

Safer Communities



Councillor Heather Kidd (Lead)*

Shropshire Council
heather.kidd@shropshire.gov.uk



Councillor Jon Ball

London Borough Ealing
jonball@cix.co.uk



Councillor Jake Short (sub); took over from Councillor Kris Brown (Liverpool CC), January 2023

London Borough of Sutton
jake.short@sutton.gov.uk

District Councils Network Lead



Councillor Bridget Smith*

South Cambridgeshire DC
cllr.bridgetsmith@scamb.gov.uk

County Councils Network Lead



Councillor Jerry Roodhouse*

Warwickshire County Council and Rugby Council
jerryroodhouse@gmail.com

Council Rep on Federal Board and Policy Coordinator



Councillor Chris White*

Hertfordshire County Council and St Albans District Council
chris.white.stalbans@gmail.com

LGA Properties Board



Councillor David Neighbour*

Hart District Council
neighbod@aol.com

Audit



Councillor Howard Sykes MBE *

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
howard.sykes@oldham.gov.uk

LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Children and Young People Board

Councillor Lucy Nethsingha



Overview

Looking back at last year's report it has been a really extraordinary year for government, and the total chaos of the change from Johnson to Truss to Sunak has had a significant impact on the work of the CYP Board and on the direction (or more accurately total lack of direction) for government policy. It is very clear that while children or education was not high on the agenda for Johnson's government, they are even lower on the agenda for Sunak.

Rising costs in social care provision

There has been an ongoing crisis in the provision of places for children's social care for many years, and that crisis has got considerably worse since the pandemic. There was a significant drop in the number of foster carers, understandably, around the pandemic, and those numbers have not yet fully recovered.

Aligned to this there has been a big increase in the number of children and young people suffering for mental health difficulties, and for the most extreme cases there is a serious national shortage of places for children and young people to be looked after in secure and safe accommodation appropriate to their needs. This is a national problem, but not one that the Government seems to want to address in any way. The response by government to the MacAlister report was predictably inadequate, and the report itself was not clear about the scale of this problem.

The LGA Board has been looking at this issue during the year, and a report from our working group is likely to come to the next meeting. The costs for care for children at the most extreme end can be well over £500,000 a week, and given the unpredictably way such children often end up in care this is a huge risk for council budgets.

SEND and children not in school

The impact of the pandemic has also exacerbated the existing failures in educational provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The academy system, and the government changes to the education system more broadly have not supported the needs of children with SEND well, and there is wide recognition that the introduction of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) under the coalition has not delivered what was hoped. It is accepted that this is a problem with implementation, not with the intention of the legislation, but that the situation for both councils and families remains dreadful.

Families are keen to get an EHCP for their child, as they see it as a passport to the support their child needs, while councils face the costs for delivering on EHCPs while having little input into their development, particularly in the large number of cases which go to expensive appeals. The system remains adversarial, which was not the intent, and children are not getting support early, nor are families feeling supported when they need help.

The Government review of the SEND system has looked at some of these issues, and there are some welcome elements, (for example national expectations and banding will probably help both councils and families have shared expectations,) but it completely avoids any discussion of the role of schools in supporting children.

lucynethsingha@icloud.com

LEAD MEMBER REPORT

LGA Liberal Democrat Group Whip

Councillor Alan Connett



Group elections

Elections for the various Group Offices and LGA Board and other appointments were held in May 2021 again in the past month or so. The Executive reviews the process after each election and there will be a report to a future Executive on this year's arrangements.

The election guidance was updated following concerns about the use of email addresses and the volume of campaign emails sent by candidates for the various LGA and Group positions. At last year's Group Annual Meeting, the Executive was authorised to make such arrangements and changes as were necessary for this year, taking into account advice received regarding the concerns raised.

In summary, we have clarified that email addresses drawn from council websites may be used. Additionally, this year candidates were able to issue three 'election emails' in addition to the compendium manifesto sent out by the LGA Liberal Democrats Group Office.

The returning officer and deputy for the Group elections are officers of the LGA, which is also this year responsible for the election process and count, generating a helpful saving to the Group budget.

Consultation on Tithing

The response submitted by the LGA Liberal Democrats Group to the consultation on tithing arrangements can be found here: www.local.gov.uk/lga-libdem-group/our-press-releases/lga-liberal-democrat-group-response-consultation-tithing

Liberal Democrats council groups should, from the elections after the new tithing regulations came into effect, now ensure their members are contributing 10 per cent gross from Basic and Special Responsibility allowances. This is particularly relevant post the May 2023 council elections.

Group contract

The Group Contract was introduced several years ago, setting out the expectations of all those who hold Group Offices or serve on the various LGA Boards, Panels and related organisations. It was updated last year, giving improved clarity on the responsibilities. Following the 2023 Group elections, all those elected to Group positions are expected to sign and observe the Group Contract.

Reports and attendance

A summary of attendance of Board Members is included within this report. I am grateful to colleagues for their diligence in submitting reports and focussing on the issues of concern rather than the length of the content. There is much to be said for brevity!

Standards and pastoral support

For the third year, I am concerned about the distress that long-running Standards complaint can cause our councillors. While the Standards process is unlikely to be a priority for any administration, those entangled in its web often find they are helpless without recourse to sound, independent advice and they do not have the funds to engage professional legal support – unlike the council.

Councillors can also find themselves facing the twin jeopardy of a Standards complaint being processed and a complaint to the Party on the same, or similar matter.

The Group Office has supported several colleagues with regard to Standards matters and ALDC also offers a simple legal support advice service, which may also assist.

Thank you

This is my final report at Group Whip as, after six years in the role, I am no longer eligible to stand. I have greatly enjoyed serving the Group and Liberal Democrats in this role.

It has been a task made easier with the great support of Terry Stacy, Rob Banks and Ryan Priest in the Group Office and the Executive Team over that period of Councillor Joe Harris and Councillor Howard Sykes as Group Leaders, Councillor Bridget Smith and Councillor Ruth Dombey as Deputy Group Leaders, and Councillor Heather Kidd, Chair. I am also grateful to all of my colleagues on the Boards and Panels for their support. Thank you.

alan.connett@btinternet.com

Reports tabled	21/07/22	15/09/22	20/10/22	26/01/23	09/03/23
Joe Harris	verbal	verbal	verbal	verbal	verbal
Bridget Smith	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Heather Kidd	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alan Connett	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lucy Nethsingha	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Gareth Roberts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gerald Vernon Jackson	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Sarah Osborne	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pippa Heylings	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Liz Green	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Emily Smith	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Keith Aspden	No	No	No	Yes	No
Dave Neighbour	No	No	No	No	No
Keith House	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Howard Sykes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jerry Roodhouse	Yes	Yes*	No	Yes	No
Chris White	Yes	No	No	Yes	No

*Apologies for lateness

Executive member Attendance 2022-23	09/06/22	21/07/22	15/09/22	20/10/22	25/01/23	09/03/23
Joe Harris	Yes	Apologies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bridget Smith	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Heather Kidd	Yes	Apologies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alan Connett	Yes	Yes	Yes	Apologies	Apologies	Yes
Lucy Nethsingha	Yes	Yes	Yes	Apologies	Apologies	Yes
Gareth Roberts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Apologies	Yes	Yes
Gerald Vernon Jackson	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sarah Osborne	Yes	Yes	Apologies	Yes	Apologies	Yes
Pippa Heylings	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Apologies	Yes
Liz Green	Yes	Yes	Yes	Apologies	Yes	Yes
Emily Smith	Apologies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Keith Aspden	Apologies	Apologies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dave Neighbour	Yes	Yes	Apologies	Yes	Yes	Yes
Keith House	Apologies	Apologies	Apologies	Yes	Yes	Apologies
Howard Sykes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jerry Roodhouse	Yes	Yes	Yes	Apologies	Yes	Yes
Chris White	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Community Wellbeing Board

Councillor Sarah Osborne



It's been another disappointing year with Government renegeing on previous commitments including halving the social care workforce funding to £250 million at a time when the sector is facing a massive shortage. This will do almost nothing to reverse the sector's worrying recruitment and retention problems and will pile ever more caring responsibility onto unpaid carers.

We have robustly and consistently called on The Secretary of State to put adult social care (ASC) funding on a long-term, sustainable footing and been critical of the complex web of different pots of funding that have been allocated to support ASC as is not the best way to either improve outcomes or get best value from the available resources.

We gave evidence to the Hewitt Review of the autonomy and accountability of Integrated Care Systems (ICS). I was pleased to see the following included in the final report:

- That if health and care are to be effectively integrated and delivered, social care needs to be a national priority for investment and workforce development, enabling delivery of the reforms of the 2014 Care Act.
- Recommendation that government should produce a complementary strategy for the social care workforce and enable flexibility for health and care staff, both in moving between roles and in the delegation of some healthcare tasks.
- Government should give local leaders space and time to lead.
- Acknowledgement that adding new targets and initiatives, providing small funding pots (often with complex rules and reporting requirements), or non-recurrent funding makes it impossible to plan or even recruit, wastes money and time, and weakens impact and accountability. Multi-year funding horizons, with proportionate reporting requirements, are essential.

- Public health grant to local authorities needs to be increased if we are going to extend healthy life expectancy, reducing the financial burden to health and social care.

Inadequate increases in Public Health Grants leaves councils facing significant challenges as they try to meet demand for services. We continue to lobby around the sufficiency of the public health grant, and have recently called for a wider review of the adequacy of public health funding.

I have also asked for the allocations to be announced earlier as the very late announcements this year left councils to make critical decisions on renewing contracts for vital public health services before they knew their allocation. In future this must be announced at the same time as the local government finance settlement.

Government shelved the Health Disparities White Paper and are instead planning a Major Conditions Strategy which combines several different strategies including the 10-year mental health strategy and some elements of the shelved white paper. The six major conditions are mental health, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases, dementia, cardiovascular diseases (diabetes and strokes) and muscular skeletal conditions. The strategy as yet is unclear - is their focus on prevention and early intervention, or whether about joining up NHS care pathways? We highlighted some oversights too for example there were no specific references to addressing women's or children's health within the strategy. We were also critical of yet more organisational reform when what we need is urgency and reliability of funding.

Lead Members meet regularly with the CYP Board and we are now working alongside the People and Places and City Regions Boards on Economic Inactivity and Health. There has been a rise to seven million in potential workers and taxpayers. This situation is in large part due to increased NHS waiting times. Mental health, muscular skeletal health and cardiovascular disease were the three main health conditions contributing to figures, as well as a significant number not returning to work after COVID.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Culture, Tourism and Sport Board

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson



This year, the Culture, Tourism and Sport Board has been dominated by the problems the rise in energy costs have had on our swimming pools. Councils across the country have had to battle huge rises in costs at a time when council budgets have been under huge pressure.

Before the energy cost rise Swim England issued a report saying that they expected almost half of all publicly accessible pools in the country would shut before the end of this decade. There have been decades of underinvestment in our pools and sports centres. Therefore many pools are at the end of their useful lives and councils across the country are having to make very difficult decisions about keeping pools open, reducing opening times and turning down the temperature.

The Government has really had very little interest in this issue, but the LGA briefed councils and MPs who increasingly raised the issue with Ministers. We eventually got a meeting of the Board with the Minister for Sport, who told us that there would be no Government support. We pushed back hard and showed him where pools would close. Just one month later the Government announced a fund of over £60 million to support council run pools. Incredibly good news.

The Culture, Tourism and Sport Board seems to work differently from other Boards. Under my chairmanship we are the only Board to hold board meetings outside of London. We also work in a collegiate way and almost never have votes. It works well.

Some of the other issues we have looked at have been the fall out of the Arts Council funding decisions. I have written a proposal to get Blue Plaques done by English Heritage in areas outside of London, something that the Minister has now taken up. My thanks to Chris White for all his help and support over the years.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board

Councillor Pippa Heylings



Breaching 1.5C climate threshold

Worryingly, the World Meteorological Organisation has just announced for the first time that we will breach 1.5C of global warming “on a temporary basis with increasing frequency”. We have never experienced such surface

temperatures before in the world. Climate change has now also been recognised as the greatest threat to biodiversity and the recovery of nature. Yet this Conservative Government is not on track to meet our Net Zero targets.

At COP 26, I led the LGA campaign lobbying for the inclusion of local government’s role in addressing climate change. While the Government was pedalling backwards, we have been working hard to put those words into action, showing how local climate action can contribute to our national Net Zero targets.

I successfully lobbied for the LGA Climate Change Task Group (that had lead the initiative at COP 26) to be formally recognised as the national Local Net Zero Forum which is the platform for elected members to engage with all relevant Whitehall departments. With the excellent support of LGA officers, the Local Net Zero Forum has met with four Ministers to hold them to account, to lobby for greater powers and resources and to offer real solutions.

Huge savings through local climate action to power and heat our homes.

We have campaigned relentlessly to get the government to act now and introduce higher energy efficiency standards for new builds. It is so irresponsible to delay further (the Lib Dems introduced the Zero Carbon Homes policy back in 2012!).

I have been on several national panels and given evidence to two APPGs about the Government’s recent consultation on inshore wind farms which continues to make them more difficult to approve, despite overwhelming public support.

We have also lobbied for a mandate for EV charging and electromobility to be managed strategically at local level. Latest research shows compared to a nationally implemented programme to achieve Net Zero by 2050, devolved climate action would result in £160 billion in savings and over £400 billion in wider returns.

Concerns about homelessness crisis

We have successfully lobbied for changes to some of the deeply unfair and perverse policies and regulations that have been shown to catapult vulnerable people into homelessness, such as the abolition of the Section 21 no faults evictions.

We lobbied for an emergency review of the Exempt Accommodation scheme.

I have provided evidence at three national conferences and to a House of Lords Roundtable on homelessness and talked to many housing officers in our councils, as well as the major charities.

We have also provided evidence about government loopholes that contribute to the crisis in council homes, social and affordable housing. We are hugely relieved to see changes to the Right To Buy scheme because it meant the loss of almost 60,000 homes in social housing stock over the last year: the significant discounts for home buyers have left councils without funding to replace the much-needed homes on a like-for-like basis.

We continue to be extremely concerned about the planning reforms proposed in the Levelling Up Bill which threaten the 'infrastructure first' approach championed by the Lib Dems. The proposal is to replace S106 with an infrastructure levy that is only paid to local councils on the sale of the first home. This is a game-changer. Putting in infrastructure ahead of housing would only be possible if local councils go into huge debt and upfront the investment themselves (all at risk). The new levy also threatens the supply of affordable housing which, to date, has been provided through S106 developer contributions.

Housing can contribute to nature recovery IF....

It was an honour to be the LGA key speaker at the national Biodiversity Net Gain Conference alongside the Chair of Natural England and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) director for land use policy with officers, councillors, conservation organisations and developers.

There is a huge opportunity with the new Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) scheme to ensure due consideration to the local environment and developer contribution – if managed well and not leading to greenwashing. Through the LGA we have many examples of how BNG is already being managed with Built and Natural Environment planning teams in councils.

Additionally, I raised the serious issue of a lack of coordination between different government departments around the excellent work that is being done to develop Local Nature Recovery Schemes. The National Planning Policy Framework and proposed planning reforms are ominously silent about LNRS which means that they have no material weight in planning considerations.

Gridlock!

I finish this year very proud of Lib Dem influence. I pushed for the Board to campaign on local councils' role in the planning and delivery of the energy and water utilities as key to unlocking the economy in our areas.

Current grid capacity is overwhelmed in many areas and blocks the connection of ambitious new renewable energy schemes that can decarbonise the sector. There is a need to agree how spatial planning helps identify energy demand and is factored early into planning for local grid expansion and reinforcement. The lack of water supply also threatens housing provision in water stressed areas. This has led to a large piece of LGA work around the proposed 'duty to cooperate' whereby local councils should be at the table early in the planning stages of energy and water systems.

It was an honour to chair the all-day LGA conference on the Future of Local Energy, bringing together for the first time representatives from the distribution network operators in England, National Grid, Ofgem, community energy associations and councils to discuss the challenges and agree a way forward.

My thanks to fellow LGA Liberal Democrat Group Board member Vikki Slade and our substitute, Stewart Golton, for all their help this year.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Improvement and Innovation Board

Councillor Liz Green



A key plank of the LGA work is the sector-led improvement programme, whereby councils help each other to innovate and improve. It is paid for by a government grant from the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DULHC) to the LGA and the IIB looks after this work.

Services covered

You'll probably know some of the offerings for sector-led improvement - corporate and area specific peer challenges, leadership essentials and leadership academy training, peer mentoring, change of control support, webinars and LG Inform.

But did you know that it also covers officer training, financial reliance, regional principal advisors, the national graduate development programme (NGDP), the be a councillor programme, support for disabled councillors, greenhouse gas accounting tool, net zero innovation programme and behavioural insights. As well as assisting in programmes funded by other government departments - children's services, Partners in Care and Health, cyber security, digital and technology, one public estate and planning advisory service.

This last year, once again, the LGA has met virtually all of the Government targets running 143 peer challenges/remote peer support, over 2,500 councillors attending training or learning, over 700,000 LG Inform page views, 22 disabled councillors receiving individualised coaching and targeted workforce support for 56 councils.

If your council is not making the most of these opportunities (many offered for free to your council) please get in touch with me or our political group office.

Oflog

After a shaky start, DLUHC has moved forward in setting up the Office for Local Government (Oflog) with the premise of bringing together and publishing data to understand local government performance and value for money. This year considerable time has been spent trying (but failing) to convince the Government that this is just repeating information already held by LG Inform. For a new tool to be useful it needs to cover central government spending at local level, so residents can see what not only councils spend in their area but what the Department for Education, Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Health and Social Care, and the Ministry of Justice does as well, and are we getting value for money from these departments. The repeated message back from ministers is that they will look into this, but it won't be in the initial tranche of work. It looks likely that between me writing this and you reading it at the annual conference, Oflog will have been launched.

LGA's own peer review

This year the LGA had its own peer challenge exploring the use and effectiveness of member and officer peers. The review found that peers make a vital and highly regarded contribution to the LGA's sector-led support offer, but it also highlighted some improvements it could make. As a result the LGA is introducing a much improved training offer for councillors involved in peer challenges and mentoring, better quality assurance, ensuring members are better informed about sector issues and improving the diversity of the peer pool.

Innovation Zone

Finally I'd like to highlight the Innovation Zone at the LGA annual conference. These short, sharp sessions showcase just some of the innovative work being undertaken in councils up and down the country. This year there will be over 50 sessions running (from 200 applications received), covering pretty much everything that local councils do. Stop by, grab a coffee and listen to the best case studies our sector has to offer.

If you've got queries please do get in touch.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Resources Board

Councillor Keith House



The Resources Board leads for the LGA on a range of financial issues for local government: pay, terms and conditions, workforce, welfare reform and the remnants of COVID and EU funding.

This last year has largely completed the move to the post-COVID world, including with more informal meetings thanks to MS Teams, yet much of the Resources Boards' work has been business as usual: lobbying government on fair funding, handling pay negotiations through National Employers, and understanding the mess that is the broken audit system.

Government has failed to deliver on long-promised reviews and updates on fair funding, business rates review and changes to new homes bonus and more. Short-termism, with three Prime Ministers and a plethora of Ministers in different roles has not created a stable climate for long-term decisions. I have no sense that any of this work will recommence any time soon, as we now have key issues and concerns kicked into the long-grass until after the General Election.

Pay has been the Board's biggest issue through the year. It will again be the most complex issue over the coming year as planned increases in the National Minimum Wage continue to put pressure on lower pay points and put pressure upwards on pay bands. The inflationary pressure here is still not widely understood across the sector and what was a difficult negotiation that finally succeeded last year for a large flat-rate pay increase has this year run into union disputes and the spectre of strike action, following wider industrial action across the public sector.

The audit system is failing due to a lack of auditors and increasing regulatory burden. A slow response from government to leading the sector has compounded the challenge which has resulted in hundreds of delayed audits. This problem will take years to fix and would be helped by a simplified audit process.

An acting “sector leader” from the Financial Reporting Council is making progress, but the context of a distracted government does not help. New contracts for future audits have been awarded by the Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA), at higher prices with some new entrants and re-entrants to the market.

Looking forward, the cost of living crisis, inflation and the impact of interest rates on councils’ costs, will need to be the Board’s focus over the coming year. Thoughts and experiences of colleagues would as always be good to share.

Finally, to record my thanks to Richard Kemp, and to our team at the LGA in Smith Square, who have given me fulsome support on the Board in a year of increasing complexity.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Councillor Heather Kidd



This year has again been a very busy year covering a broad range of reviews, legislation, conferences and round tables. A focus of the work has been to make sure legislation and policy reviews reflect interests in both rural and urban areas and their councils. Where services are devolved to separate nations the group have worked to ensure that impacts of reviews and proposed legislation are considered across national borders.

Main areas covered this year include:

Anti-social behaviour and the Government consultation. The work continues on this with Government consulting.

Prevent review: we argued that stopping terrorism required a broad and joined-up approach across the cohesion, counter-extremism and Prevent spectrum, and noted the report's emphasis on the importance of counter-extremism and disruptions work as a key aspect of the national strategy.

Gambling review

The Board believes that councils do not have the full powers that they need to effectively manage local gambling premises, as shown by the case studies which I have also included in the annex of this letter. Councils do have mechanisms to try and reduce the risk of gambling harm through their statement of licensing principles or local area profile. However, no matter how robust a council's local area profile or licensing policy is, it is extremely difficult to use these to prevent a new premises from opening in inappropriate areas. The Board has called for additional powers to allow local democratically elected councillors to restrict the opening of new gambling premises in areas where there are already clusters, or where for other reasons – for example the presence of treatment centres, or schools, or because of community opposition – it may not be appropriate to open a gambling venue.

Building safety – information and communication around Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) which is now failing and is present in many public buildings including Schools, Leisure Centres, Libraries and more. This was used from the 1950's through to the 1990's. Raising the profile of the issue is now vital.

Government Review of **Community Safety Partnerships**, their effectiveness and future changes.

Taxi licencing in Wales is under review and could have far reaching consequences for those operating taxis both sides of the England/ Wales border as the Welsh Government consult on whether operators should register and work mainly within Wales.

Work force capacity was reviewed by most Boards and we concentrated on problems recruiting in Licensing, Environmental Health, and Trading Standards. These are poorly represented to the public and find it difficult to recruit despite being interesting career paths. Apprenticeships are being used.

Asylum seekers, community cohesion and modern slavery. The board felt that work around this should not limit modern slavery to asylum seekers. This is a truly diverse area. Continued reports of councils being faced with refugees being placed in hotels all over the country and the presence of children being notified late to councils.

Beach & Water Safety Special Interest Group which has proved interesting and useful. It highlights some major campaigns for summer safety in water.

Chairing a session on Vapes at the Association of Directors of Public Health Conference was particularly interesting but also informative on the issues around them. They are becoming a significant issue for young people, schools and disposal authorities.

Both Jon Ball and Jake Short (our new substitute) on the Board have proved hard working members and I thank them for their support.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Fire Services Annual Report

Councillor Keith Aspden



It has been another busy year for the LGA Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) and Fire Commission.

I would like to thank all those that have been involved with fire service issues this year. My thanks go to Councillor Jeremy Hilton, my colleague on FSMC who will be returning as lead member (May-August 2023) and to Councillors Roger Price and Carolyn Lambert, our substitute members, alongside all Lib Dem members of the Fire Commission.

During this year we have:

- responded to the Fire Reform White Paper (which now seems to have stalled)
- continued to lobby against unwanted 'take overs' from Mayors or Police and Crime Commissioners of Fire and Rescue Authorities
- made building safety one of our key priorities, responding to the Fire Safety Bill and Grenfell Tower tragedy
- campaigned to 'End the Cladding Scandal'
- engaged with the Fire and Building Safety Ministers and Senior Sector Group with the Home Office, in order to respond for the fire sector to spending reviews, the national fire inspection report and push for resources to match responsibilities
- sent occasional e-bulletins for Lib Dem fire spokespersons and held group meetings for our team of Fire Commission members, which included continued advice on how to turn fire service issues into local and national campaigns
- held the Fire Conference, FSMC and Fire Commission meetings.

The Fire Reform white paper and recent national fire inspections has focused our work on culture and diversity in the fire services, fire services pay (through the National Joint Council), chief fire officer operational independence and the suggestion of common standards for the sector. LGA members are actively working with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) to respond on these issues, whilst reminding the minister to tackle the big areas for improvement (culture, professionalism and funding), that will improve services, rather than get distracted on governance.

Hundreds of councillors, including an active Lib Dem Group, attended the LGA Fire Conference in Nottingham. Last year we launched a best practice guide to fire services tackling the climate emergency, from responding to flooding to suggestions for what more fire authorities can do.

As we approach a new year the teams priorities as Liberal Democrats and at the LGA will focus on implementation following the national reviews of governance, fire safety and the national fire inspection. This must rightly include culture, professionalism, funding and workforce issues. We will also continue to campaign for local areas to be able to retain their decision making and for greater funding and action on building safety and cladding.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

City Regions Board

Councillor Gareth Roberts



Over the past 12 months much of the work of the City Regions board has been focused on change and renewal; not so much of city regions themselves, but more the board itself.

It is claimed that Roman generals returning to the Eternal City following a military triumph were accompanied by a slave who would whisper 'Memento Mori' in their ear, reminding them that their time was limited. And so it is with our Chair, the soon to be ex-mayor of Bristol, Marvin Rees, who is moving at pace to reform the board in the little time he has left. Whether he will continue as Chair when his term of office concludes remains to be seen; we've been far too British to ask such a vulgar question.

So now all board business is viewed through the following thematic lenses:

Theme One: The Future of Cities

Theme Two: Levelling Up

Theme Three: Urban Resilience

Theme Four: Green Jobs

Theme Five: Growth Funding

In fairness to Marvin this has been quite a transformational approach to how we conduct business. Whereas before there was a vagueness to meetings, an unspoken questioning between members as to why we were considering a particular paper, now there is clarity and certainty as to why items are being discussed.

My own work over the last year has been largely focused on Themes One and Three. As one of the committee vice chairs I get the opportunity to meet with the chair and fellow Vice Chairs to drive through the agenda and be given allotted tasks.

The Future of Cities theme, for example, has seen me be involved with both the development, and the presentation, of the City Regions Urban Summit which has just held its second annual meeting. I've been a panel member at both summits which I'm claiming makes me a regular.

Some themes are more successful than others – particularly notable are Future of Cities and Urban Resilience. The less successful being Levelling Up, Green Jobs and Growth Funding which largely fall into the same categories of discussion about how funding doesn't go far enough, how competition for funding is ineffective, piecemeal and insufficient and how the Government isn't doing enough to create opportunities. All good stuff but it feels a bit 'Groundhog Day' when we reach those themes.

Having focused largely on Future of Cities and Urban Resilience and made good progress on those subjects, the goal for the next two years will be to level up the other three categories. There's certainly work to be done on them and see how they might be transformed or, in the case of levelling up, ditched as we see a new Government take power at Westminster.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

People and Places Board

Councillor Emily Smith



The People and Places Board seeks to influence national policy in the interests of non-metropolitan communities. The topics we cover are varied but with a focus on ensuring rural and coastal communities are fully considered in the formation of national and local government policy.

As a Lib Dem team, we agreed for areas of focus for the year and have successfully used our voice on the board to steer the boards activity. A few examples include:

- We made sure the issue of financial support for 'off grid' homes and businesses reliant on heating oil was raised by the board, which along with pressure from our parliamentarians led to a shift in the governments approach. www.fwi.co.uk/business/rural-groups-condemn-miserly-100-handout-for-heating-oil
- The Board had some success in lobbying for the UKSPF funds to be allocated to councils based on need as opposed to councils having to bid for funding, despite the overall pot available to local areas being smaller than pre-Brexit.
- We participated in discussions with the National Farmers Union about employment and skills in rural areas and contributed to the Boards 'Work Local' publication. The Lib Dem board members are champions for agricultural communities in debates about climate action, council services for local businesses and general economic policy. Points I was also able to raise as a panel member at a national Skills and Employment Summit in July.
- As the UK prepares for digital switchover the board has been raising the need for investment in broadband infrastructure in rural areas such as the issues social care services face in areas with poor connectivity and the need to guarantee access to 999 calls when there is no mobile or internet coverage.

- Board meetings and reports we contribute to provide the opportunity to champion Lib Dems values of localism and community empowerment. I was quoted in the LGC describing the Government’s Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill as “a move away from the autonomy of local councils” which was “pretty shocking”.

The Lib Dem People and Places team

My huge thanks to my fellow Lib Dem board members for their input and commitment to the Board’s work: Councillor Caroline Leaver and Councillor Michael Mullaney and special thanks to Councillor Stan Collins who stood down this May having served the People and Places Board for many years.

The coming year

I have recently been appointed to represent the People and Places Board on the health devolution working group with the NHS Confederation and including representatives from, City Regions and Community Wellbeing Boards, where I hope to push for a strong local government voice as part for the new Integrated Care Boards.

As the Board looks to publish its priorities for the coming year, the Lib Dem team are pushing for our priorities to being included – a greater focus on the impact of second homes and holiday lets on affordable housing provision, and the need for food production and agriculture to be central to the solution to the cost-of-living crisis and sustainable local economies.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Liberal Democrat Retained Peers

Councillor Alan Connett



Supporting Liberal Democrats in local government

Your team of Retained Peers, Councillor Alan Connett, Councillor Sarah Butikofer and Councillor Lisa Smart, work to support our council groups, leaders and individual councillors across the country.

Facilitated 'away-days', training and development opportunities, peer mentoring, support for service specific issues and much more, are the bread and butter of what we do... along with a team of experienced and knowledgeable Liberal Democrat councillors who form our pool of Member Peers.

In the year April 2022 to end of March 2023, we have:

- arranged **20** Member Peer Assignments
- provided mentoring support for **18** councillors
- took part in **16** Corporate or other Peer Challenges
- supported **30** Change of Control councils
- delivered **19** Change of Control support programmes for councillors
- provided a range of general advice and support to Liberal Democrat Council and Group Leaders, Groups and councillors.

Our work is part of the LGA's Sector Led Improvement programme which includes the Highlighting Leadership offer which is particularly valuable to all councillors. It includes the excellent Leadership Academy as well as the high-quality Leadership Essentials events.

A good number of the LGA Leadership Essentials course are free, but councillors will need to ensure they or their councils fund the travel/ accommodation.

This can be a high bar for colleagues in authorities where the member training budget is minimal, primarily used by the administration or requires the Leader's approval!

Winning control and influence

Again, this year a significant part of our work has been supporting Liberal Democrat councillors during and following the annual Change of Control programme after the May elections. Most often, this is where we have won control, or form a partnership administration.

We also support Liberal Democrat councillors who may find themselves as a sole 'Lib Dem' on the authority, and this May, new Liberal Democrat groups such as Slough and Bracknell Forest.

We have template written agreements which our groups going into partnership arrangements are able to utilise so everyone is clear what is offered, what is being secured and how such an agreement can be ended.

Training for Group Whips

We identified a gap in the LGA's comprehensive training and development programme – and that is for the role of a Group Whip. We have had requests over the past three years for such training. We put the case to the LGA last year and I hope there will be 'Whip focused' development opportunities in the year ahead covering aspects such as team building, conflict resolution and member development among other topics.

Keeping in touch with leaders

The regular 'conference calls' for council leaders and also for Group Leaders have continued. Topic specific conference calls have drawn greater attendance and I am grateful to Party Leader, Sir Ed Davey, and others for their support and using these meetings to speak to and hear from our leaders.

Peer assignments and mentoring

Join the team. We welcome applications to become a Member Peer and especially welcome expressions of interest from women, young councillors, councillors with good experience in planning, adult and children's services, finance and housing and social media.

If this is you, don't hide your light... come forward, join the team...

Email ryan.priest@local.gov.uk for an application form. Do it NOW.

Help and support throughout the year

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

Our support includes, but often extends beyond facilitated events for groups, future planning for the council, putting that planning into reality, group issues, general advice and arranging mentoring.

Thank you

My thanks to Sarah and Lisa, the Group Office, all our Member Peers and ALDC for the help and support throughout the year. My thanks also to the LGA Principal Advisors and the Improvement Team for their support.

Contact points

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Councillor Sarah Butikofer

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

District Councillors Network

Councillor Bridget Smith



It has probably been the most busy year yet for DCN as we come out of the pandemic and continue to tackle the demands of immigration and the cost of living crisis. Our annual conference, held in Lib Dem controlled St Albans, was exceptional and we have delivered a brilliant programme of training for council officers from all over the UK.

We have had some serious wins as a result of our lobbying and influence especially:

- Government climbdown on Levelling Up Bill preventing district powers being given to combined county authorities without consent.
- Better than expected Finance Settlement (five per cent increase in core spending power, including three per cent funding guarantee).
- Planning fee increases.
- £63 million support fund for swimming pools.
- Additional support for refugees and Ukraine, especially the £500 million Local Authority Housing Fund.

The Board, working with a very high calibre set of executive officers from partner councils and with an excellent Director in James Hood has moved to a new level of professionalism and productivity. We also now have our own communications officer which has meant far more media attention and impact at ministerial level. The work plan has been wide ranging over the year but with some current big ticket items.

Waste reforms

The Government has yet again delayed announcing its proposed waste reforms, most probably as the result of robust campaigning by the DCN and others. The Board has again reiterated its concerns about the cost and viability of what is expected to be in the consultation response. National press coverage about the possibility of households needing seven bins originated from DCN.

Planning reforms and Infrastructure Levy

The DCN is not the only body expressing serious concerns about the Government's plans for a new Infrastructure Levy (IL). These include:

- Strong scepticism that the IL will achieve its stated aims of delivering more affordable housing and infrastructure than the current system of developer contributions.
- The problem with land value capture that most of the value is captured by the landowner before the point of development and IL does not change this. The portion of land value remaining to be shared between developers, Local Planning Authorities (LPA) and others will still be too small.
- DCN members asked the Government to be much more ambitious on both affordable housing and infrastructure provision.
- DCN is concerned that IL could affect viability on some/many sites in the same way as Community Infrastructure Levy does.
- The proposals would create a big financial risk to LPAs of borrowing upfront against IL proceeds, for example when the final amount is not known or when the development takes much longer than expected to complete or when the developer goes bust/disappears before site is completed.
- Councils being faced with flux for a decade or more due to the very gradual implementation timescale.

Asylum and resettlement

DCN continues to raise concerns about the cost of supporting refugees and asylum seekers and the burden imposed on certain places. It has been suggested that current policy is setting up local authorities to fail.

District roles on ICS

The DCN and the King's Fund agreed to produce a report primarily aimed at health stakeholders and partners within ICSs to drive a step change in their engagement of districts. The report aims to describe what good looks like in terms of district council engagement in ICSs and will provide recommendations to ICS and local government leaders about how to strengthen existing arrangements so that the value of district services is properly harnessed. It will also highlight the potential for district councils to play a key role in helping ICSs to achieve their goals around population health.

Promoting district councils

The DCN has commissioned work from Localis to identify how district councils as a whole can improve our joint messaging in order to:

- influencing nationally
- promoting locally
- showcasing excellence.

This is a work in progress but the Board have been discussing eight key messages, under the following umbrella headings:

- we provide vital services to 100 per cent of residents
- we make local places better
- we keep local places safe and healthy
- we are excellent value for money
- we are close to our communities
- we care and understand our local people
- we bring communities together
- we can be trusted to get the job done.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

County Councils Network Report

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse



County Councils Network (CCN) is a cross party grouping of 36 county authorities which are England's largest grouping of councils, with their 2,600 councillors representing some 26 million people, and covering 86 per cent of the country's landmass. Collectively, they are responsible for 39 per cent of England's Gross Value Added (GVA), almost half the country's entire spend on children's and adult social care, and they maintain 70 per cent of local roads.

Leading recovery – delivering renewal

The Liberal Democrat group on CCN is now the second largest grouping with us taking control of more councils. Well done to those newly elected councillors. The Chief Executive of CCN attends Lib Dem group meetings and briefs the Lib Dem group on emerging issues and updates on specific policy matters. This has allowed time for us to discuss what our view is on specific items. The leaders calls are held on a regular basis. The Executive of CCN meetings is attended by me and Stephen Giles Medhurst and it progresses the business of CCN such as the work programme.

Councillor Stephen Giles Medhurst acts as our deputy leader (Herts) and is also the lead on the Transport & Infrastructure Portfolio. All CCN Meetings are held by Microsoft teams except for the CCN conference held in November which an in-person event.

CCN has mainly been working on county deals and devolution

The main campaigns continue around the following, The business plan for 2023 /2024 can be found on the CCN website.

- 1. Local government finance** ensuring that CCN members have the funding they need to support the services that matter to their residents.
- 2. Adult social care** and health making sure that the voice of counties is considered as the Government pushes ahead with reforms and the Integrated Care System.
- 3. Children's services** and education articulating the increasing financial pressure on children's services, SEND and Home to School Transport.
- 4. Devolution and reform** supporting members who are in county deals and ensuring that proposals in the Levelling Up White Paper benefits all CCN members.
- 5. Economic growth** and levelling up focusing on the role of counties in economic growth, highlighting the activity they undertake to support the private sector and drive the recovery as we emerge from the pandemic.
- 6. Housing and communities** continue to actively influence forthcoming planning reforms and continue to push our calls for the reintroduction of strategic planning as a replacement for the duty to cooperate.
- 7. Climate change** and net-zero secure greater recognition about the role CCN members will need to have as part of the national response to the climate emergency.

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Facebook www.facebook.com/groups/ccnlibdems/ (this is a closed group you need to ask to join).

LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Federal Party Coordinator Report

Councillor Chris White



The reform of the Federal Board (FB) takes us back to what the conference previously rejected as an informal arrangement. FB now comprises (in short summary) President, Leader, Vice-President, State Party chairs, other committee chairs, three directly elected members, Chair of Liberal Youth and the Principal Councillor Representative. As a smaller body it naturally works more effectively than its predecessor and the ability to meet face to face has doubtless been helpful in a more harmonious atmosphere than before. The local government voice is proportionately larger.

The new factor is Federal Council (FC), which operates rather like a scrutiny committee and has already called in an item (of no great weight). I have had a first meeting with councillor representatives on FC and we have agreed to meet more and share thoughts in advance of FB.

Looking forward there are some key issues that need resolving. The usual suspects are there: needless overlap between ALDC and campaigns activities and the need for conference to debate issues which are of relevance on the ground as opposed to niche matters which either bore the electorate or frighten them. Linked to this is the problem of passing resolutions that are actively unhelpful, as we have seen with housing numbers. (There are those in the party who feel that councils should be required to build on the green belt.) It is basically not clear that the whole of the party understands that local election success is the key to General Election success.

An issue now coming into view (although we have seen it before) is how to react sensibly to the recent local election results. I was on FB when the party decided to go mad in 2019 and target seats which were in no sense winnable simply on the basis of European election results. I am confident this time around that that mistake will not be repeated but will argue that the local government base is key: if you don't have many councillors you should not be a target seat.

I was not on FB in 2010 but am conscious that when there is no majority for any party after a General Election we need to guard against those who prefer seats in ministerial cars rather than having an idea as to why on earth those cars would be beneficial to our agenda, principles and policies. We need a contingency plan if we are not to be sucked up into a Labour Party vacuum cleaner and destroyed on the ground again.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

Local Partnerships and Audit Committee

Councillor Howard Sykes MBE



Local Partnerships is an in-house consultancy jointly owned by the Local Government Association, HM Treasury, and the Welsh Government.

We work solely for Central Government Departments, the Welsh Government, Councils and Combined Authorities.

I have been the LGA Liberal Democrat Group representative since August 2021. The Board met in July, September, December, January, March (Strategy Day and full meeting) and May.

The Board comprises of members from all the above and working first hand with civil servants from the Treasury and Welsh Government is a unique experience and gives a real insight into how government works and what is important to them.

Local Partnerships delivers value and efficiency for the public purse. As a key interface between local and central government, we provide expert advice and practical resources alongside project and programme delivery support, enabling public services to thrive.

Whether supporting and accelerating the delivery of major infrastructure, tackling climate challenges through waste efficiency and renewable energy propositions through to wider place-making initiatives, we help transform services across the public sector ecosystem.

We seek to share our intellectual capital freely for the benefit of the whole public sector. We issue regular guidance and dissemination of best practice. Examples include the Greenhouse Gas Accounting Tool, Local Authority Company Review Guidance and the Climate Adaptation Toolkit, all freely available to the public sector on our website www.localpartnerships.org.uk.

We produce an annual impact report, located on the front page of our website and which details the successes we have helped our clients achieve. I recommend you take 10 mins and have a read – it will not be time wasted!

Keith Fraser took over the role of Chair from Sir David Wootton JP in a transition during the summer of 2022. Keith chaired the panel for the appointment of the new Chief Executive, Adele Gritten, who replaced Sean Hanson (CE). Corporate Director Howel Jones held the position of Interim CE in the few months after Sean's departure and before Adele started.

Adele joined Local Partnerships on 1 November 2022. In the time that she has been in post I have been impressed with the breadth of her understanding of the public sector and the solutions she and the team bring to the challenges we face.

We have recently set some ambitious targets to grow the business in terms of the greater assistance we can offer to the sector, which will necessitate an increase in the number of staff employed or retained as associates.

We welcome the opportunity to talk to councillors and councils to see how we can help deliver your priorities. The calibre of staff carrying out this important work to support authorities across England and Wales is second to none and I have great pleasure in recommending Local Partnerships to you.

For further information please see www.local.partnerships.org.uk or for an informal discussion, do drop me an email or give me a call. I look forward to hearing from you.

Audit Committee

I was appointed to the Audit Committee at the end of August 2021.

This year it has met four times, October 2022, January, March and June 2023 (review of how the Committee works). All meetings have been held via Zoom/Teams and attendance has been good. Mine is 100 per cent.

We have considered and agreed the Audit Plan for the LGA.

We approved the appointment of the external auditor.

We also held a special meeting in March of this year to consider the Audit Committee Governance review (part of the LGA own Peer review).

Colleagues may recall that, when I was first appointed, I challenged whether the previous practice of only two meetings a year was sufficient to fully discharge our proper responsibilities.

As a result, it was agreed that performance and financial reports would now be shared with the committee every quarter.

The Audit Governance Review recommended more meetings and regular reports on several key issues. It is nice that they agreed with me.

Following the LGA Peer Review it has been suggested and agreed that Audit will now meet more often and take on its role more comprehensively.

It will be interesting to see if what was discussed becomes a reality – no point in speculating until others in another place take a view. I have had no feedback to date on these issues from the Boards that make the decisions.

I reported last year that no induction whatsoever was arranged for new members of the Audit Committee. We are learning as we go, although the expectation had been of something better from the LGA. This issue still needs to be addressed, and we will see what happens if new members are appointed to the committee later this year.

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LEAD MEMBER REPORT

LGA Commercial Advisory Board

Councillor David Neighbour



The Commercial Advisory Board is effectively a working group of the LGA Board. It's remit is to monitor and evaluate the LGA's commercial activity and to recommend appropriate action on its commercial undertakings. The role includes being a Director of LGACS (Local Government Association Commercial Services). The Board meets four times a year.

Our work this year has included the letting of Layden House, Farringdon to JA Kemp as well as the final upgrade to electricity supply to enable the letting of the two ground floor retail units. LGA's other property is 18 Smith Square, where we continue to rent out two floors for commercial rent as well as renting desk space for other public sector partners, including District Councils Network, NHS Federation, National Association of Local Councils and soon the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners.

The Board routinely receives updates on existing and planned commercial activity throughout the organisation. This has led to an Income Generation Strategy Review which builds on the success of the Commercial Ideas Lab.

The Board also receives updates on activity with the LGA's joint ventures such as GEOPLACE (with Ordnance Survey), UK Municipal Bonds Agency (with 56 Councils) and Local Partnerships (with HM Treasury & Welsh Government).

The activities we oversee allow the LGA to both control the price of member council subscriptions and to provide revenue streams to support future core work throughout the organisation.

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The LGA Liberal Democrat Group Office

The Liberal Democrat Group office provides direct support and advice to Liberal Democrat council groups and councillors whilst also acting as the day-to-day voice of the Liberal Democrats within the LGA.

We currently have three full-time members of staff. **Terry Stacy**, the Head of Office, **Rob Banks**, Political Advisor, and **Ryan Priest**, Political Assistant. Rob and Terry both have experience as Liberal Democrat Councillors and Ryan has stood as a candidate at local and Parliamentary level.

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

In addition to supporting the LGA Liberal Democrat Group we are also the first port of call for Liberal Democrat councillors in relation to a variety of policy, governance or legal issues. We do weekly joint emails with ALDC to all councillors and ALDC members on a range of issues, news from the Liberal Democrats, local government news, good practice from council groups and councillors, highlight lobbying successes and details of events for councillors and campaigners.

We also use Twitter; follow us on **@libdemlocalgov**



Terry Stacy MBE JP

terry.stacy@local.gov.uk

Head of the Group Office

Terry is responsible for the operation of the LGA Liberal Democrat Group. He also provides specific support on housing, welfare local government finance, Cities and Urban regeneration and fire.

020 7664 3295



Rob Banks

rob.banks@local.gov.uk

Political Adviser

Rob provides support for: Environment; Economy and Transport; Community Wellbeing including Adult Social Care; People and Places; and Safer Communities and Rob supports the regular council leader calls.

020 7664 3204



Ryan Priest

ryan.priest@local.gov.uk

Political Assistant

Ryan provides support for Children and Young People and supports the regular Opposition Leader calls, in addition to Local Government Improvement and peer support work.

020 7664 323

Liberal Democrats retained control on Bath and NE Somerset (Council credit: Clive Dellard), Watford and Hinckley and Bosworth and retained all Lib Dem seats on Sheffield City





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