

first

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the magazine for local government

Interview:

“It has been a struggle to value care and yet **it’s at the heart of a decent society**”

Heléna Herklots CBE, Chief Executive, Carers UK

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Local Government Association



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Fair funding
Consultation on councils' relative needs



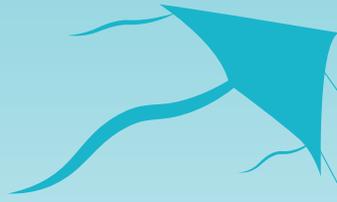
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Homelessness
New duties to keep people housed



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Parental conflict
Improving support for children and families



LGA HOUSING ADVISERS PROGRAMME

REGIONAL EVENTS



The Housing Advisers Programme has assisted councils with expert advice to support building homes, improve the planning function and tackle homelessness.

London – Wednesday 6 June
Birmingham – Tuesday 12 June
Manchester – Tuesday 19 June

These three events will focus on the work undertaken through the programme to tackle homelessness and improve planning. The events will feature presentations and discussions from some of the projects, as well as round table discussions with experts and participating local authorities.

To book your place visit www.local.gov.uk/events



Future view



The LGA has submitted its response to the Government's fair funding review consultation on the relative needs and resources of councils, and you can find out more about this on p10.

Elsewhere in this month's **first**, we take a look at the apprenticeship levy following another successful National Apprenticeship Week last month, which I know many of you will have supported with local events and activities (p12).

Our interview this month is with Heléna Herklots CBE, Chief Executive of Carers UK. She talks about how this summer's Green Paper on adult social care should also link to the Government's industrial strategy (p18).

Our lead comment is from Ben Lewing, from the Early Intervention Foundation, who looks at research suggesting that if we can reduce conflict between parents, all the other family and child support services we provide will work more effectively (p23).

Finally, we would be really grateful if you could complete our latest readership survey on **first**, so that we can make sure the magazine is meeting your needs (contact karen.thornton@local.gov.uk if you haven't received an email about this). Many thanks if you have already done so. **Lord Porter** is Chairman of the LGA

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“Social care is a huge economic sector. It should be seen as part of the infrastructure of a good economy, in the same way that transport is”



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Social care reforms warning

The Government needs to “make a down-payment” on its social care Green Paper by providing more money to help keep the system afloat, the LGA has warned.

Responding to an announcement on the principles that will underpin the Green Paper, LGA Chairman Lord Porter highlighted the immediate funding pressures on adult social care, which are set to exceed £2 billion by 2020.

Additional resources now would enable the care system to survive “until such time as the Green Paper brings in new resources”, he said.

Health and Social Care Secretary Jeremy Hunt has outlined seven ‘pillars’ that will frame the reforms, which he said will “jump-start” the debate on the future of social care funding.

The principles of reform include: quality and safety; whole-person integrated health and social care; a valued workforce; better practical support for families and carers; a sustainable funding model; and greater security for everyone with care needs.

Mr Hunt also announced a consultation to extend rights to integrated personal budgets for those with the greatest ongoing social care needs. In new, two-year

pilots in Gloucestershire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire, everyone receiving adult social care will be given a joint health and social care assessment and care plan.

Lord Porter, LGA Chairman, said: “We are pleased to see the Government’s latest detail on how it intends to make adult social care fit for the future, which is one of our most pressing public priorities.

“The seven pillars of the Green Paper reflect what we have long called for. However, government should resist the temptation for major system reform.

“Councils know what good looks like and, in the Care Act 2014, the sector has legislation that enjoys widespread support and sets out a vision we all aspire to – particularly the emphasis on prevention to help reduce or delay people developing care and support needs. What is missing is the funding to turn that vision into reality.

“While integration is an essential agenda that local government is committed to, in order to achieve better health and wellbeing outcomes for people, appropriate funding must be the overriding priority for the Green Paper and we hope its broad scope will not detract from this focus.”

news in brief

Falls rising

The LGA is calling for more funding for cost-effective prevention work, to help counter the rising number of older people admitted to hospital after falling over. The number of hospital admissions caused by people aged over 65 falling is set to rise to nearly 1,000 a day by the end of the decade, according to figures obtained by the LGA. In England in 2016/17, there were 316,669 such admissions – a 9 per cent increase over four years. Based on this trend, the numbers would rise to around 350,000 by 2020/21, or 950 cases a day. Cllr Izzi Seccombe, Chairman of the LGA’s Community Wellbeing Board, said: “The fact these shocking figures are set to soar even higher in the next few years will heap further strain on local services.”

Choosing care

Choosing adult social care is one of the most stressful life decisions, according to a survey by the Care Quality Commission. Cllr Linda Thomas, Vice-Chair of the Community Wellbeing Board, said: “Thousands of older and disabled people deserve to be given a decent choice of care homes providing quality care, but the sad reality is that the underfunding of adult social care is threatening the quality of care on offer and its availability.”

Emergency admissions

Emergency hospital admissions cost the NHS £13.7 billion in 2015/16 and pose a serious challenge to both the service and NHS finances, according to a National Audit Office report. Cllr Linda Thomas, Vice-Chair of the LGA’s Community Wellbeing Board, said: “Councils are working closely with the NHS to avoid unnecessary admissions to hospital through better self-management of conditions, better community support and better advice and information. Social care needs to be put on an equal footing with the NHS and government needs to address immediate pressures as part of the funding gap facing social care, set to exceed £2 billion by 2020.”



Care minister Caroline Dinenage MP (pictured) addressed a recent meeting of the LGA’s Councillors’ Forum. She told members that social care reforms expected as part of a Green Paper this summer were “not just about funding”, and that improvements were needed to address the “patchy” quality of care in some areas.

Care advisers 'underfunded'

Councils have warned that a potentially life-changing initiative for children leaving care only has enough funding to support one in five young people.

From 1 April, councils have a new duty to provide eligible care leavers aged 21 to 25 with a personal adviser. A personal adviser acts as a focal point for the care leaver, ensuring that they receive the practical and emotional support they need to make a successful transition to adulthood. Those under 21 already get this support.

The Government has allocated around £12 million for councils to provide advisers, enough for around 4,700 young people out of 23,000. But the LGA has warned that at least double this amount could be needed.

In addition, no extra funding has been given to councils to offer any of the follow-up support that a young person leaving care might need. This could range from short-term financial help with travel, food or bills, to more significant requests for accommodation to prevent someone becoming homeless.

Instead, the shortfall will have to be met by councils, exacerbating pressures on children's services, which already face a funding gap of around £2 billion by 2020.

The LGA responded, saying: "Personal advisers can play a major role in supporting care leavers as they move towards independence and we were fully supportive of the decision to extend this to all care leavers up the age of 25.



"However, we are disappointed that the Government will only provide funding for 20 per cent of eligible care leavers. While not every care leaver will need the support, we expect the number to be much higher than the Government has anticipated.

"This is further compounded by the fact that councils will receive no extra money to give any of the essential follow-up support a young person might need. It is essential that this is funded properly by government if we are to help improve young people's lives and give them the best start in adulthood."

Improving children's services

The LGA has successfully bid for £2 million to improve leadership in children's social care services.

The funding was announced by Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi MP, who also pledged £15 million to improve outcomes for vulnerable children by expanding Partners in Practice, a peer support programme between local authorities.

The LGA will use the £2 million improvement funding to create a package of support to ensure lead council members have the skills they need to scrutinise performance and drive improvement in children's services.

The LGA said: "We are pleased that the minister has backed our call for children's improvement funding. This will help to deliver an enhanced programme of sector-led support to councils, offering everything from regular 'health checks' to training for lead members and senior officers. The achievements of councils through the sector-led improvement approach demonstrate its success and shows what councils can achieve by working together and supporting one another."

Mr Zahawi said: "I am pleased to support the LGA to drive good leadership, which is crucial if we want to support and encourage frontline staff to deliver excellent care for children and young people."

news in brief

Pupil places

The number of schools at, or over, capacity increased in 2017, according to the latest government figures. The number of state-funded primary schools that were full or over-full went up from 3,781 in 2016 to 3,826 last year. For state-funded secondaries, the numbers were up from 487 to 548. The LGA responded: "Councils have an excellent track record of fulfilling their statutory duty to ensure every child has a school place. However, they remain under extreme pressure to accommodate rapidly rising numbers of pupils looking for a place. Councils should be given back the powers to open new maintained schools, and existing academy schools should expand where required."

School deficits

The proportion of council-maintained secondary schools in deficit in England has almost trebled in the last four years, to more than a quarter (26.1 per cent), according to a report from the Education Policy Institute. The number of primary schools in deficit is up 7.1 per cent. The LGA has called for more funding, citing pressures arising from cuts to local authority budgets, wage increases, and the apprenticeship levy. "The introduction of the national funding formula for schools and reforms to high-needs funding have exacerbated things further, by making it more difficult for councils to 'top up' high-needs funding in response to rising demand."

Youth offending

Cuts to youth-offending budgets are putting crime reduction work at risk, the LGA has warned. Years of success in tackling youth crime will be threatened unless government funding – down from £145 million to £72 million over the past eight years – is maintained. As **first** went to press, councils had still not received their youth justice grant allocations for 2018/19, making planning services difficult. The LGA said: "Government must commit to the futures of our young people by maintaining funding for the vital work that can put young people on the right track and help to transform lives."

news in brief

Roads wrecked

One in five local roads in England and Wales is in poor condition, with more than 24,400 miles of road identified as needing essential maintenance in the next year, according to the Asphalt Industry Alliance's annual report. Councils face a £556 million gap between the funding they received in 2017/18 and what is needed to keep roads in reasonable order. Cllr Martin Tett, LGA Transport Spokesman, said: "Only long-term and consistent investment in local road maintenance can allow councils to embark on the widespread improvement of our roads that is desperately needed."

Air quality

MPs on four Commons select committees have called for a new Clean Air Act, and a clean air fund financed by the motor industry. A report from the Environment, Health, Transport, and Environmental Audit Committees demands an end to the UK's "poisonous air", plus a faster phase-out of petrol and diesel cars – currently set for 2040. Cllr Martin Tett, LGA Environment Spokesman, said: "The 2040 target is too far away to tackle a public health problem that is shortening lives now. The Government cannot overlook the immediate measures that could make drastic improvements to public health in areas where air quality problems are at their most severe."

Bus journeys



The number of people using buses in England each year has fallen to its lowest level in a decade – down to 4.38 billion passenger journeys in 2016/17. The LGA said fewer bus journeys means increased congestion, poorer air quality, and loss of support for those who rely on the bus network. Cllr Martin Tett, the LGA's Transport Spokesman, said: "It is nearly impossible for councils to keep subsidising free travel while having to find billions of pounds worth of savings and protect other vital services, such as caring for the elderly, filling potholes and collecting bins."



Barn conversions 'place pressure on rural services'

A potential surge in barn conversion homes could heap more pressure on rural schools and roads in England, the LGA has warned.

Landowners can convert agricultural buildings into three new homes without the need for planning permission. But changes coming into force on 6 April will soon allow conversions of individual agricultural buildings into five new homes, without permission or any contribution towards local services, infrastructure and affordable housing.

There has already been a 46 per cent jump in residential conversions of agricultural buildings in England in recent years. Last year, there were almost 19,000 new homes converted from old offices, barns, and storage facilities without local scrutiny.

The LGA estimates this equals a loss of almost 8,200 affordable homes over the last two years and zero investment in local services and infrastructure to support new households.

Cllr Martin Tett, the LGA's Housing Spokesman, said: "Councils want to see more affordable homes built quickly and

the conversion of offices, barns and storage facilities into residential flats is one way to deliver much-needed homes.

"However, it is vital that councils and local communities have a voice in the planning process. At present, permitted development rules allow developers to bypass local influence and convert existing buildings to flats, and to do so without providing affordable housing and local services and infrastructure such as roads and schools.

"We have seen an enormous jump in the number of offices being converted into flats in our urban areas, accounting for one in 10 new homes last year and more than 30 per cent of new homes in our cities and towns.

"Relaxations to 'agri to resi' permitted developments risk sparking significant increases in the number of new homes escaping planning scrutiny in rural areas, as developers are able to further bypass local communities and avoid contributing towards crucially needed local infrastructure and affordable housing."

UK law-making role for councils

The Government has agreed that local government will have consultative rights on new legislation affecting councils after the UK leaves the EU.

As the EU Withdrawal Bill continued in the Lords, the Government said it will give local government a clear assurance through a written ministerial statement about "how it can expect to be consulted" on matters that it would have been consulted on through the EU Committee of the Regions (CoR). This was a response to an amendment moved by LGA Vice-President Lord Shipleigh.

Local government currently has a formal advisory role in the EU law and policy-making process through its membership of the CoR, which has helped ensure EU laws are improved by the experience of those at the frontline of delivery.

The LGA and the local government associations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have been in discussion with the UK Government about how this advisory role

might be replicated in UK law, after we leave the EU.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's Brexit Task and Finish Group, said: "Brexit should not simply mean a transfer of powers from Brussels to Westminster, Holyrood, Stormont and Cardiff Bay. It must lead to new legislative freedoms and flexibilities for councils so that residents and businesses benefit.

"We are pleased that the Government has offered assurances that they will replicate the consultative rights that local government currently has at European level following the UK's exit from the EU. We look forward to meeting with the Government very soon to iron out the details.

"Replicating the advisory role of local government in the UK post-exit, without creating new bureaucracies, will help continue our role in good law-making and ensure no deficiency in local government powers, bringing decisions closer to the communities they affect."

New measures proposed on domestic abuse

The Government has launched a consultation to seek views on measures to be included in its forthcoming draft Domestic Abuse Bill.

Measures include new domestic abuse protection orders to better shield victims against further abuse by enabling courts to impose a range of conditions on abusers.

The Government has also proposed a new statutory aggravating factor in sentencing for domestic abuse, similar to those already in law for hate crimes; to toughen sentences when abuse involves or affects a child; and the creation of a domestic abuse commissioner to hold government to account. Economic abuse will be recognised for the first time as a type of domestic abuse, covering controlling circumstances in which victims have finances withheld, are denied access to employment or transport, or are forced to take out loans and enter into other financial contracts.

An £8 million fund will be allocated to support children who witness domestic abuse, and help with their recovery through locally commissioned projects – something the LGA

has previously called for (see **first** 621).

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said the £8 million fund was "positive" but warned more needed to be done.

"Councils want to prevent domestic abuse from happening, rather than just tackling the impact of it," he said.

"Reducing domestic abuse over the longer term means looking at what young people are taught about relationships. This includes what children and young people are watching online, and the impact this is having on their views about appropriate behaviour in a relationship.

"Councils know the wider cost to their communities of domestic abuse. That is why we have consistently called on the Government to fully resource children's services departments – currently likely to operate at a £2 billion shortfall by 2020 – so that councils can include early intervention measures as part of a comprehensive package of reform to tackle this issue, and to ensure councils are fully funded to prevent and tackle domestic abuse."

Councils to pilot integration plans

Five councils – Bradford, Blackburn with Darwen, Peterborough, Walsall and Waltham Forest in London – are to adopt new integration plans to deal with segregation issues.

The move is part of the Government's Integrated Communities Strategy, published following Dame Louise Casey's independent review into opportunity and integration, which will see £50 million invested in schemes to improve community relations over the next two years.

The strategy sets out measures to boost English language skills, while Jobcentre Plus will trial new approaches to support people from some of the most isolated communities into work through personalised skills training to address their individual needs.

New proposals will also look to ensure young people have the opportunity to mix and form lasting relationships with those from different backgrounds, promote British values across the curriculum, and increase take-up of the National Citizen Service.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "Work to support the development of cohesion sits at the heart of what councils do every day and councils, who are closest to the residents they serve, are best placed to



develop approaches for their local area.

"If we are to truly help create cohesive communities, local government needs to have the powers and resources to be able to do so. Good quality housing, vibrant local economies and excellent local education are all vital ingredients of cohesion, but are areas in which councils' powers have been reduced over the years."

news in brief

Trading standards

A 50 per cent cut in trading standards' budgets over the last seven years – rising to more than 60 per cent in some areas – is leaving millions of older people at greater risk of becoming victims of fraud, according to Age UK. The charity says more than two-fifths of older people – almost five million over-65s – believe they have been targeted by scammers. The LGA said: "It is vital that government ensures trading standards services are properly resourced, and stops giving them additional duties on top of their core role of protecting residents and stopping rogue traders."

Reporting abuse

The Government has reversed plans to place a legal duty on those working with children to report any concern about child abuse and neglect. The Department for Education said nearly 70 per cent of responses to its consultation felt mandatory reporting could have an adverse impact on the child protection system. An LGA spokesperson said: "We do not believe mandatory reporting would have addressed the current challenges in protecting children in the UK. Evidence shows referrals to the police and children's social care are already higher than in comparable jurisdictions in other countries with mandatory reporting systems, and rates continue to increase significantly year-on-year."

first survey prize

Don't miss your chance to win a free place at an LGA event of your choice by completing the **first** readership survey. Emails have been sent to all councillor subscribers to the magazine, and the survey should only take about 15 minutes to complete. Your responses will help us develop the magazine to best meet your needs. If you haven't received an email or are having problems accessing the survey from the link provided, please email karen.thornton@local.gov.uk or rebekah.wilson@local.gov.uk. The prize draw excludes accommodation costs.

Business rates

Further business rates retention could lead to greater inequality between councils without promoting growth, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has warned. It found local authorities that would have seen the biggest increase in retained business rate revenues were often not those that experienced the biggest growth in spending needs. Cllr Claire Kober, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "A fairer system of distributing funding between councils is urgently needed, and this distribution mechanism, along with the way the new system of business rates retention is set up, should take into account issues such as those identified in the IFS report. No council should see its funding reduce as a result of this new system."

Betting terminals

The Gambling Commission has recommended that the maximum stake for fixed odds betting terminals (FOBTs) should be cut from £100 to £30 or less. Its report is expected to inform the Government in its review into gambling machines, with a decision on stakes and other measures expected shortly. Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said maximum FOBT stakes are "significantly out of line with other high street gambling machines". The LGA is urging the Government to implement the maximum possible reduction, to £2, recommended by the Commission.

Children in crisis

Too many children and young people find themselves at 'crisis point' before accessing mental health services because health care, education and other public services are not working together, the Care Quality Commission has warned. It has called for Health and Social Care Secretary Jeremy Hunt to ensure greater collaboration across government departments. An LGA spokesperson said: "Action to tackle the crisis in children and young people's mental health is long overdue and this report reinforces the urgent need to support children and families in desperate need of help." The LGA is calling for school-based counselling for children and young people, see www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures



'Fake' council news alert

Scammers are imitating council emails, logos and letterheads to try to defraud local residents, the LGA has warned.

It has outlined new guidance to help residents sort legitimate information from councils from 'fake news', which can be inaccurate and misleading.

Councils are concerned about how misinformation is affecting their day-to-day work, and have warned residents to be on their guard for unexpected communications purporting to be from local authorities that are, in fact, from scammers.

One northern council had issues with fake emails being sent from addresses using the council's domain name, claiming that a PayPal transaction had been processed, but that were actually part of a phishing scam.

Another had to deal with fake parking notices being put up, featuring the council's logo and letterhead, advising residents they would face a £120 parking charge or have

their vehicle removed by "a toe truck" [sic].

The LGA has set out a three-stage fact-check to help people determine whether they are seeing genuine information online or fake news or a scam (see www.local.gov.uk/community-safety).

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "The ability to supply accurate information to residents is crucial to councils. Fake news and misinformation can have serious consequences.

"The best way to tackle misinformation is for residents to be constantly vigilant, and ask the key questions of any information they see online – who is supplying this information, how are they doing it, and what are they saying? If those questions trigger any red flags or set off alarms, it's worth cross-referencing information with other council communication channels, such as the council website, social media, or calling the council directly."

Growth up – but no new funding

If public finances continue to improve, there could be more money for public services in the autumn, the Chancellor has indicated. In response, the LGA has reiterated its call for government to address the funding gaps facing councils.

As expected, there were no new tax and spending announcements in last month's Spring Statement. Instead, Chancellor Philip Hammond delivered an update on the overall health of the economy and Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts, which show the economy is continuing to grow, with borrowing and debt down. He announced that "the overall path for public spending for 2020 and beyond" will be set at the Autumn Budget in November, and that a spending review will take place in 2019 to distribute public funding, including for local government.

LGA Chairman Lord Porter said the

Chancellor's forecasts of a growing economy were "good for residents and businesses". He added: "Councils and their staff have strained every sinew to play a vital role in supporting local economies and communities through a difficult few years. If public finances improve as a result, it is vital that the Government addresses the growing funding gaps. This is the only way to protect our vital local services over the next few years, but also makes perfect economic sense for the Government.

"Investing in local government will boost growth, reduce demand for services and save money for the taxpayer and other parts of the public sector. Councils in England face an overall funding gap that will exceed £5 billion by 2020. Only with the right funding and powers can councils continue to make a difference to people's lives." ● See p10

letters

Children's views matter

Last month, year 5 and year 6 pupils from 16 Nottingham schools took part in 'Primary Parliament' at Nottingham's Council House to discuss how cities can be designed in a way that makes them safer and more enjoyable places to live.

Primary Parliament takes place six times a year and is an initiative of Nottingham City Council's Children's Partnership Board, which oversees children and young people's services.

Each session has a different theme, and encourages Nottingham children to feed into discussions on issues that affect their schools, community and the city as a whole.

Primary Parliament enables children to develop their confidence in teamwork and leadership. It is an excellent opportunity for them to gain curriculum-enhancing experiences outside of school and meet children from other schools.

We want Nottingham to be known as a first-class destination for science, technology and innovation, and for our children to be fully equipped for the knowledge economy jobs that are increasingly available in the city.

Primary Parliament is one of the ways we are inspiring children at a young age to develop their passion for learning and have their voice heard.

The children's ideas are taken back to the City Council and schools to be discussed further.

We are continuously impressed with our primary children's ability to speak confidently in the council chamber – to question, challenge and respond. These are all important life skills, especially in the workplace. We are very proud of Nottingham children and young people.

Cllr David Mellen (Lab), Portfolio Holder for Early Years and Early Intervention, and **Cllr Sam Webster (Lab)**, Portfolio Holder for Business, Education and Skills, Nottingham City Council

Planning together

Neighbouring authorities are increasingly being encouraged to work together to provide the homes, jobs and infrastructure where people want to live.

My authority, Hertsmere Borough Council, along with four others – Dacorum, St Albans, Three Rivers and Watford – are on course to start work together on a new joint strategic plan (JSP) for growth in South West Hertfordshire, if the proposal gets approval from all parties.

The JSP will aim to ensure that housing growth, jobs and key infrastructure on large development sites, such as transport, schools, health, and utilities like water and sewerage, are properly co-ordinated and delivered. It will deal with issues that go beyond individual council boundaries – for example, major transport and road improvements – and help ensure that these infrastructure needs are aligned to the development of new homes and employment areas.

The need for this type of joint working is reflected in changes to national planning policy, proposed by the Government in March, and the work already has the support of Hertfordshire County Council, which provides key services and infrastructure.

For Hertsmere, the benefits of working with our neighbours are significant. It will bring increased funding opportunities; put us in a better negotiating position with the Government and

sound bites

Cllr Warren Whyte (Con, Buckinghamshire)

"Very honoured to have had a chance to say hello to our PM @theresa_may today after her speech at the @Conservative spring conference. Too slow to get a selfie!"

www.twitter.com/CllrWarrenWhyte

Cllr Emma Webster (Con, West Berkshire)

"16 years ago I first stood for local council after someone asked if I was interested. 15 years ago I was elected for the first time #IWD2018 #Askhertostand #community #listening."

www.twitter.com/CllrEmmaWBC

Cllr Kyle Robinson (Lab, Staffordshire)

"Cllr Sylvia Dymond and I are honoured to have supported our local Kidsgrove Scouts with their fashion show this week. These bright young people are raising money to attend a jamboree to America for the experience of a lifetime. They will act as young ambassadors for Kidsgrove."

www.twitter.com/Kyle_Robinson22

Cllr Amanda Chadderton (Lab, Oldham)

"Really proud to open the first Oldham Changing Horizons event. We welcome NW Civil Service, local employers and over 300 young people from every mainstream secondary school in Oldham. #raisingaspirations"

www.twitter.com/CllrAmandaOL2

Cllr Jude Deakin (Lib Dem, Chelmsford)

"Spent the morning on a task and finish group looking at #electoral registration at #Chelmsford"

www.twitter.com/judedeakin

Cllr Sarah Bevan (Ind, Bath and North East Somerset)

"Arranging for 'Keep Clear' markings to be painted in Eckweek Road – hopefully they'll help residents accessing/exiting their driveways #lovepeasedown"

www.twitter.com/SarahFBevan

other authorities; and mean that we can manage the delivery of infrastructure more effectively when strategic development opportunities come forward.

It will also ensure that our new local plan – which is being prepared and will identify locations for growth – reflects the strategic needs of the area.

By working together, we are confident we will be in a stronger position to deliver sustainable growth and access funding opportunities to make the improvements to local transport links, health services and educational facilities that local people want to see.

Cllr Dr Harvey Cohen (Con), Portfolio Holder for Planning and Localism, Hertsmere Borough Council



What do you think? Please submit letters for publication by emailing first@local.gov.uk. Letters may be edited and published online

features

Measuring councils' relative needs

Additional resources will be needed if proposed changes to how councils are funded are to succeed, the LGA has warned

The current system for distributing funding to local authorities is no longer fit for purpose, the LGA has said in its response to a consultation on fair funding. Highlighting councils' "ever-dwindling resources", the LGA has warned that the Government's review of local government finance will not lead to a successful and sustainable outcome unless proposed reforms are "introduced alongside additional resources".

The Government's latest consultation, on councils' relative needs and resources, agrees that the current system for allocating council funding needs to change, to be fit for the future.

In his foreword to 'Fair funding review: a review of relative needs and resources', Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary Sajid Javid says: "I want local government funding to be decided in a fair, robust and evidence-based way, one that reflects the most up-to-date picture of councils' relative needs and resources."

The consultation suggests that the current, complicated system of measuring councils' relative needs should be replaced with an assessment based on a relatively

"There is a consensus among local authorities that we should build a simpler, more transparent system of assessing relative needs and resources"

small number of common cost drivers – such as population, deprivation, sparsity and area cost. These would provide a simple 'foundation' formula for measuring the relative needs of local authorities.

However, a more sophisticated approach to measuring relative needs may be required for some council services, leading to additional 'service-specific' formulae. The Government suggests these should cover: adult social care; children's services; highways maintenance and public transport; waste collection and disposal; and fire and rescue services.

The consultation closed last month (March) and, in its response, the LGA said it was positive that the Government was



listening to representations from all parts of local government.

"There is a consensus among local authorities that the outcome of the review should build a simpler, more transparent system of assessing relative needs and resources. Above all, it is important that the review delivers a fair outcome," says the LGA's response.

On simplification and the foundation formula, the LGA welcomes the attempt to reduce the number of cost drivers and formulae, noting that complexity should only be added where it is unavoidable and has a positive impact on fairness.

However, the right number of formulae and cost drivers must ultimately be driven by evidence, or the outcome will not be seen as 'fair', warns the LGA.

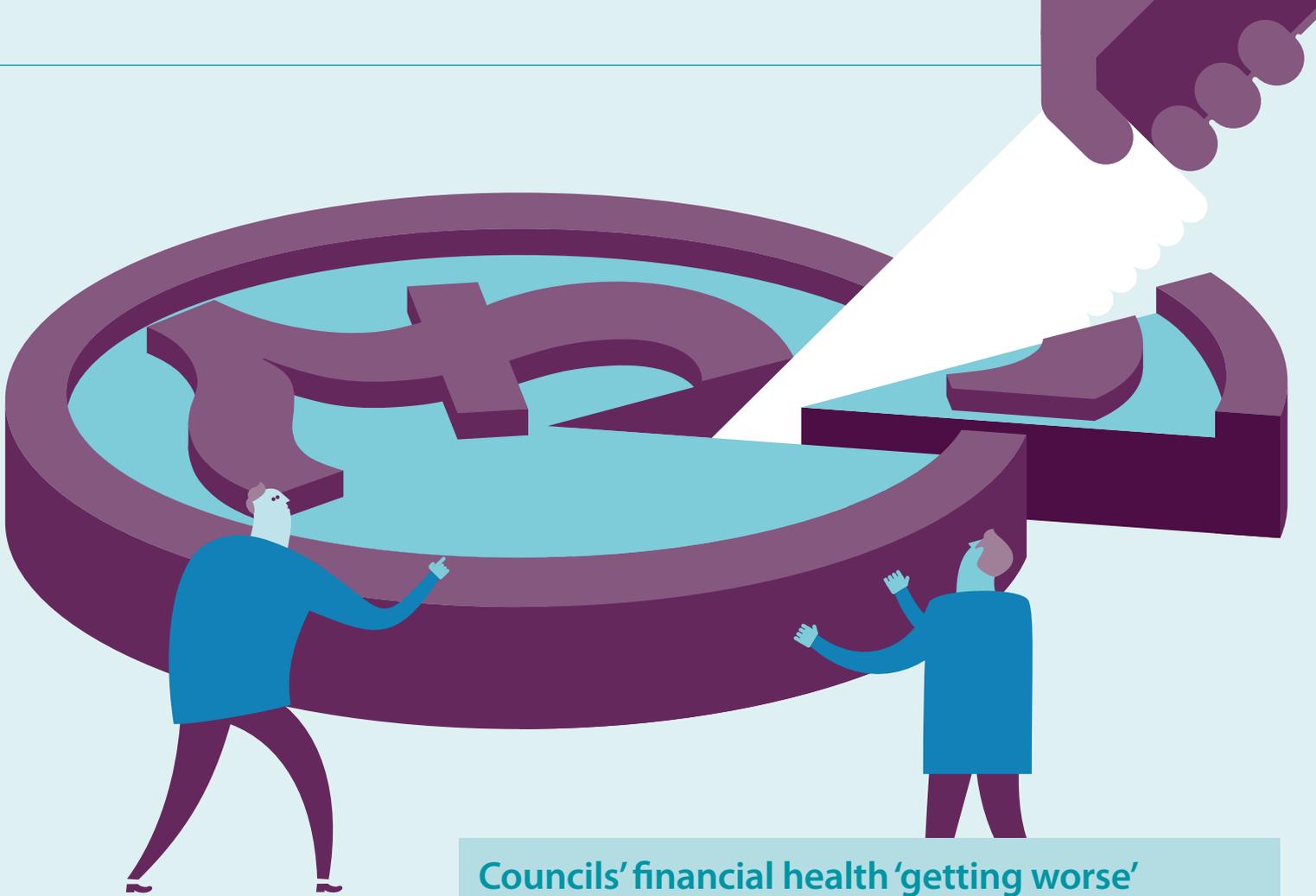
Local government is complex, with different types of authorities delivering different services in different local circumstances, meaning there will be an "inevitable level of complexity", and making a single formula "too crude to deliver an equitable result".

However, a 'foundation' formula should continue to be explored for services not subject to unique cost drivers, and where need to spend can be shown to be most closely correlated to factors used in the foundation formula.

In respect of the foundation cost drivers, the LGA asks the Government to consider if and how the costs of service delivery might differ in more densely populated areas. Large student and daytime populations are often cited as contributing to service delivery costs, and the evidence for these factors should be considered.

The LGA also suggests adding non-housing revenue account housing support to the list of service areas that might need 'service-specific' formulae, given that homelessness and temporary

i The LGA, with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government colleagues, ran six regional workshops around England for local authorities to discuss and directly feed into the consultation process. More than 200 delegates attended the events. 'Fair funding review: a review of relative needs and resources – technical consultation' can be viewed at www.gov.uk/government/consultations/fair-funding-review-a-review-of-relative-needs-and-resources. The LGA's response is available at www.local.gov.uk/finance



accommodation services represent a significant demand-led pressure for district and unitary authorities.

Public health is not listed as a 'service-specific' area, and the LGA warns that treating it as outside the review "could add an unnecessary degree of complexity". Effort needs to be put into finding suitable cost drivers for social care – for example, reflecting the likely lifetime costs for people with learning disabilities. The LGA's response also raises councils' concerns about the financial sustainability of schools.

Meanwhile, the LGA wants ministers to continue their work on local government finance "at pace". The current spending review period and the four-year settlement offer both expire from April 2020, while the Government also intends to implement greater business rates retention, improvements to the retention system and the results of the fair funding review at the same time.

"The financial uncertainty facing local authorities makes financial planning meaningless without some guidance from the Government on what could be expected," says the LGA's consultation response.

"Only with the right level of funding and powers can councils continue to make a difference to people's lives by providing dignified care for our elderly and disabled, boosting economic growth, tackling homelessness, creating jobs and supporting schools."

Councils' financial health 'getting worse'

One in 10 social care authorities will have exhausted their reserves in three years if they keep using them at current rates, according to the National Audit Office. In a report on the financial health of local authorities, the public spending watchdog warns local authorities are struggling to juggle high demand for services and rising costs against significant central government funding cuts of nearly 50 per cent since 2010/11.

Continued increases in demand for social care and tightening resources are pushing local government towards a narrow remit centred on social care, reflected in a 32.6 per cent reduction in spending on all other service areas.

Spending is down 52.8 per cent for planning and development, 45.6 per cent for housing services, 37.1 per cent for highways and transport, and 34.9 per cent for cultural and related services. Social care now accounts for 54.4 per cent of local authorities' total service spend – up from 45.3 per cent in 2010/11.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has made improvements in understanding the sector's financial position since the NAO's last report in 2014 but, because responsibility for services is spread across government departments, there is no single view of how funding cuts are having an impact on the whole of local authority services.

Sir Amyas Morse, Head of the National Audit Office (NAO), said: "Current funding for local authorities is characterised by one-off and short-term fixes, many of which come with centrally driven conditions. This restricts the capacity of local authorities and yet the weight of responsibility to respond to increased demand and maintain services remains very much on their shoulders.

"The Government risks sleepwalking into a centralised local authority financial system where the scope for local discretion is being slowly eroded."

The NAO says local authorities have done well to manage substantial funding reductions, but face a range of new demand and cost pressures while their statutory obligations have not been reduced.

It calls on the MHCLG to set out a long-term financial plan for the sector that includes sufficient funding to address specific service pressures and secure the sector's future financial sustainability.



You can read the NAO's report, 'Financial sustainability of local authorities 2018', at www.nao.org.uk/report/financial-sustainability-of-local-authorities-2018

Transforming skills

The apprenticeship system should be devolved to councils and changes made to the levy



Last month's National Apprenticeship Week was, as ever, a great opportunity to highlight the brilliant work being done across the country at every level of our economy – whether it was a small business taking on its first apprentice, a big company expanding its current apprenticeship system or councils and combined authorities working with public and private sector partners to boost the number of apprenticeships in the local economy.

This annual event does, however, require us all to look at what isn't working, or what could be improved.

There were 131,500 fewer apprenticeships started in the first seven months after the launch of the Government's apprenticeship levy in April 2017, compared with the previous year. The latest figures show there were 195,200 apprenticeship starts between April and November last year, compared with 326,700 starts in the corresponding seven months in 2016 – a 40 per cent drop.

This is an early warning that the levy must be improved if it is to deliver the right training at the right time, both for employers and for those wishing to pursue an apprenticeship.

Significant changes to the apprenticeship levy are needed if it is to achieve its potential. The complexity of the



Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE
is Chairman of the LGA's
People and Places Board

system, coupled with the fact that standards for a number of key apprenticeship subjects, such as teaching and social care, are not yet available, are important issues that need to be addressed to help increase the number of starts.

The Government has recently indicated that it will work with employers on how the levy can be spent more effectively to improve productivity across the country, which is encouraging. The LGA believes a locally coordinated approach to these reforms would make a massive difference and the Government should run pilots of this approach.

For the reforms to succeed, we are calling for:

- local areas to be allowed to pool levy contributions and have more flexibility on how, and how much, of the levy they can transfer
- greater flexibility on how the levy is used, including on pre-apprenticeship

training, so long as there is a final apprenticeship outcome

- all levy underspend to go back to the areas where it was raised, rather than the Treasury
- the apprenticeship system to be fully devolved, initially to combined authorities but eventually to all parts of the country
- non-levy apprenticeship funding to be devolved to local areas so it can be more effectively targeted to local businesses' training needs
- an extension to the two-year limit (from April 2017) within which the levy must be spent.

Regarding the latter point, councils have been prevented from spending levy funds on filling a number of key skills gaps, including teaching and social care, as the

“The Government has indicated it will work with employers on how the levy can be spent more effectively to improve productivity”



relevant standards are not ready – and will not be available until September 2018, giving councils too little time to spend their levy.

Together, these changes would free combined authorities and councils, employers, and colleges to work together with the Government to boost the number of quality local apprenticeships. As part of our Work Local proposals (see right, and www.local.gov.uk/work-local), we would also want to give young people and adults the careers advice they need to match local skills with local jobs, and help address the skills gaps and shortages local employers face up and down the country.

The LGA is calling on the Government to launch local pilots in an effort to target training better and help unleash the potential of the apprenticeship levy across local areas. We want ministers to give us the chance to show exactly what can be done if our Work Local proposals are implemented in full.

Combined authorities and councils fully support the ambitious target of creating three million apprenticeships by 2020 – but they could do far more if the Government allowed them to pool and plan local provision.

Devolving apprenticeship funding to the local areas in which they are used will allow combined authorities and councils, schools, colleges and employers to work together to help people get the skills they need to progress in work, and supply businesses with the right skills at the right time to help local economies grow.

All we need now is for the Government to give us the chance to show what local government can really do.



National Apprenticeship Week

Councils from across the country took part in last month's National Apprenticeship Week, running information events for potential recruits, promoting the benefits of apprenticeships to businesses, and showcasing their schemes and apprentices.

Durham County Council hosted its 10th apprentice pop-up information shop in the city's Millennium Place (pictured, above), offering one-to-one advice and information on apprentice posts across the county, with current council apprentices on hand to share their experiences.

Cllr Carl Marshall (Lab), Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, said: "An apprenticeship is a great way to get on-the-job experience while earning

money and there are many great success stories within our county."

Central Bedfordshire Council took to social media to promote the week, with council staff and the Central Bedfordshire Academy of Social Work and Early Intervention manning stalls and attending events to hand out advice and information.

Cllr Steven Dixon (Con), Executive Member for Families, Education and Children, said: "The council is a firm supporter of apprenticeships – as well as other means of helping people to find work like traineeships and work experience. And by making our apprentices feel valued and wanting to stay, that helps us to grow a motivated workforce."

An apprentice's view...



"I chose an apprenticeship because I knew I didn't want to stay on at school. I'd done some research and this seemed a great first step after leaving school. It's been a really good experience. I've learned lots of new skills. I'm working at a doctor's surgery that involves dealing with a lot of patients and using NHS admin systems. Doing the apprenticeship has given me real confidence and I'm hoping to stay on at the practice and get a full-time job."

Bash Hussain is on a Level 2 apprenticeship in business administration with Bradford Council's Skills for Work team.

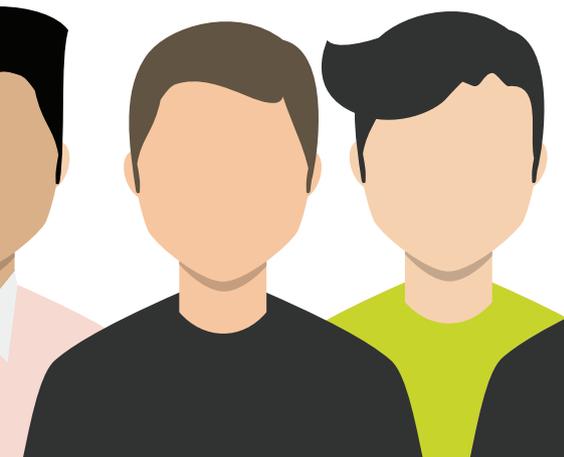
Work Local

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

Across a local area, take up of the Work Local vision could each year result in 8,500 more people in work and 6,000 increasing their skills. For the average combined authority, that would mean £280 million of benefits to the public purse alongside a £420 million boost to the economy. We're calling on the Government to:

- help close the skills gap by giving councils and combined authorities a central role in designing, commissioning and coordinating skills funding and careers advice
- ensure that apprenticeship provision offers the right training, at the right time, in the right place, with funding – particularly apprenticeship levy funding – that meets the needs of local areas
- work with councils and combined authorities to create good employment opportunities which residents can access and make progress in.

For more detail and to get involved, please visit www.local.gov.uk/work-local



Healthy hearts



Cllr Izzi Seccombe is Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board

Councils play a crucial role in helping prevent heart disease by inviting millions of people to have an NHS health check

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) – caused by the furring or stiffening of artery walls – is the number one cause of death globally, and can lead to heart failure, stroke and diabetes.

It is responsible for one in four premature deaths in the UK. With almost seven million people affected, it is also a leading cause of disability and death for our residents.

Between 50 and 80 per cent of cases could be prevented by getting people to change their behaviour, to reduce the risks from factors such as physical inactivity, obesity, hypertension, poor diet and smoking.

CVD is one of the conditions most

strongly associated with health inequalities, as these risk factors are greater among the poorest in our society. As a result, premature death rates from CVD in the most deprived 10 per cent of the population in England are almost twice as high as rates in the least deprived 10 per cent.

As well as affecting individuals, families and communities, CVD places a considerable strain on the NHS and wider society, accounting for an estimated £8.96 billion a year in NHS healthcare costs alone. Because of tighter budgets across the NHS and local government, it's imperative that investment is allocated to the most cost-effective prevention methods.

One of these is the world-leading NHS health check programme for the over-40s,

which checks for risk factors for CVD and other non-communicable diseases. Local authorities have done a tremendous job in inviting more than 12 million eligible people to have a check over the past five years – of which six million have taken up the offer – and I commend all the local health and care providers who deliver the programme so effectively.

However, an estimated 1.4 million people who are eligible to have a health check will not have been offered one by the end of this current five-year cycle. So it is important that we continue working to reduce the variation in the number of offers and uptake across the country, and prioritise the most vulnerable and high-risk groups that will benefit most from the programme.

There is robust evidence that tackling lifestyle and clinical risk factors is an effective method of preventing CVD. However, late detection is still a common problem, with millions of people living with undetected risk factors.

The NHS health check offers several crucial means of addressing this, by identifying leading risk factors across populations, helping individuals understand their personal risk profile, and giving the opportunity to detect risk factors early.

The start of the next five-year cycle of health checks means we will embark on another round of collaborative work to ensure the programme reaches its full potential. We must work together to develop the scheme into one that supports individuals and communities to cut the burden of CVD, while also aiming to reduce the financial costs to our health and care system and society as a whole.

If we are to continue to improve on the successes so far, strengthening the integrated approach between local authorities and the NHS is crucial.

“There is robust evidence that tackling lifestyle and clinical factors is an effective method of preventing CVD”



For more information, please visit www.gov.uk/government/publications/using-the-nhs-health-check-programme-to-prevent-cvd



Freedom to build

The planning system is not a barrier to house building, the LGA has reiterated in response to government consultations on planning reforms

The Prime Minister has launched a major overhaul of the National Planning Policy Framework – the first in six years – in a bid to build more homes, more quickly.

Measures include a new housing delivery test for local authorities, to help drive up the number of homes actually delivered in their area, rather than the number planned for. The Government has also indicated it will look to remove planning powers from councils that miss their goals, and give them to an independent inspector.

Councils will have more freedom to make the most of existing brownfield land to build homes that maximise density. A new standardised approach to assessing housing need will be introduced, with measures to make the system of developer contributions “simpler and more robust”. There will also be strengthened protections for the Green Belt.

Lord Porter, LGA Chairman, said the threat of stripping councils of their right to decide where homes are built is “unhelpful and misguided”.

“The truth is that councils are currently approving nine in 10 planning applications, which shows that the planning system

is working well and is not a barrier to building. Nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) of planning refusals are upheld on appeal, vindicating councils’ original decisions,” he added.

“It is essential that councils and their communities are empowered to ensure local development creates prosperous places, that new homes are good quality and affordable, and that they are supported by crucial services and infrastructure, such as roads and schools.

“No-one can live in a planning permission. Developers need to get on with building affordable homes with the needed infrastructure and councils

need greater powers to act where house building has stalled.

“History shows that the private sector has never built enough of the homes the country needs on its own. The Government must back the widespread calls, including from the Treasury Select Committee, for council borrowing and investment freedoms to spark a renaissance in house building by local government.”

Last year, councils granted nearly twice as many planning permissions as the number of new homes completed. Overall, the UK built 217,000 homes, a significant rise, but ministers want to increase that figure to 300,000 a year by 2025, to cope with Britain’s growing population.

The proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework come after repeated LGA calls for councils to be given the powers to ensure that approved developments become built-out houses, and that vital infrastructure and affordable housing are included in plans. The LGA has called for the scrapping of permitted development rights that allow developers to convert offices into homes without planning permission, which accounted for one in 10 new homes last year (see **first** 620).



The draft revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) incorporates policy proposals previously consulted on in the Housing White Paper and last year’s ‘Planning for the right homes in the right places’ consultation, as well as changes to planning policy implemented through Written Ministerial Statements since the NPPF was published in 2012.

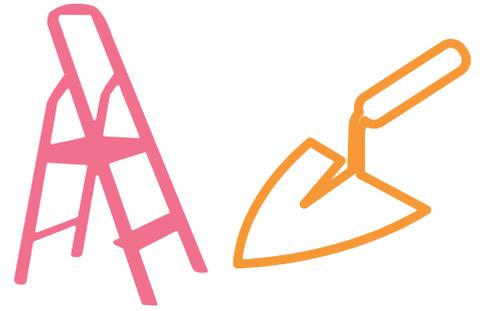
The current consultation seeks views on additional proposals to change planning policy and legislation announced in the Autumn Budget 2017. A separate consultation has also been published on reforms to the existing system of developer contributions.

The LGA will be engaging with councils to help shape our response to the consultation. If you would like to send us your views direct, please email jo.allchurch@local.gov.uk.

The Government’s ‘National Planning Policy Framework: consultation proposals’ can be viewed at www.gov.uk/government/consultations/draft-revised-national-planning-policy-framework. The consultation closes on 10 May

Help for the homeless

New duties on councils to help prevent homelessness come into effect this month



Cllr Martin Tett is Chairman of the LGA's Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board

Councils want to end homelessness by preventing it happening in the first place.

Last year, local government prevented 100,000 families from becoming homeless, helping them remain in their own home – an increase of 134 per cent since 2010.

Despite this effort, homelessness has

been increasing since 2010, which makes for a challenging background to the introduction this month of new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Right now, councils are housing more than 77,000 homeless families, including more than 120,000 children in temporary accommodation. On average, over the past three years, councils have been housing an additional 900 homeless children each month.

The drivers of homelessness are complex, but unaffordability of housing is now the greatest trigger. Since 2010, there has been a threefold increase in the number of households becoming homeless after the end of an assured shorthold tenancy.

Mirroring the experience of families

themselves, the increasing lack of affordable housing further limits the options for councils trying to find settled and temporary accommodation for those who need it.

As councils, we are ambitious for our communities, but the demand for temporary accommodation is distorting the capacity of councils to prevent homelessness and help all groups at risk.

This is the context for the new duties, which require councils to provide support – including a personalised housing plan – for all people that approach them for help 56 days in advance of becoming homeless.

These new duties present some real challenges for councils, but there are some opportunities too – for instance, to engage our partners in new collaborative efforts to prevent homelessness for all.

The LGA lobbied Parliament as the Act progressed, and fought for funding and a reasonable timetable for implementation. We have had some success: the Act is more workable than the initial Bill, but we continue to press for funding and support with implementation (see p29).

We are also supporting councils to innovate, share and improve. Around the country, councils are leading tremendous, transformative, and inspirational work that is changing lives, and we want to help spread that experience. For instance, our Housing Homeless Households project captures innovative lessons in providing temporary accommodation, and our Housing Advisers Programme is directly helping some councils prepare for the new duties (see **first** 620, www.local.gov.uk/housing-advisers-programme).

Looking ahead, we will continue this effort, and would like to hear from councils on the progress being made in implementing the new homeless duties and how the LGA can further help the sector.

But, ultimately, ending homelessness will rely on ending the drivers of homelessness.

The LGA will, therefore, continue to make the case for policy and funding changes that reduce the risks of homelessness, including adapting welfare reforms and allowing councils to build more homes.



“The drivers of homelessness are complex, but unaffordability of housing is now the greatest trigger”

Councils' new homelessness duties

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 requires English councils to provide everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness with access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status. It includes:

- a duty to assess all eligible applicants' cases and agree a personalised housing plan
- a prevention duty to help all applicants threatened with homelessness within 56 days
- a relief duty to help all applicants that become homeless to secure accommodation for at least six months.

i For more information and resources from the LGA, please visit www.local.gov.uk/topics/housing-and-planning



Rough sleeping

This winter's intense media coverage of rough sleeping will fade away as spring comes, but street homelessness and street-life issues – such as begging and drugs activity – will not.

Residents in towns and cities will continue to worry about the welfare of people they see on the street and the wellbeing of a society in which it is normal to walk past people huddled in doorways.

As councillors in Cambridge's city centre Market ward, we've heard it loud and clear from our residents – they want to understand what the problem is, what's being done about it and what more might be done.

We found ourselves ill-equipped to answer these questions so, last autumn, we decided to carry out an enquiry and have recently published our report (see www.goo.gl/Vj43Tu). We focused largely on the situation in Cambridge because that's our patch, but we hope our work will also be of wider interest.

We conducted the enquiry mainly through interviews – more than 30 of them – with organisations locally and in Oxford, Peterborough and London. These included accommodation providers and the whole range of support services, as well as police and council enforcement officers. We also spoke with rough sleepers and people with experience of a street-based lifestyle.

It soon dawned on us how complex this group of problems is. There are many reasons why people end up on the street – and, in some cases, stay there – but we learned



Cllr Nichola Harrison (Lib Dem) and Cllr Tim Bick (Lib Dem) represent Cambridge's Market ward on Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridge City Council respectively



that serious mental illness and drug misuse, often as a 'dual diagnosis', are increasing factors. This tends to produce more chaotic and anti-social behaviour on the street and the individuals concerned often have great difficulties in engaging with support services.

Homelessness is about much more than the need for housing, and Cambridge's service providers are trying to tackle the whole range of problems to enable people to turn their lives around. Basic welfare is on offer, but Cambridge's system is focused on progress. We describe it as 'a progression model comprising housing and recovery pathways, with a welfare safety net', with enforcement against anti-social behaviour if necessary, as part of a broader support effort. This seems the right approach to us.

We were surprised at the range and quality of services and initiatives on offer, and deeply impressed by the commitment and

collaboration we found among the service providers. It was also encouraging to find that the system is reasonably responsive to change.

After a doubling in rough-sleeper numbers in Cambridge in 2016, several new initiatives

are in place, aimed, for example, at supporting people with a dual diagnosis or whose anti-social behaviour might otherwise keep them on a downward spiral.

The report makes several recommendations to the councils and partner agencies – about the 'Housing First' concept, where a stable, independent home is given first to those with high needs, rather than 'last'; better integration between council and police enforcement activity; a review of supported housing provision; and a peer mentoring scheme.

We propose a Street Life Charter, based on clear principles, to foster a sense of common purpose in the city. And the report considers some ethical issues, such as whether it is productive to give money direct to beggars, and what place there is for personal choice in all of this. We hope first readers will find it an interesting read!

“There are many reasons why people land up on the street but serious mental illness and drug misuse are increasing factors”

interview

An economic benefit

Governments need to stop seeing social care as a burden and instead recognise it as a societal good – as well as a vital part of our economy, says **Heléna Herklots CBE, Chief Executive of charity Carers UK**





Looking
after

A lot of hopes are riding on the Government's promised Green Paper on social care, due out this summer.

Local government is looking for a solution to the long-term funding problems facing adult services – the LGA estimates the sector faces a £2.3 billion gap by 2020.

Heléna Herklots wants it to go further.

"Our vision as a charity is of a society that respects, values and supports carers, and essentially that's what we want to see recognised in the Green Paper," she says.

"Respect is about the Green Paper starting from an understanding of what carers are doing and will be doing in the future, recognising that most care in this country is provided by family and friends – and always has been.

"Valuing carers... is about making sure that the support is there for them when they need it. That support needs to be flexible to their needs and understand that they may have other demands on their time. We know there are variations in things like respite and care breaks, and the Green Paper seems to me an opportunity to address that.

"Fundamentally, there needs to be more money into social care."

Carers UK, which campaigns for and supports the UK's 9.5 million unpaid carers,

also wants to see the Green Paper link to the Government's industrial strategy.

"Sometimes I think all governments have thought of social care as just a drain on resources – expenditure with no benefit. Nothing could be further from the truth, not least because it's about the health and wellbeing of people in society," says Ms Herklots.

"But actually it's about the economy as well. Social care is a huge economic sector. It contributes billions of pounds a year, we have millions of people working in it, and it should be seen as part of the infrastructure of a good economy in the same way that transport is, for example."

She adds: "If someone is having to give up work to care because the social care support isn't there for their loved one when they're at work, there is a cost there – in loss of tax receipts from that person working, and a cost to benefits. The cost of people leaving work to care has been calculated at £1.3 billion a year. So, just on that example, we can see that there is an economic reason for better social care."

Ms Herklots acknowledges the "extraordinary" funding pressures on councils, with demand for adult social care rising and budgets declining. But official data show there has been a decrease in support for carers – at a time when Carers UK would expect to see more >

"Fundamentally, there needs to be more money into social care"



“We shouldn’t be tolerating a situation where we are expecting someone to care 24 hours a day and not get a break”



> carers being assessed and getting support – and this is having an impact on them and their families, she warns.

“By 2037, we expect there to be nine million carers. We have more carers who are having to care longer, and for more hours a week, and at the same time have more pressures on them because of the cuts that there already have been in services, compounded by pressures on the NHS and cuts to benefits,” she says.

“It’s a really challenging time for thousands and thousands of carers right now.”

She particularly highlights the need for breaks from care, as an issue raised by carers in the charity’s annual survey.

“We shouldn’t be tolerating a situation where we are expecting someone to care 24 hours a day and not get a break. That is doing long-term damage to their health and wellbeing. So there is an urgency about the action we need to see. I think many carers can feel what they do isn’t valued, particularly nationally, but locally to some degree as well.

“They have a right to an assessment of their needs and to the support required to meet those needs, whatever those are. There’s a dual problem. One is about access to services specifically for carers and whether those are there. And also, of course, if the services for the person they are caring for are under pressure or not available then more is expected of the carer.”

Carers UK is hoping for progress on some of these issues courtesy of a cross-government action plan for carers, covering the next two years, which it expects to see published after Easter and ahead of the Green Paper.

Ms Herklots says: “I think it’s potentially quite an important publication and may also be a useful framework for local councils’ work in terms of what they might want to focus on over that two-year period.

“We’re hoping to see first of all that it is truly cross-government, that it deals with and responds to some of the key challenges that carers are facing around financial security, around employment, access to social care, to respite, to breaks, recognition by the health service, and for younger carers recognition of the challenges that they face, issues around education and training.

“It’s recognising – and we’ve made this point very strongly – that we need action now. We are hoping to see something that will make a tangible difference to carers’ lives over that two-

year period, with some clear objectives and milestones and ways of measuring progress.”

The organisation is also gearing up for Carers Week in June. This year’s theme is about being healthy and staying connected – which “fits very well with local councils’ responsibilities”, says Ms Herklots.

The charity already works with some councils on support for carers, and is keen to get involved with others. It can offer digital resources, as well as other help and ideas – for example, it is working on a ‘carers’ passport’ with hospitals that could also be used in social care.

“Carers Week is a fantastic opportunity for councils to get behind carers and to help people understand more about caring, and identify the people who are caring, which can be a challenge,” says Ms Herklots.

“We’ve also developed the idea of carer-friendly communities – that’s thinking through what could be done in local communities to make things better. It could be the leisure centre recognising carers in terms of its provision, with discounts or flexibility about the times carers can use the centre.”

Councillors should be aware that typically one in nine of their local authority’s workforce will be carers, and might want to think about how they can support them. It can also make a big difference if councillors who are also carers can talk about their experiences, to raise awareness, she says.

“One of the things we sometimes talk about is normalising caring. We know if there are any champions in any business or in local authorities, it makes a massive difference. So I think if councillors can look at that, if they can have an item on their agendas about how are we supporting carers in our own workforce, what are we doing for carers in our local authority, who can help us, which are the organisations we can work with – they can do a lot, despite all the challenges.”

All of us will at some point need care, or be caring for someone else, and the fact that people are living longer, and longer with complex needs and disabilities, is “something to be celebrated”, adds Ms Herklots.

“We should be doing all we can to be one of the best places that you could live if you are in need of support or care – rather than always taking a rather deficit model approach to this. It has been a struggle to value care, to value the people who do that, and yet actually it’s at the heart of a civilised or decent society.”

“Sometimes I think all governments have thought of social care as just a drain on resources, expenditure with no benefit. Nothing could be further from the truth, not least because it’s about the health and wellbeing of people in society”



The Health and Care Political Leadership Offer

Our **free** support offer, funded by Department of Health and Social Care, is aimed at:

- health and wellbeing board (HWB) chairs/co/vice chairs
- portfolio-holders/lead members with responsibility for adult social care
- anyone with any other leading political role in a health and care system.

Induction session

10.30am – 3.00pm
Thursday 28 June 2018
LGA, London

If you are new to a leading role in a health and care system, as above, this **free** induction session is for you.

To book a place contact sarah.brown@local.gov.uk

Leadership essentials

**Warwick Conference Centre,
Coventry**

These **free** two day residential sessions are an opportunity to reflect on the leadership challenges of these roles. Using the LGA's tried and tested approach to leadership development, the programme will be led by LGA peers and national partners and focus on a range of current and crucial issues.

If you are a HWB chair/co/vice chair or have a leading political role in a health and care system:

10 – 11 July 2018

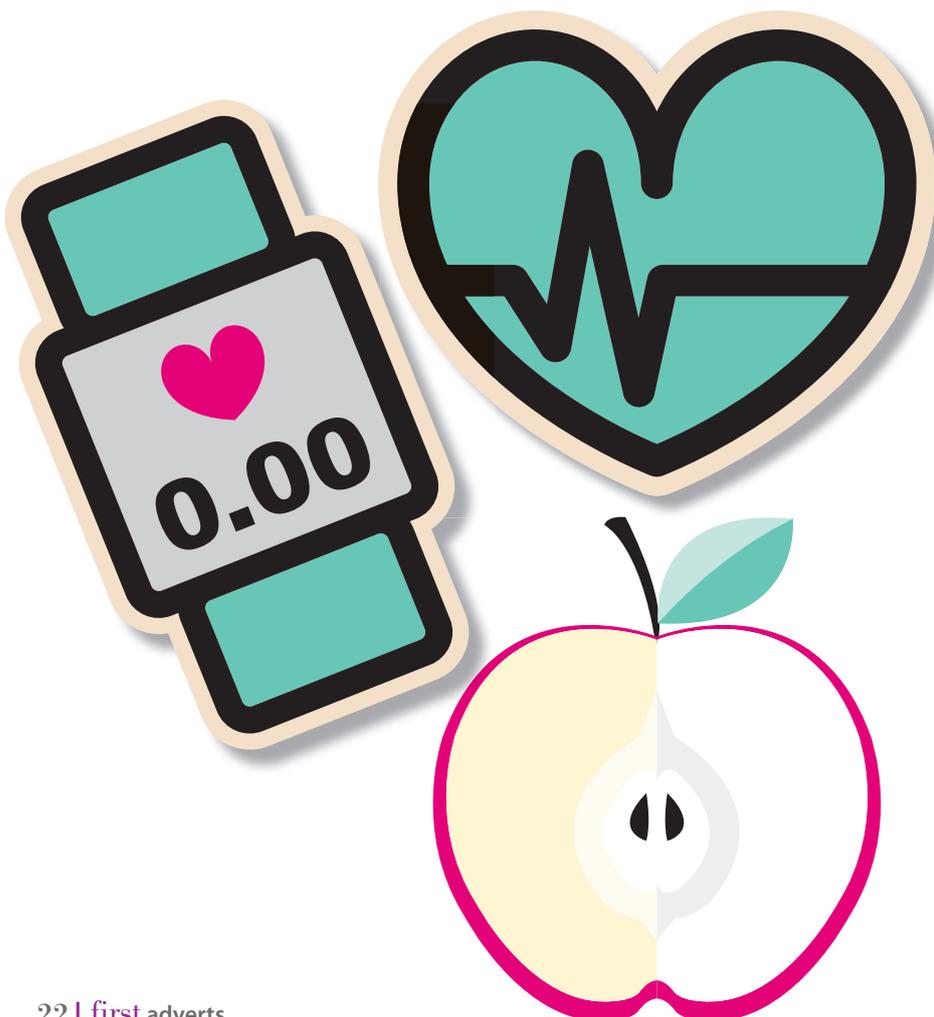
9 – 10 October 2018

If you are an adult social care portfolio-holder or lead member:

9 – 10 October 2018

Reflecting responsibilities across health and social care, the October sessions will run simultaneously, linked by shared speakers, facilitators and a joint dinner to provide a wider networking opportunity.

Places are limited and early booking is recommended. For further information and to book a place, please contact Grace Collins on 020 7664 3054 or grace.collins@local.gov.uk



comment

The benefits of reducing parental conflict



Ben Lewing is a Senior Adviser at the Early Intervention Foundation

Ask anyone whether they think aggressive arguing by parents or giving each other ‘the silent treatment’ is good for their children – you know the answer.

We intuitively recognise that frequent, intense and poorly resolved conflict between parents can be damaging to children.

Our intuition is now backed up by decades of evidence. Destructive conflict between parents – whether they are together or separated – is associated with a range of problems for children and young people as they grow up, including mental health difficulties, lower academic outcomes, reduced employment prospects and poor future relationship chances.

The impact of parental conflict on children and young people places significant pressures across a range of public services, and particularly on local government. Reducing this conflict has the potential to lessen many of these pressures, including those on adult and child mental health; home, school and care placement breakdown; unemployment; and domestic abuse.

But we know that interventions that focus solely on the parent-child relationship in the context of ongoing parental conflict are unlikely to be effective. So why have we not already designed public services to focus on reducing conflict between parents?

First, while there are many examples of public services that ‘think family’, the separation of planning and commissioning between children’s services and adult services continues to make a whole-family approach difficult, particularly as budgets contract around statutory

responsibilities. This doesn’t help with reducing parental conflict, where the intervention is focused on adults but the benefit is seen in children’s lives.

At an operational level, we continue to have something of a Victorian attitude towards ‘interfering’ in the private relationship between two adults, unless it is explicitly seen as being abusive. This is compounded by the fact that couples tend to seek help with their relationship only when they have already reached crisis point.

Our qualitative research suggests that front-line practitioners in early help, health, schools and social care often lack the confidence and knowledge to raise the issue of relationship problems. This means they are missing opportunities to identify and support families experiencing parental conflict.

Lastly, we know that financial stress and unemployment increase the risk of destructive conflict between parents. However, low-income

families who may benefit most from relationship support are less likely to access it, because of lack of service availability, cost and the stigma of being judged as failing or doing harm.

Despite all this, it now looks as if the tide is turning.

Ten pioneering local authorities have adapted their family services, focusing on equipping their workforce to ask the right questions, and offer advice and support to parents in relationship distress.

The Department for Work and Pensions is investing millions in new face-to-face interventions that will grow the UK evidence base, including a network of regional advisers and ambassadors to support local authorities and their partners.

Practical tools are available to support local areas, including the EIF Guidebook of evidence-based programmes, a guide for commissioners, and a new self-assessment planning tool, all available through the EIF’s Reducing Parental Conflict Hub (see <http://reducingparentalconflict.eif.org.uk/>).

Improving outcomes for children by reducing parental conflict is difficult for practical, systemic and cultural issues, but we all know it is the right thing to do.



“The impact of parental conflict on children and young people places significant pressures across a range of public services, and particularly on local government”

Quickest route to change is through councils

“Returning power and control to communities offers a chance to reduce the feeling of alienation from politics”

The LGA Labour Group recently launched its new publication, 'On Day One'. Written by leading Labour councillors from across England and Wales, it sets out the immediate challenges facing local government and describes how a future Labour government should meet them 'on day one'.

It offers a compelling narrative, saying that if the next Labour government wants to deliver immediate and visible change 'for the many, not the few', then the quickest route runs through local government. In council leaders and councillors, the next Labour government has a deep well of experience that can deliver results from the very first day in power.

The next Labour government will be under

immediate pressure to make a difference to the lives of those who have suffered from austerity – so funding councils fairly and properly must be a priority.

Labour must also resist the temptation to meddle from Whitehall or constrain councils with ring-fencing, and get used to the idea that there will be varying outcomes in different areas – a necessary consequence of giving communities more control.

When many communities have expressed a loss of identity and control over their own lives, localism offers another, more powerful political argument too. It wouldn't restore faith in the political system at a stroke, but the public has always placed more trust in their local council



Cllr Michael Payne
is Deputy Leader of the
LGA's Labour Group

than national government. Returning power and control to communities offers a chance to reduce the feeling of alienation from politics.

If a future Labour government unshackles local government from the dead hand of Whitehall, and in turn asks councils to put power into the hands of communities, then we could deliver real change in days, not years.

With proper funding and greater freedom to take decisions, councils can generate economic growth, build new homes, strengthen communities, and provide compassionate care and sustainable support for our most vulnerable people. And, under a Labour government that gave councils the funding and freedom we need, we could do it on day one.

chairman's comment

Funding from growth



Lord Porter
is Chairman of the LGA

The Chancellor's Spring Statement may not have come up with more funding for councils, but it did have some good news for local residents and businesses – namely, that the economy is forecast to grow.

Councils and their staff have strained every muscle to help support local economies and communities through a difficult few years.

A growing economy should mean more money in the Treasury's coffers for public services. And if that's the case, local government should be first in the queue when it comes to any handouts in the Autumn Budget.

We have long argued that the

Government needs to address the growing funding gaps facing councils, which we estimate will exceed £5 billion by 2020. This is the only way to protect our vital local services over the next few years.

It also makes perfect economic sense for the Government. Investing in local government will boost economic growth, reduce demand for services and save money for the taxpayer and other parts of the public sector, such as the NHS.

The worsening financial health of local government has been highlighted in a stark report from the National Audit Office (NAO). It warns that continued increases in demand for children's services and adult social care, coupled with tightening resources, are pushing local government towards a narrow remit centred on social care. Other

service areas have seen a 32.6 per cent reduction in spending.

As the NAO rightly recognises, councils are having to divert ever-dwindling resources from other local services, including filling potholes, maintaining our parks and green spaces and running children's centres, leisure centres and libraries, to try to plug growing funding gaps in adult social care and children's services.

Only with the right level of funding and powers, can councils continue to make a difference to people's lives by building desperately needed homes, creating jobs and school places, providing dignified care for our elderly and disabled, and boosting economic growth.

“Investing in local government will boost economic growth, reduce demand for services and save money for the taxpayer”

group leaders' comments



Cllr Sean Anstee is Deputy Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group

Spring Statement and snow

“Local authorities have proven that, with the right funding, they can save money for the taxpayer”

Councils have worked flat out during the recent severe weather.

The cold temperatures and heavy snow have proven to be particularly challenging, and local authorities have kept roads gritted and vulnerable residents protected.

We have ensured that central government and the media are aware of the hard work that local authorities undertake every winter.

Last month, the Conservative Councillors' Association held its annual conference which, despite the snow, was well attended by councillors, MPs and ministers.

The LGA Conservative Group sponsored a popular Q&A panel session at the conference with the ministerial team from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. This was a great opportunity for delegates to discuss topical issues with the Secretary of State and ministers.

The Chancellor recently delivered his first Spring Statement in which he forecast a growing economy. If public finances are set to improve, I hope that the Government can address the funding gaps facing councils. Local authorities have proven that, with the right funding, they can save money for the taxpayer, for example by reducing delayed transfers of care through additional funding for adult social care.

Many colleagues will now be looking to the fast-approaching local elections. I would like to wish candidates the best of luck and pay tribute to those councillors standing down for their diligence and dedication.



Cllr Howard Sykes MBE is Leader of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group

The issues that matter to local people

“With 125,000 children currently homeless, it is time to act”

We've just got back from our spring conference in Southport, where we continued our hard work to raise the profile of local government.

On housing, Liberal Democrat councillors successfully tabled a motion calling for councils to be able to abolish the Right to Buy. We confirmed our commitment to scrap the housing borrowing cap, which is also a key LGA demand. With 125,000 children currently homeless, it is time to act.

We raised concerns over adult social care funding, launched our new booklet and heard from an inspirational panel of speakers. Baroness Judith Jolly spoke movingly about the care needed by her mother and how hard-pressed she saw that local authorities are. Cllrs Heather Kidd (Shropshire), Richard Kemp (Liverpool) and Peter Thornton (South Lakeland) also spoke passionately about the need to reform our broken social care system.

We also held a meeting to encourage more women to stand as Liberal Democrat councillors. The charge for this was led by Cllrs Lisa Smart (Stockport), Ellie Hudspith (St Albans), and Baroness Kath Pinnock (Kirklees).

In addition, I was very proud to chair a meeting that highlighted the achievements of Mayor Dave Hodgson's Liberal Democrat-led administration in Bedford.

We value the incredible work put in by our councillors and their experience – and will keep fighting for the issues that matter to them and the communities they represent.



Cllr Marianne Overton MBE is Leader of the LGA's Independent Group

Developers need to contribute more

“Planning reforms seem designed to make it even easier for developers”

Last year, 173,000 homes were built – around half the number of planning permissions given. Councils pass 90 per cent of planning applications and only a quarter of those refused win on appeal. Councils are clearly giving planning permission as quickly as they reasonably can.

Proposals for a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – now out for consultation – seem designed to make it even easier for developers. Particularly worrying is the fact that developers fight for a minimum contribution to essential infrastructure before getting their planning permission, but still return to ratchet that downwards even further. This leaves our communities seriously short. The confidential viability assessments are galling enough, but now a separate troubling loophole has appeared.

Where a local plan and community infrastructure levy (CIL) have been introduced, affordable housing requirements have been reduced to accommodate the new CIL payments. The CIL can only be charged on new applications, or new floor area, so returning applications don't have to pay it. Yet the other newly reduced contributions do apply, so developers are handed money back – millions of pounds on a big application.

This loophole means that developers contribute less affordable housing, and even less towards essential community infrastructure. Our communities lose twice.

I have written to the Secretary of State to see if we can get this loophole closed and improve contributions to the community.



For more information about the LGA's political groups, see www.local.gov.uk

Building mixed-use communities



Ben Bolgar is Senior Director of The Prince's Foundation

The Prince's Foundation supports people to create community, and it works with local community groups and partners to build new sustainable housing and regenerate existing neighbourhoods.

At the recent release of the draft National Planning Policy Framework, much emphasis was placed on having the security of a home, and on home ownership as a platform for being an active member of your local community and society as a whole.

The press coverage focused on the current housing crisis as one of the biggest barriers to social mobility, which is, of course, right. But the housing crisis cannot automatically be tackled by building more homes – or, at least, not by building the type of volume suburban



houses that can be seen popping up all over the country.

The reason for this is that social mobility is much more likely within mixed use, mixed income, walkable communities rather than in zoned housing estates targeted at car

drivers, similar income groups and built using identical house types.

What seems critical in delivering the important aspiration of social mobility is to find a way to prioritise those landowners and developers who are capable of building a wide range of homes and the community infrastructure that will engender a strong community and offer social and economic opportunities.

This is only likely where the land value uplift can be captured in areas with reasonable sales values, and not where land has been optioned at the highest price and where the only game will be to drive down the values, reduce affordable housing and reduce community uses.

There does seem to be a unique opportunity for local authorities to build proper mixed-use communities on their own land if they can overcome the current valuation method of determining 'best value', and instead look at 'best consideration'. This would account for the social benefits that accrue from community building, as opposed to just house building.

Support for foster carers



Robert Cann is Campaigns Officer for The Fostering Network

Every councillor in England has a shared parental responsibility for the looked-after children in the care of their local authority. As a corporate parent, it is your duty to ensure that everything is done to achieve the very best outcomes for your children.

But, do you know who your children are living with? For the vast majority (80 per cent), it will be with foster carers, who work tirelessly – for little financial reward – to provide some of our most vulnerable young people with a stable, loving and nurturing family life.

Foster carers form part of the 'team around the child', which will also include social workers, youth workers, personal advisers, teachers, and so on. It is crucial for them to be treated as equals within this team; a great first step to ensure that this happens is for a fostering service to introduce a foster carers' charter.

The idea behind a charter is to create a document, setting out mutual roles and responsibilities, that is 'owned' by both carers and the service. In this way, a framework is created with which to improve the lives of children in care.

The charter might cover issues such as supervision, involvement in planning and decision making, information, and payments. A successfully implemented charter will have a positive effect on the recruitment and retention of foster carers, too.

At the last count, almost half of English local authority fostering services had a charter in place. If your service doesn't, please get in touch with The Fostering Network.

As a councillor, you might want to ask



“Foster carers form part of the ‘team around the child’, and it is crucial for them to be treated as equals”

your service if it has a charter and, if so, when it was last reviewed. Ideally, this should take place every couple of years, and you can work with your local foster carers to help devise a new or refreshed version.



Visit www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/charter to download our sample charter for inspiration, organise a local publicity event to (re)launch your local charter, and email campaigns@fostering.net for more advice



A care system fit for today and tomorrow

We spend £47,945,205 a day protecting and supporting adults in England.

An estimated 400,000 people are living in residential or nursing care with the number of over-65s expected to pass 15 million by 2038.

Our adult social care system is creaking at the seams. We need to act now to ensure the structure we have will provide for generations to come, by fundamentally rethinking how we fund care in the long term.

Let's be clear, it is not that there aren't excellent care homes or teams up and down the country doing a dedicated and brilliant job. The issue is that, as local authorities, we are hamstrung; our hands are tied by the responsibility for keeping people safe without true power to put things right.

It is our collective responsibility to be the voice of the most vulnerable. We all have a responsibility – private and public, individuals and agencies – to act on bad care.

There is little argument that improvement is needed. The National Audit Office report on the adult social care workforce is the latest to call for radical change, and the Government is



Cllr Louise Goldsmith (Con)
is Leader of West Sussex
County Council

currently working on a Green Paper. Now is our moment to call time on poor care and find a long-term answer to how we fund it in a way that is fair to this generation and the next.

But just to focus on funding would miss the point. We need to grab the chance to build political consensus for real reform and focus on promoting and valuing the care profession, and strengthening the hand of those who can intervene when things go wrong.

The Green Paper needs to lead to a cross-party solution. The predictable crisis facing social care is too great for the solution to be put at risk by a change of administration.

People are our greatest asset, but training is fragmented. We are calling for a nationally recognised training pathway for carers

alongside a structured career path. We need a caring profession that feels valued, trained and empowered.

More clarity is needed about the roles of the agencies involved in regulation and protection. The Care Quality Commission regulates homes, social services safeguard individuals and the police can step in when serious problems are found. But they all need a clearer set of powers to enable them to act quickly and in ways the public can understand.

The Government's Green Paper must give us the means to change that. It won't cost more or mean more regulation, but it will lead to more clarity and accountability.

It should include proposals for a more professional career structure; more power for local authorities when things go wrong; a requirement to publish details of homes where there are safeguarding concerns; a national framework for supporting people to find a care home for their relatives; and an 'ABTA-style' insurance system similar to the travel industry, funded by the industry, to ensure that private funders and local residents do not lose out when care homes go bust.

In local government, we know we have to do the best for all our residents. This is our role and we are proud to perform it. What we need now is the shackles removed so we can do that role to the full and sleep at night knowing we all provide care that can be relied on.

“We need a cross-party solution. The predictable crisis facing social care is too great for the solution to be put at risk by a change of administration”

Sustainable development for councils



Dr Greg Munro is Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum

With so many challenges facing councils every day, you might ask what the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) has got to do with your community and the work you do.

First, CHOGM's focus is on four themes: a fairer, safer, more prosperous and sustainable Commonwealth. This aligns with the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), two-thirds of which require local government engagement for implementation. All countries, including the UK, have signed up to achieving them by 2030.

Issues such as poverty, hunger, education, employment, gender equality and climate change are as important to developed countries as they are to the developing. These challenges do not observe national borders

and will inevitably impact on all countries, often with far-reaching consequences.

Second, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) brings together local government and national ministries from across the Commonwealth's 53 countries to promote the sector's role in achieving local, national and international goals; and highlights the importance of local government in ensuring the voices of all members of a community are reflected in decisions about development to create a fairer, safer, sustainable and prosperous future for all.

Councils need support, wherever they are, to find innovative ways to resource and finance services; whether it's new ways of raising money, or deploying technology to work more efficiently and cost-effectively to meet community development needs.

As world leaders gather in London this month for CHOGM, the four themes and SDGs may look different depending on where you are in the world, but they are all relevant to our councils and the people we serve.

CLGF is using the CHOGM process to create

“The UN’s Sustainable Development Goals require local government engagement for implementation”

a more strategic working relationship with the Commonwealth Secretariat to reflect local government's role and influence in shaping and delivering Commonwealth priorities.

If we are to create a fairer, safer, more prosperous and sustainable Commonwealth for all citizens, including those in the UK, then national and local governments need to commit to working in partnership to achieve the sustainable goals.



You can find out about the work of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum by visiting www.clgf.org.uk

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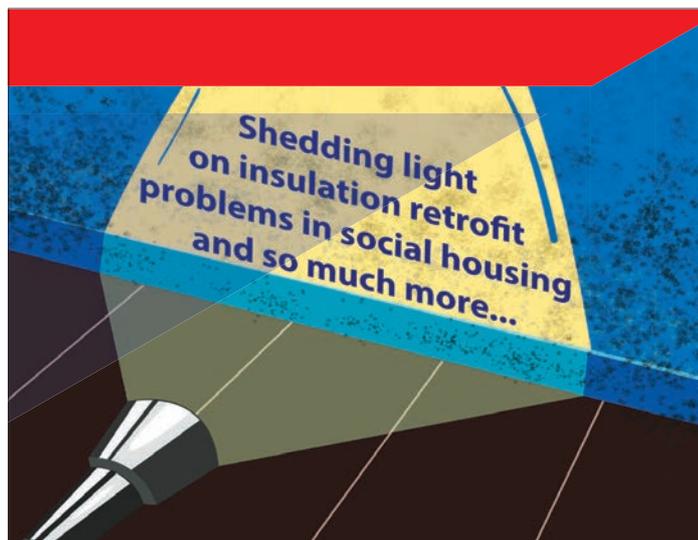
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parliament

Housing and homelessness

As councils prepare to implement the Homelessness Reduction Act and await the publication of the Government's Social Housing Green Paper, there has been a range of parliamentary activity on housing and homelessness.

We've been working with MPs and Peers to ensure our policy recommendations are featuring in the various debates and inquiries taking place in Parliament.

The Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee has held inquiries into the main issues, seeking the views of the LGA, local authorities and the Government, among others.

Alongside a representative from London Councils, the LGA gave evidence in late 2017 on the funding and resources available for implementing the new duties in the Homelessness Reduction Act (see p16).

This session was an opportunity to encourage the Government to review

the funding allocated for the Act, and the witnesses emphasised that the Act must be accompanied by wider measures on welfare and affordability to be a success. In questioning the then Minister for Homelessness, Marcus Jones MP, the committee said local authorities needed greater clarity over longer-term funding.

Heather Wheeler MP, the current minister, has faced similar questioning since taking up her post in January 2018. In evidence to MPs on 12 March, Ms Wheeler indicated that the Government recognises extra funding for homelessness may be required. In the first instance, this will be available to London-based authorities only, through top-sliced funding from the £402 million Homelessness Support Grant.

In the chamber of the House of Commons, MPs have raised the LGA's concerns about the pressures facing councils dealing with rising homelessness, including during Prime

Minister's Questions in March. The topic was chosen for a special 'Estimates Day' debate in late February, and the LGA's briefing was picked up by MPs across the political divide. Several called for councils to be allowed to borrow more to invest in affordable housing, which would stop low-income families from facing unaffordable private rents.

The LGA also made the case before the influential Treasury Select Committee in January, pressing for councils to have greater borrowing flexibilities to build. In its encouraging report on the 2017 Autumn Budget, the committee recommended that the cap be lifted, noting that it would have 'no material impact' on the national debt. To build on this, the LGA's Chairman, Lord Porter, has tabled parliamentary questions to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government ministers, and has spoken in debates in the House of Lords.

The new Housing Minister, Dominic Raab MP, was asked about any pressure his department has been putting on the Treasury to lift the housing revenue account cap, in another committee session in March. In a small sign of movement since the extra £1 billion announced in the Budget, Mr Raab said the policy is 'being kept under review'.

He also noted the Government is eager to bring forward legislation to enable councils to double council tax on empty properties, with the receipts earmarked for affordable housing.

It is encouraging to see support growing within both Parliament and the Government for better equipping councils to deal with the growing pressure on housing homelessness services. The LGA will continue to call for increased investment in social housing and the financial freedoms that are needed to make sure councils can resume their historic role as house builders.



“The Government recognises that extra funding for homelessness may be required”



For more information about the LGA's parliamentary work, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament

councillor

Commercial skills for councillors

The role of the modern councillor is constantly evolving to take account of the challenges faced by councils in the latter part of this decade.

Changes to funding sources through devolution deals, the retention of business rates and powers to generate income or raise taxation present new possibilities as well as challenges for councils in the way they provide services to local communities.

As a result, councils are increasingly looking at innovative ways to generate income and transform their organisations in response to local needs. Commercialisation and entrepreneurialism are becoming increasingly key to the role of the modern councillor.

The LGA recently ran two commercial skills masterclasses for councillors who were interested or involved in delivering the commercialisation agenda for their areas. The sessions focused on the key strategic role that councillors need to play in council commercial ventures.

The masterclasses set out the different commercial models, the changing policy landscape and how councillors need to make risk-based judgements, as well as giving useful insight into the challenges of contracts management, budgeting, and the responsibilities of board members.

They offered the opportunity to look at case studies from a number of councils already operating in this environment. Cllr Kevin Bentley (Con), Deputy Leader of Essex



County Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Skills, Infrastructure and the Digital Economy, who hosted the first masterclass, said: "Councillors are a vital part of the commercialisation process, as enablers, challengers and decision makers.

"At Essex County Council, we have proactively embraced the challenges and successes of commercial initiatives and have created the culture and processes to allow opportunities to grow and flourish. As a host of the first LGA commercial skills masterclass, I was delighted to share case studies with councillors from across the country, to hear their experiences and to facilitate some fascinating peer discussions."

The masterclasses looked in depth at the concept of commercialisation in terms of definition, accountability and the councillor's role. Councillors were keen to engage in discussions about the positioning of social purpose within the council commercial strategy – particularly topical, given recent changes to investment guidance.

Councils have a range of powers to support trading activity – the key is to understand which model is appropriate for your purpose.

When setting up commercial organisations, it's imperative that sales and resourcing are appropriately planned to develop sustainable income. The masterclasses explored the importance of cash-flow management and key questions that can be asked to apply a financial health check to council commercial ventures.

Elected members can bring valuable experience to the boards of council-owned companies. It is important to understand the duties and accountabilities, including potential conflicts of interest that could occur between directors' duties and the councillor role. This was discussed in the masterclasses, including some of the personal liabilities of directors and the vital role fulfilled by non-executive directors.

The commercially minded councillor is intrinsic to the success of building strong, resilient services for residents.



To keep up to date with the LGA's commercial training and support offer, please visit www.local.gov.uk/commercialisation

elections

Mixed results

The currently unpredictable state of British electoral politics makes it harder than ever to draw firm conclusions from any set of local by-elections.

On 8 March, for example, the Conservatives lost all five council seats they were defending and social media was soon abuzz with predictions that the party was on its way to hell in a handcart.

In other weeks, however, the Conservatives seemed more sure-footed, comfortably holding their own or making gains from either the Liberal Democrats or Independents.

Much the same goes for the Liberal Democrats. In several contests, they struggled to break into double figures in terms of share of the vote; in others their progress was such that they gained seats from a standing start. The best result was probably in the Northchurch ward of Dacorum, where their share leaped from 19 per cent to 59 per cent on an impressive turnout in excess of 40 per cent after vigorous campaigning.

Labour, too, has experienced both highs and lows. In Medway, the party took a seat



Professors **Colin Rallings** (right) and **Michael Thrasher** are Associate Members, Nuffield College, Oxford



in the Rochester West ward for the first time following the resignation of the area's sitting Conservative MP, Kelly Tolhurst, on her appointment as an assistant government whip. The crude figures suggest that Labour was the beneficiary of a collapse in both Green and UKIP support since 2015.

Labour also easily retained a seat in Harlow despite the vacancy being caused by the leader of the council, Jon Clempner, standing down amid accusations that he was being harassed by the party's Momentum faction.

On the other hand, the unpopular Labour administration in Bolton suffered another blow as it lost a seat for the second time this year. This time a localist Independent came from nowhere to poll nearly half the votes in the seemingly safe Farnworth ward.

This variety of results may well presage a similar pattern in May. Labour is expected to make gains in London and in some other urban councils. The Conservatives will hope to fight back in the suburbs and shires, especially where there is a large UKIP vote from 2014 to unwind. And the Liberal Democrats' performance is likely to resemble the proverbial curate's egg – embarrassingly bad in some places, yet spectacular in others.

For all parties, though, the difference between winning and losing could well hinge on the quality of their campaign on the ground. The contemporary, volatile elector may not take much persuading, but persuaded they must be.



i Only results where seats changed hands or that are mentioned in the story above are listed here. For more information on these and other recent local by-election results, please visit www.local.gov.uk/first

Shorter results

Arun, Marine

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON

6% over Lab

Turnout 20.1%

Bolton, Farnworth

IND GAIN FROM LAB

9.3% over Lab

Turnout 24.3%

Dacorum, Northchurch

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON

30.9% over Con

Turnout 40.5%

Dorset, Bridport

CON GAIN FROM Lib Dem

5% over Lib Dem

Turnout 28.9%

East Hampshire, Petersfield Bell Hill

IND GAIN FROM CON

4% over Lib Dem

Turnout 30%

Harlow, Little Parndon and Hare Street

LAB HELD

30.8% over Con

Turnout 19.8%

Medway, Rochester West

LAB GAIN FROM CON

8% over Con

Turnout 33%

North Kesteven, Eagle, Swinderby and Witham St Hughs

CON GAIN FROM IND

22.2% over Ind

Turnout 21.3%

Nottingham, Wollaton West

LAB GAIN FROM CON

5.4% over Con

Turnout 40.3%

Redcar and Cleveland, Longbeck

CON GAIN FROM IND

6.4% over Lib Dem

Turnout 28%

Rutland, Oakham South East

IND GAIN FROM CON

19% over Con

Turnout 23.5%

West Dorset, Bridport North

CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM

6% over Lib Dem

Turnout 27.1%

West Somerset, Minehead South

LIB DEM GAIN FROM IND

3.4% over Con

Turnout 37.3%

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