

# ANNUAL REPORT 2026

## LIBERAL DEMOCRAT GROUP

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION



**Cover image: Liberal Democrats celebrate gaining majority control of Portsmouth City Council in May 2026**

**Newcastle's new Lib Dem cabinet following the party taking control of the City in 2026**



**Ed Davey celebrates local election result with Portsmouth Lib Dems, May 2026**

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[www.libdemgroup.lga.gov.uk/lga-lib-dem-group](http://www.libdemgroup.lga.gov.uk/lga-lib-dem-group)

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



**Councillor Bridget Smith**  
Leader of the LGA  
Liberal Democrat Group

Welcome to the 2026/2027 Annual Report of the Liberal Democrat Group. This is another year of change, including the position of the Group Leader. Joe Harris, Group Leader until May 2026, I want to thank Joe for all his hard work as he prepares to stand down following a new job opportunity.

Joe has done an excellent job for us at the LGA and within the Lib Dems nationally, always standing up for local government and the Liberal Democrats who are involved with it. Thank you Joe – and we wish you all the very best with your future career.

The LGA Liberal Democrat Group Executive have confirmed that I will serve as Group Leader until fresh elections are held next year, following Joe Harris's decision to resign as Leader. They have also confirmed Councillor Amanda Hopgood will be Deputy Leader.

In her Group Whip report, Heather Kidd mentions colleagues who have stood back this year after decades of service. But I did want to pay particular tribute to Camden Lib Dem councillor Flick Rea who served as a councillor for 35 years and was an inspiration to many Lib Dem councillors and campaigners.

Flick was also the lead Lib Dem member for Culture, Tourism and Sport here at the LGA including chairing its Committee, in the run up to and during the 2012 Olympics. She was an inspiration to many and we will miss her

This year we saw another 133 Lib Dem councillors elected, bringing our total up to 3,361 across the UK.

At the time of writing 40 councils have a Liberal Democrat majority. If you add in where we lead the council either under minority control or lead in an alliance that is now 76 councils led by the Lib Dems.

As we all know that means there are more Liberal Democrat Council Leaders than there are Liberal Democrat MPs - despite our record gains at the 2024 General Election!

## **Keeping in touch with our councillors**

It is important to keep in touch with our large – and growing – councillor base. This includes a weekly email update, running a series of on-line seminars; sometimes visiting the councils in question and having a visible presence on social media. In addition, we visit some of our member authorities to see for ourselves some good practice that their council is promoting. We run regular on-line meetings for our council leaders. We hold fringe meetings at Lib Dem conferences and run the Councillor's Weekend in partnership with ALDC.

Through our network of lead peers, we arrange for an experienced Lib Dem Councillor to support colleagues who are facing changed circumstances on their council or those Lib Dem Groups seeking advice on other issues.

## **Working as part of the Liberal Democrat family**

As mentioned, we work closely with the Association of Lib Dem Councillors (ALDC) in planning the annual Councillors Weekend and plan our presence at Lib Dem Spring and Autumn Conferences. We put together joint fringe meetings and share a stand in the exhibition area. Office staff meet with ALDC staff online every Monday.

In addition to this, Joe as group leader met with party leader Ed Davey MP, the Lib Dem President and the Chief Executive to help co-ordinate our work and ensure that the national and local parts of the party are working well together.

## Fighting for local government in Parliament

We also meet with the party's MPs and Peers, and we are pleased to have a good working relationship with the Lib Dem Local Government team.

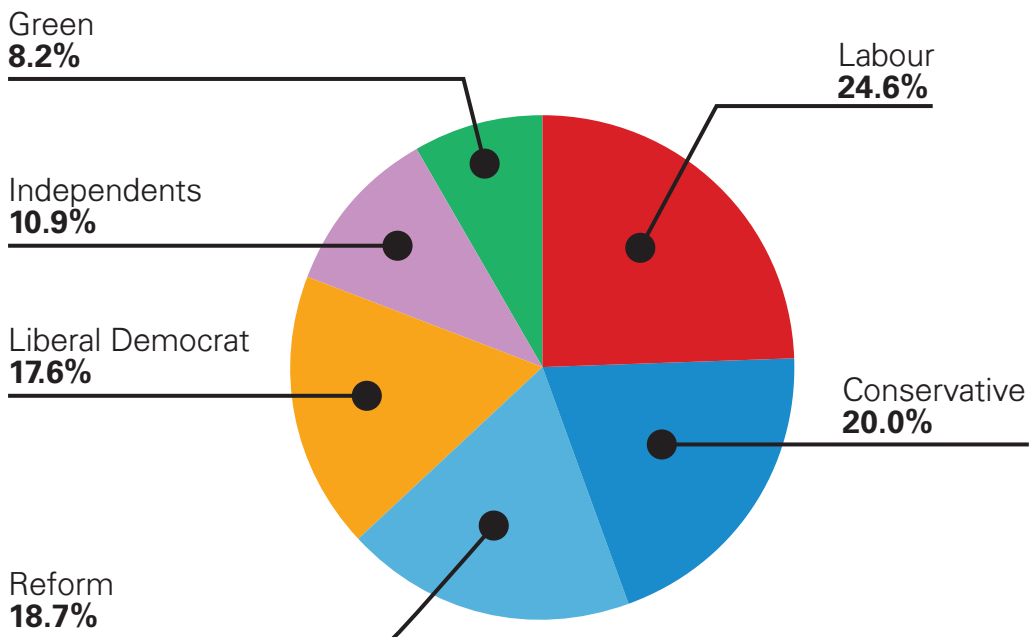
Our thanks in particular to Zoe Franklin MP, as our local government spokesperson in the Commons, Gideon Amos MP as our spokesperson on housing and planning and Baroness Kath Pinnock our lead spokesperson in the Lords and her team. A big "Thank you" to Vikki Slade MP who was our local government lead for the first year in the Commons for all her hard work.

Thank you to our office team – Terry, Rob and Colin – for their hard work over the year. And finally, thank you to all Liberal Democrat Councillors for everything you do for your local communities – you may not always get thanked for it, so I wanted to make sure your work is appreciated!

## Political balance 2026/2027 of the LGA

This year's LGA political balance has been released following the local elections.

Once again the Liberal Democrat Group has increased its vote share at the LGA, now standing at 17.6 per cent. While we are now in fourth place behind Reform, our vote share is the highest percentage share for the Lib Dem Group since 2010. The LGA now has 6 political groups – with a Green Party Group formed in 2026 as well as a Reform Group formed in 2025. Numbers are:



Some of you have asked why it isn't simply based on numbers of councillors. The LGA political balance uses a formula that includes the type of council, population across a council area and the strength of the different political groups on that council.

I look forward to fighting for Liberal Democrat values within the LGA at a time of rapid change both at the LGA and in the wider political environment.



**Liberal Democrats celebrate becoming the largest party on Milton Keynes Council**

# The LGA Liberal Democrat Group Leadership Team



## Group Leader

**Cllr Bridget Smith**

South Cambridgeshire DC

[Cllr.BridgetSmith@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:Cllr.BridgetSmith@scambs.gov.uk)



## Group Deputy Leader

**Cllr Amanda Hopgood**

Durham

[amanda.hopgood@durham.gov.uk](mailto:amanda.hopgood@durham.gov.uk)



## Group Chair

**Cllr Lucy Nethsingha (Lead)**

Cambridgeshire CC

[lucynethsingha@icloud.com](mailto:lucynethsingha@icloud.com)



## National Lead Peer

**Cllr Alan Connett**

Devon CC

[alan.connett@btinternet.com](mailto:alan.connett@btinternet.com)



## Group Whip

**Cllr Heather Kidd MBE**

Shropshire Council

[heather.kidd@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:heather.kidd@shropshire.gov.uk)

# LGA Liberal Democrat Board members 2025/2027

Liberal Democrat Group Executive and Board Members 2025/2027

## Children and Young People



**Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE (lead from July 1st 2016)**  
Portsmouth City Council  
[geraldvj@gmail.com](mailto:geraldvj@gmail.com)



**Cllr Amanda Hopgood (lead until July 1st 2016)**  
Durham Council  
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**Cllr Jane Carr**  
Milton Keynes  
[Janecarr.mklibdems@gmail.com](mailto:Janecarr.mklibdems@gmail.com)



**Cllr Dine Romero (sub)**  
Bath & North East Somerset  
[dine\\_romero@bathnes.gov.uk](mailto:dine_romero@bathnes.gov.uk)

## Inclusive Growth



**Cllr Carl Cashman (lead)**  
Liverpool  
[carl.cashman@liverpool.gov.uk](mailto:carl.cashman@liverpool.gov.uk)



**Cllr Mike Ross**  
Hull City Council  
[councillor.ross@hullcc.gov.uk](mailto:councillor.ross@hullcc.gov.uk)



**Cllr Jim Millard**  
Richmond Upon Thames  
[cllr.j.millard@richmond.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.j.millard@richmond.gov.uk)



**Cllr Andrew Brown (sub)**  
Bristol  
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## Health and Wellbeing



**Cllr Wendy Taylor (lead)**

Newcastle

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**Cllr Sarah Osborne**

East Sussex

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**Cllr Mike Bell**

North Somerset

[mike.bell@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:mike.bell@n-somerset.gov.uk)



**Cllr Rebecca Trimnell (sub)**

Gloucester

[rebecca.trimnell@gloucester.gov.uk](mailto:rebecca.trimnell@gloucester.gov.uk)

## Culture, Tourism and Sport



**Cllr Darryl Smalley**

City of York Council

[cldr.dsmalley@york.gov.uk](mailto:cldr.dsmalley@york.gov.uk)



**Cllr Elizabeth Scott**

Durham

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**Cllr Stephen O'Brien**

Sunderland

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**Cllr Robert Kim (sub)**

Kingston upon Thames

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## Neighbourhoods



**Cllr Victor Chamberlain**

London Borough of Southwark

[victor.chamberlain@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:victor.chamberlain@southwark.gov.uk)



**Cllr Hayleigh Gascoigne**

Vale of White Horse

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**Cllr Paula Widdowson**

York

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**Cllr Alexander Ehmann (sub)**

Richmond Upon Thames

[Cllr.a.Ehmann@richmond.gov.uk](mailto:Cllr.a.Ehmann@richmond.gov.uk)

## Fire Services



**Cllr Carolyn Lambert (lead)**  
East Sussex County Council  
[cllr.carolyn.lambert@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.carolyn.lambert@eastsussex.gov.uk)



**Cllr Stuart Bray**  
Hinckley and Bosworth  
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**Cllr Paul Edgeworth**  
Sunderland  
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## Improvement and Innovation



**Cllr Tim Pickstone**  
Cumberland Council  
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**Cllr Lucy Nethsingha**  
Cambridgeshire CC and Cambridge City Council  
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**Cllr Mike Evemy**  
Cotswold District Council  
[mike.evemy@cotswold.gov.uk](mailto:mike.evemy@cotswold.gov.uk)



**Cllr Roger Hayes (sub)**  
Kingston upon Thames  
[roger.hayes@kingston.gov.uk](mailto:roger.hayes@kingston.gov.uk)

## Public Sector Reform and Innovation



**Cllr Caroline Leaver (lead)**  
North Devon and Devon CC  
[caroline.ndlibdems@gmail.com](mailto:caroline.ndlibdems@gmail.com)



**Cllr Alex Wagner**  
Shropshire  
[alex.wagner@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:alex.wagner@shropshire.gov.uk)



**Cllr Michael Mullaney**  
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council  
[michael.mullaney@hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk](mailto:michael.mullaney@hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk)



**Cllr Diana Lugova (sub)**  
Vale of White Horse  
[diana.lugova@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:diana.lugova@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## Economy and Resources



### **Cllr Keith House (lead)**

Eastleigh Borough Council and Hampshire County Council

[keith.house@eastleigh.gov.uk](mailto:keith.house@eastleigh.gov.uk)



### **Cllr Mark Jeffery**

Portsmouth

[mark.jeffery@libdems.org.uk](mailto:mark.jeffery@libdems.org.uk)



### **Cllr Michael Headley**

Bedford Council

[michael@mheadley.co.uk](mailto:michael@mheadley.co.uk)



### **Cllr Paul Smith (sub)**

Colchester

[paul.e.smith@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:paul.e.smith@colchester.gov.uk)

## Safer and Stronger Communities



### **Cllr Ryan Priest (lead)**

Dudley

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### **Cllr Aga Dychton**

Watford

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### **Cllr Thalia Marrington**

Cornwall

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### **Cllr Jon Ball (sub)**

Ealing

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## Local Councils Network



### **Cllr Bridget Smith**

South Cambs District Council

[cllr.bridgetsmith@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.bridgetsmith@scambs.gov.uk)

## County Councils Network



### **Cllr Lucy Nethsingha**

Cambridgeshire CC and Cambridge City Council

[lucynethsingha@icloud.com](mailto:lucynethsingha@icloud.com)

## Cllr representative on Liberal Democrat Federal Board



### **Cllr Lucy Nethsingha**

Cambridgeshire CC and Cambridge City Council

[lucynethsingha@icloud.com](mailto:lucynethsingha@icloud.com)

## Federal Policy Committee reps (Appointed via party rules)



### **Cllr Lucy Nethsingha**

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### **Cllr Susan Juned**

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## Local Partnerships



### **Cllr Howard Sykes**

Oldham

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## Council of European Municipalities and Regions



### **Cllr Flo Clucas**

Cheltenham

[flo.clucas@btinternet.com](mailto:flo.clucas@btinternet.com)

## Audit and Risk Assurance Committee



### **Cllr Alan Connett**

Devon

[alan.connett@btinternet.com](mailto:alan.connett@btinternet.com)

## HR and People Committee



### **Cllr Heather Kidd**

Shropshire

[heather.kidd@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:heather.kidd@shropshire.gov.uk)

## Finance and Performance



### **Cllr Bridget Smith (Chair)**

South Cambs

[cllr.bridgetsmith@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.bridgetsmith@scambs.gov.uk)

**Lib Dems celebrate  
winning a strong majority  
on South Cambridgeshire**



# Liberal Democrat Vice Presidents of the LGA

Every year the political groups at the LGA invite parliamentary representatives from the House of Commons and House of Lords to be our Vice Presidents. They support the LGA in Parliament – helping to raise our concerns in Parliament and from time-to-time hosting events, The current list of Liberal Democrat Vice Presidents is below and we thank them all for their support:

Baroness Bakewell

Baroness Brinton

Baroness Pinnock

Baroness Caroline Pidgeon

Baroness Thornhill

Daisy Cooper MP

Helen Morgan MP

Layla Moran MP

Tim Farron MP

Vikki Slade MP

Pippa Heylings MP

Lisa Smart MP

Lord Scriven

Lord Shipley

Lord Storey

Lord Tope

Zoe Franklin MP

# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## LGA Liberal Democrat Group Whip

### Councillor Heather Kidd



#### Tithing reminder

Liberal Democrat council groups should have ensured their members are contributing 10 per cent gross from Basic and Special Responsibility allowances. This is particularly relevant post the May 2024 and now the May 2025 council elections.

Those operating council group bank accounts should be reminded that there are new regulations around reporting and PPERA.

#### Group contract

As a reminder the Group contract was introduced several years ago, setting out the expectations of all those who hold Group offices or serve on the various LGA boards, panels and related organisations. It was updated last in 2023, giving improved clarity on the responsibilities. Following the 2023 Group elections, all those elected to Group positions are expected to sign and observe the Group contract and for 2025 and for all following elections.

#### Council Group Standing Orders

Council Group Standing Orders were updated in 2022. Many council groups have now updated theirs to reflect these. All groups need to review theirs with the Council group Toolkit available from ALDC.

#### Thank You

Our thanks to Amanda Hopgood who stepped up to be our group's lead councillor on the Children and Young People's Committee during Gerald Vernon-Jackson's Mayoral year on Portsmouth City Council. Amanda has also been the LGA Chair of the CYP Committee. Gerald will resume his duties as our lead member on 1st July 2026.

It is worth noting that the LGA as part of a re-organisation re-named the policy Boards (of which Children and Young People was one) as Committees; with only the main LGA Board retaining "Board" status.

I would also like to thank Chris White for his hard work for the Lib Dem Group at various levels – most recently liaising with Lib Dem Federal Party Committees. Howard Sykes has also stepped down from Oldham Council after serving the LGA Liberal Democrat Group for many years in various roles including four years as group leader. Thank you Howard for all you have done for us. Howard remains serving his community as a parish councillor.

Cllr Roger Price stepped down this May as a Hampshire Councillor after decades of public service. Roger served on our Fire Services Committee. Previous Lib Dem members of the Culture, Tourism and Sport Committee – Liz Green and Rob Pritchard (substitute) have now left their respective councils. Welcome to Cllr Stephen O'Brien and Councillor Robert Dongsung Kim (substitute) who take their place.

## **Reports and attendance**

A summary of attendance of board members is included within this report. The report format was standardised a few years ago and aids in helping Lead Members give a brief summary of their work on the Boards in each cycle. I am grateful that these have mostly arrived on time.

## **Attendance in person**

Attendance in person is to be encouraged at least for the induction session and at least once or twice a year. This does need improvement. Group working for the Group Executive will be improved if this happens. All meetings will remain hybrid.

## **Review of the Constitution and emergency Executive meeting May 2026**

The resignation of Cllr Joe Harris from the LGA Liberal Democrat Leadership shortly before the elections showed areas of the LGA group Constitution which needed attention. Work was done around this.

Recommendations were that the Deputy Leader would step up when the Leader was unavailable and this was underlined by the Emergency Executive on Monday 18th May. The Deputy Leader role will be filled for the next 10 months until the next elections by election from within the Executive.

Expressions of interest were requested and the Leadership Team (Leader, Chair and Whip) will select from those for that role.

Thank you all for your support this year.

Heather Kidd

[heather.kidd@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:heather.kidd@shropshire.gov.uk)

## LGA Lib Dem Group – Attendance 2025 - 2026

	04/09/25	23/10/25	23/10/25	22/01/26
Joe Harris (Leader)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Bridget Smith (Deputy Leader and DCN lead)	Apologies	Apologies	Y	Y
Ryan Priest (Safer and Stronger Communities)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Lucy Nethsingha (Chair and CCN lead)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Alan Connett (National Lead Peer)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Heather Kidd (Whip)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Carl Cashman (Inclusive Growth)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Amanda Hopgood (Children and Young People)*	Y	Y	Y	Y
Wendy Taylor (Health and Well Being)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Victor Chamberlain (Neighbourhoods)	Apologies	Apologies	Apologies	Apologies
Darryl Smalley (Culture, Tourism and Sport)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Caroline Leaver (Public Sector Reform and Innovation)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Carolyn Lambert (Fire Services)	Apologies	Apologies	Apologies	Apologies
Keith House (Economy and Resources)	Y	Apologies	Y	Y
Howard Sykes (Local Partnerships)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Flo Clucas (CEMR)	Apologies	Apologies	Y	Y

	<b>05/03/26</b>	<b>18/05/26</b> (Emergency meeting)
Joe Harris (Leader)	Y	Y
Bridget Smith (Deputy Leader and DCN lead)	Y	Y
Ryan Priest (Safer and Stronger Communities)	Y	Y
Lucy Nethsingha (Chair and CCN lead)	Y	Y
Alan Connett (National Lead Peer)	Y	Apologies
Heather Kidd (Whip)	Y	Apologies
Carl Cashman (Inclusive Growth)	Apologies	Y
Amanda Hopgood (Children and Young People)*	Y	Y
Wendy Taylor (Health and Well Being)	Y	Y
Victor Chamberlain (Neighbourhoods)	Y	Y
Darryl Smalley (Culture, Tourism and Sport)	Y	Y
Caroline Leaver (Public Sector Reform and Innovation)	Y	Y
Carolyn Lambert (Fire Services)	Apologies	Apologies
Keith House (Economy and Resources)	Y	Y
Howard Sykes (Local Partnerships)	Y	Y
Flo Clucas (CEMR)	Y	Y
Tim Pickstone (Improvement)	Y	Y

# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## Inclusive Growth Committee

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### Councillor Carl Cashman



#### Introduction

Having been elected to this board during its previous iteration as the City Regions Board, I feel a deep responsibility toward our colleagues in urban areas. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge our stagnation in these areas during the last set of elections; I want to reassure

my colleagues in these parts of the country that I am actively holding conversations regarding this issue.

Our party has a significant opportunity in local government, but we must win in urban areas to fully realise that potential. Our focus remains on ensuring that growth strategies effectively address the needs of both urban centres and the rural communities we represent.

#### Key Policy Interventions

##### 1. Housing and Development

Our contributions focused on unlocking delivery and ensuring local accountability:

- We advocated for bringing empty homes back into use, increasing land availability, and establishing sustainable Housing Revenue Accounts.
- We pushed for targeted Compulsory Purchase Order and land assembly powers to address banked, unbuilt land that hinders local delivery.
- To mitigate the risks of institutional investors ignoring local needs, we proposed an institutional investor roundtable to define “minimum social covenants” for public land disposals.
- We championed flexible ownership models – including rent-to-buy, community land trusts and pushing the FCA for interventions to support first-time buyers.
- In our engagement with Homes England, we remained skeptical of regional models, noting that councils carry statutory housing targets whereas mayors do not.

## 2. Protecting Local Planning

We have actively called out government intervention in local plans. During a meeting I chaired, Liberal Democrat members and representatives from all other parties pushed back against these interventions, despite Labour board members attempting to defend the government's position.

## 3. Transport and Connectivity

We emphasized that transport within rural communities must be a primary focus.

We advocated for improved connectivity outside of London and the devolution of parking fine limits.

## 4. Devolution and Local Empowerment

In our engagement with ministers, we prioritized the empowerment of local authorities:

- We questioned how the government intends to empower councils in areas that reject mayoral models.
- We demanded concrete steps to simplify and un-ringfence funding to stop councils from competing for multiple, fragmented grants.
- We pressed for a resolution to the lack of inter-departmental coordination that continues to stifle local growth.

## Looking ahead

Our work in the coming year will continue to champion councils as active market shapers and delivery partners rather than mere consenters. We will maintain our pressure for “place-based” approaches that prioritise local authority expertise over rigid, top-down structures, ensuring that economic growth translates into improved living standards for all our residents.

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**Liberal Democrats retained the leadership of Hull City Council**

# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## Culture, Tourism and Sport Committee

### Councillor Darryl Smalley



The past year on CTS has been busy, productive and frustrating probably in equal measure. As a committee we have focused on influencing policy as it evolves under the Government's various CTS-related reviews and consultations, and building stronger relationships with stakeholders who share our commitment to these policy areas. I'm pleased to say that in

this work, the policy positions taken by the CTS Committee are invariably Liberal Democrat party policy.

I'd especially like to thank past members Liz Green and Rob Pritchard (substitute). Liz's past leadership of the committee is fondly remembered and led to real change in how CTS now operates and its policy positions. Rob was a very active member of the Lib Dem CTS team and was delivering great work in cabinet in Hull. It is thanks to Rob that the next CTS Conference will be in Hull, looking at the great work Rob and his fellow Liberal Democrats are achieving there. Recently we have welcomed Cllr Stephen O'Brien and Councillor Robert Dongsung Kim (substitute), and thanks to Cllr Elizabeth Scott who continues to bring her energy and expertise.

### Successes

The LGA's response to the **Overnight Visitor Levy Consultation** and the LGA's response to the Government's response to the **Arts Council England Independent Review** both reflect what we Lib Dems have been pushing for. Key differences remain between the LGA's position and the Governments however recent ministerial correspondence appears to show this detailed work is leading to shifts in the Government's position.

Following the public disorder in August 2024, the Committee and LGA commissioned work to understand and promote the role of sport, arts and culture in supporting community cohesion. I'm delighted that this work was published in December 2025 and has been well received.

The CTS Conference in Bradford last year was a success and planning already underway for the 2027 Conference in Hull. I had the pleasure of chairing a workshop on the visitor economy. Do look out for details of the 2027 Conference, it would be great to see as many Lib Dem colleagues there as possible.

The weekly DCMS/DSIT parliamentary team meetings are very useful, as the subject matter often reflect our own CTS interests. As an example, I recently questioned SkyUK's Head of Public Affairs on how councils' could help them use more of our towns and cities for UK-based filming.

## Challenges

As a committee we have still not had the opportunity to meet with Sec of State Lisa Nandy. This has caused frustration amongst all members of CTS.

I have a concern, shared by Lib Dem colleagues, that CTS often struggles to translate our clear policy positions into tangible lobbying efforts. This is not the fault of the excellent support we receive as a committee, but likely instead reflects limited resources at the LGA. Nonetheless we will continue pushing this.

I'm always available if anyone has any questions or would like further details. Please email me at [darrylsmalley@gmail.com](mailto:darrylsmalley@gmail.com).



## Lib Dems won 12 seats on Sunderland City Council

# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## Health and Social Care Committee

### Councillor Wendy Taylor



I was surprised to find myself the Chair of the LGA Health and Social Care committee last year, but have greatly enjoyed the role.

#### **Adult Social Care**

There has been some progress as regards adult social care reform. The LGA has held a number of events and housed an online platform for comments under the name “Care where we live” The results are being collected into a report to go to the LGA conference in July with the aim of making sure the Casey Commission fully considers the role of local Government. There is cross party consensus on the need for a well-paid care work force with good opportunities for career progression, for local Government to continue to co-ordinate care and for national standards. The LGA has welcomed the Fair Pay Agreement which should give care staff better pay and conditions, but there remains concern that local Government is not included in the negotiating body. There is also cross-party agreement on the need to move funding of social care away from Council Tax, but no consensus on an alternative funding mechanism.

I was delighted to open and close the annual National Children and Adult Social Care Conference in November and also chaired the plenary session with Stephen Kinnock. We also had an excellent meeting of Liberal Democrat leaders, cabinet members and spokespeople at the conference and shared ideas.

## Public Health

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill has now been passed, but it is important that the necessary secondary legislation is passed as soon as possible. This includes licensing for tobacco and vape sales and a possible ban on some flavouring of vapes. The flavours not only increase the attractiveness of the products to children but some flavour ingredients have been shown to cause damage to the lungs. There is also legislation on banning smoking and vaping near children's play areas and I have supported the LGA in calling for any ban to include privately owned play areas. I have also supported the need for councils to be fully re-imbursed for any extra enforcement costs.

We have raised concerns about the poor level of childhood vaccination in the UK, which led to an outbreak of measles in London.

## Update on Health Reform

The 10-year plan for health at present seems too NHS dominated and there is concern about the reduction of local Government representation on integrated care boards. There is also concern about ensuring that neighbourhood health is based on genuine neighbourhoods and not NHS localities. We have been pushing for services to be provided in local facilities such as community centres, libraries and family hubs, rather than building shiny new centres.

## Other activity

I have attended several meetings of the Health Devolution Commission discussing issues such as social care reform, violence against women and girls, maximising the health and care of children and women and putting physical and mental 'public health and wellbeing' at the centre of national and devolved policy and practice.

The Health and Wellbeing Committee had a good discussion about mental health at the April meeting with good cross-party consensus. We also raised concern about the decision to scrap Healthwatch England and local Healthwatch and agreed to call for an independent patient voice to be maintained.

I attended a meeting to discuss the new armed services covenant.

I'd like to thank everyone in the Lib Dem office team who have helped me with my new role.

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# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## LGA Neighbourhoods Committee

### Councillor Victor Chamberlain



This year marked the first full year of the new LGA Neighbourhoods Committee, bringing together a wide range of policy areas that directly shape the quality, sustainability and safety of local communities across the country. The Committee's remit covers climate change mitigation and adaptation, street scene, waste and recycling, licensing, environment and

biodiversity, flooding and coastal erosion, and air quality.

A significant focus throughout the year was climate change and local resilience. The Committee led work exploring whether councils should have new statutory duties relating to climate mitigation, climate adaptation and nature recovery. Following extensive consultation with councils and stakeholders, there was strong support for a clearer statutory role for local government but critically, members consistently argued this must be accompanied by long-term funding, resources and flexibility from government. The Committee also strengthened the LGA's work on flooding resilience, coastal erosion and climate adaptation, recognising the growing pressures councils face from extreme weather and environmental change.

The Committee also undertook major work on waste and recycling reform, including simpler recycling, extended producer responsibility, deposit return schemes and future flexible plastics requirements. Members consistently pressed for practical implementation, local flexibility and adequate funding for councils to deliver these reforms successfully.

Licensing and public safety formed another key area of work. The Committee considered government proposals on taxi licensing reform following Baroness Casey's review into child sexual exploitation. Members supported stronger national minimum standards and safeguarding measures whilst recognising the operational and economic challenges around ending out-of-area licensing entirely.

During the year the Committee also formally expanded its remit to include air quality, reflecting increasing concerns around public health, environmental inequality and urban resilience.

I would like to thank my Liberal Democrat colleagues on the Committee for their hard work and support throughout the year: Cllr Hayleigh Gascoigne (Vale of White Horse), Cllr Paula Widdowson (York) and substitute member Cllr Alexander Ehmann (Richmond). Particular congratulations goes to Paula on her appointment to the Canal & River Trust Council on behalf of the LGA. I would also like to thank the LGA Liberal Democrat Group Office for all of their support throughout the year.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the Committee's work, please feel free to get in touch: [victor.chamberlain@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:victor.chamberlain@southwark.gov.uk).

# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## Improvement Committee

### Councillor Tim Pickstone



#### Overview

The Improvement Committee oversees sector-led improvement across local government – the work that helps councils help themselves, through peer challenges, leadership development, workforce programmes and assurance frameworks. In addition, myself and the four other Lead Members serve on the IDeA

Board, which holds oversight of improvement funding and performance across all sector support activity.

#### The year in context

This has been a year of significant change. Following the welcome abolition of OFLOG by the incoming Labour Government, there seems to be a greater recognition of sector-led improvement for local government. Unfortunately, the budget previously allocated to OFLOG has not followed across to the LGA.

The funding settlement for the core improvement grant (the HCLG Improvement Grant) has been maintained for 2026-27, but on a flat cash basis. We have pushed hard for additional funding around Local Government Reorganisation and devolution, where demand on the LGA's support capacity is growing sharply, and remain hopeful of some additional resource in those areas. The LGA has also been successful in securing contract income – alone and with partners – in related sectors such as social care, planning and fire.

The combination of demand pressures (LGR, devolution, financial challenge and more changes of control) have come at the same time as needing to make financial savings as costs rise faster than income. Some limited savings have been identified in the work programme, including a capped charging arrangement for some senior officer development courses.

## **What the Committee has been doing**

Since October 2025 the Committee has agreed delivery priorities for the year, focussed on peer challenge, governance, finance, leadership and workforce. We have received regular communications updates on sector support activity, including the Sector Support Offer 2025/26 which saw record engagement, and have monitored the LGA's Future Operating Model to ensure contracted improvement work is protected. Working Groups are currently undertaking a review of the Member Peer programme and preparing for the Innovation Zone at the LGA Conference.

## **The LGA Offer**

Please do make the most of the LGA's improvement offer. As Liberal Democrat run or led councils we can take advantage of specialist officer support, officer training, resources and the cross-cutting assessment that a Corporate Peer Challenge can give. As individual councillors we can take advantage of a wide range of training and development opportunities as well as direct access to information and support.

## **Our Liberal Democrat Team**

My thanks to my fellow Liberal Democrats on the Committee, Cllrs Mike Evely and Lucy Nethsingha, our substitute member Cllr Roger Hayes, and our National Peer Cllr Alan Connett

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# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## Children, Young People and Families Committee

### Councillor Amanda Hopgood



This year saw major changes to the Children, Young Peoples and Families committee for the LGA and I have had the honour of being its Chair since September. Before giving a snapshot of just some of the work we have done, I would like to thank those who I have been lucky enough to work alongside over the past few months, Gerald Vernon Jackson, Jane

Carr and our super sub who attended all meetings Dine Romero to ensure continuity should we need it. We have also had the marvellous support of our LGA staff in particular Colin Ross who has been our rock.

2025/26 saw the long awaited albeit delayed arrival of SEND reform, something that the sector and colleagues have been calling for, for decades. We have a system that is not only broken but out of date, that is costly and underperforming for everyone, the most important of which are the people who need it. The bill in general was well received but as is quite often the case it throws up as many questions as it answers. The consultation as I write this is just closing and it is important now that government listens to the experts who will deliver these reforms along with the users and makes the changes necessary to make delivery successful. In terms of the Home to School Transport deficits and the decision to write off 90 per cent of that debt for local authorities the LGA continue to lobby for 100 per cent write off as even at 10 per cent some of the figures are eye-watering.

The committees' other priorities this year were:

#### **Early years**

The committee continued to focus on ensuring that councils are the strategic leaders in early years systems, have the tools and resources to do this effectively and ensure they are central in conversations of a transformed early years system. This needs a holistic approach across the system, including health and community services (such as children's centres and family hubs), to ensure all children get the best start in life.

## **Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill**

That the committee continues to lobby during the passage of the Bill and supports the implementation of the new legislation alongside the wider programme of children’s social care reform in the context of local government reorganisation and devolution.

## **Children’s placements**

That the committee continues to prioritise placements for children in care, including consideration of how councils and health services can work more effectively together to support children in care, and how children are supported in other arrangements where they cannot live with their birth parents including adoption and kinship care.

## **Children and Young People’s Mental Health**

That the committee continues to lobby on our Task and Finish Group’s recommendations, including a cross-government plan for children’s mental health and a cross-government task and finish group to bring together relevant government departments and partners to deliver concerted action. This should be accompanied by immediate investment into early intervention and prevention that can have a positive impact on improving and preventing poor mental health.

It was also extremely pleasing that following a cross-party agreement by the committee last year led by Gerald for the abolition of the two-child benefit cap that this came into force and was indeed abolished by government.

As a committee we have introduced and piloted a new way of working and reporting for LGA committees, with a simple update for people to read, we are hopeful that this will assist new members as they join committees to quickly get up to speed with the programme of work but also just as importantly produce a mechanism to assess the success of the reports and recommendations we make. Once a report has been written and submitted to government that was quite often the last, we heard of it, this new system will make regular progress updates and the impact of our work be monitored and assessed to demonstrate the value that the LGA brings.

During this year on top of what feels like hundreds of press releases that I have signed off and interviews I have done.

I have had the privilege to represent this committee and as such the LGA at a round table event in the House of Lords for care leavers, given evidence on home to school transport at a parliamentary select committee, opened the NCASC conference in Bournemouth with Cllr Wendy Taylor, Chaired the National Centre for Family Hubs conference in London, Attended the UK Care Leavers Conference in London, took part in Radio 4's Women's Hour, chaired the Children's Improvement Board, and attended and participated in IET meetings chaired by the Secretary of State for Education.

Regular meetings are also held between myself, as Chair of the committee, with the LGA chair and other government ministers, along with Education and Children's team meetings with our own parliamentary spokespeople.

I would once again like to say special thanks to all members of our team as without their support we could not have had the opportunities that we have had to make a difference for children, young people and families.

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# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## Public Service Reform and Innovation Committee

Councillor Caroline Leaver



This annual report outlines the activities and strategic impact of the Local Government Association's (LGA) Public Service Reform and Innovation (PSR&I) Committee for the 2025/26 municipal year.

### Overview and Governance

The PSR&I Committee was established following a restructure of the LGA's board system to streamline policy activity. The Committee was initially chaired by Cllr Dan Swords (Con, Harlow) who was replaced by Cllr Richard Clewer (Con, Wiltshire). The committee is responsible for leading policy development in several critical areas, including devolution, digital transformation, and the future of local government. Central themes include:

- **Devolution and Reorganisation** – supporting the implementation of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill to ensure local leaders retain meaningful decision-making powers. Lead Members met regularly to review and support officer work on policy development and specific amendments to the Bill, with Lib Dems leading on calls for fiscal devolution and greater local accountability within Mayoral Authorities. LDs supported successful engagement with ministers to ensure the “right to request” additional powers remained central to the Devolution Bill. Our repeated raising of the issues for rural authorities surrounding local government reorganisation and devolution has resulted in agreement to look in more detail at devolution in rural areas.
- **Place-Based Budgeting** – advocating for more flexible, locally controlled funding streams to sustain preventative services and drive long-term reform.

- **Neighbourhood Governance** – promoting “neighbourhood area committees” as a model for community empowerment, while seeking government funding to standardise these structures without straining existing budgets, particularly in rural areas.
- **Digital and AI Innovation** – managing the LGA’s Digital Capabilities programme to help councils harness AI and improve data security and maturity.

## Future work

The upcoming reform of the NHS and other public service partners, including red light services, will be a key focus for the coming year, along with continuing work on rural LGR and devolution and digital transformation.

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# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## Resources Committee

### Councillor Keith House



The Resources Committee leads for the LGA on a range of financial issues for local government: pay, terms and conditions, overall finance, workforce and welfare reform.

The Lib Dem team last year included three members, and I am very grateful for the experience and insightful commentary from

Michael Headley and Mark Jeffery.

Much of the Committee's work has been business as usual: handling pay negotiations through National Employers, lobbying government on funding, and understanding the mess that is the broken audit system. There has been progress on some of these issues, less so with others, but delay and prevarication remain the underlying theme.

Audit has seen real progress, albeit with a route that further undermines local decision-making and accountability. Audit problems date back into the last government with increased regulation and unnecessary demands ("please provide the asset value of your roads") arising from poor private sector audits and a need for transparency to protect company shareholders. The system remains so broken it will take years to recover, with increased cost and many hundreds of disclaimed audits. The new Local Audit Office, a quango rather like the Audit Commission, is being established taking over from local government-led and owned PSAA next April. With change, looser regulation may allow a catch up and end to disclaimed audits after a period. The new system will cost more, with little prospect of this being centrally funded.

Pay has been a major challenge over the last year, and is again this year. Increases in the National Minimum Wage (NMW) continue to put pressure on lower pay points and upwards on pay bands. Last year's pay offer to the unions of 3.2 per cent was accepted rather more speedily than many expected. This year, an increase slightly higher at 3.3 per cent, has been offered by National Employers. Reaction from unions has not been positive, so we should not expect an early settlement. A rescaling of pay bands is needed to cope with the NMW: this is a major piece of work that is likely to be undermined by the current round of economic and political instability.

Last year's Spending Review created mixed results, as expected. There is no evidence of the end to austerity, and no sign that local government reorganisation will deliver genuine financial viability without either new funding, removed responsibility or a big increase in Council Tax. The writing-off of 90 per cent of DSG deficits accrued up to and including 2025/26 is a benefit though one that potentially stores up more future issues not least as 10 per cent of a lot is still, well, a lot.

Over the coming year we can expect to see further pressure on benefits and broader welfare. Securing a united view across the LGA will be increasingly hard to achieve with the wider politics.

Finally, to record my thanks to our team at the LGA in Smith Square, who have given us fulsome support on the Board in a year of increasing complexity not least with the change in government.

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# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## **Safer and Stronger Communities Committee**

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### **Councillor Ryan Priest**



The Safer and Stronger Communities Committee has overseen a significant programme of work during 2025/26, supporting councils through a period of major change across policing, community safety, cohesion and local governance. Liberal Democrat members consistently argued for stronger democratic accountability, properly funded prevention work

and practical support for councils facing increasing pressures.

A key theme throughout the year was ensuring that national reforms recognised the realities facing local government and did not place additional burdens on councils without sufficient funding or flexibility.

### **Community Cohesion and Extremism**

The Committee prioritised work on community cohesion and resilience in response to growing concerns around extremism, misinformation and social division. Members considered new cohesion guidance intended to help councils strengthen resilience within communities and respond more effectively to local tensions.

Liberal Democrat members emphasised the importance of locally led approaches built around trust, practical engagement and strong community relationships. The Committee also approved work on guidance relating to Islamist extremism, highlighting the need for careful language, engagement with affected communities and recognition of growing concerns around antisemitism and online radicalisation.

## Violence Against Women and Girls

One of the Committee's major areas of work this year was the **Government's new Freedom from Violence and Abuse Strategy**, which aims to halve violence against women and girls over the next decade.

The Committee welcomed the stronger emphasis on prevention and early intervention, while recognising the pressures councils already face across safeguarding, housing and community safety services. Liberal Democrat members argued strongly that prevention work must be properly funded and locally driven if the strategy is to succeed.

Members also questioned whether funding announcements represented genuinely new investment or simply the repackaging of existing budgets. The Committee stressed that councils cannot deliver increasingly ambitious national priorities through fragmented or short-term funding arrangements.

## Police governance and public safety

The Committee spent considerable time examining proposals to abolish Police and Crime Commissioners and replace them with new Police and Crime Boards. Members considered the implications for democratic accountability and scrutiny.

Liberal Democrat members consistently argued that any new arrangements must strengthen rather than weaken local democratic oversight, with robust scrutiny and clear accountability to local communities. Members also raised concerns about reforms transferring additional responsibilities onto councils without corresponding funding.

The Committee also undertook substantial work on CCTV, biometrics and facial recognition technology. Members recognised the role these technologies can play in reducing crime and antisocial behaviour, while stressing the importance of safeguards, public trust and democratic oversight.

## **Councillor standards and democratic participation**

The Committee engaged extensively with proposals to reform the councillor standards framework. Members supported reforms that improved consistency and fairness while protecting democratic debate and preventing politically motivated complaints.

The Committee also considered proposals to restore councillor access to the Local Government Pension Scheme. Liberal Democrat members supported the principle that people from a wider range of backgrounds should be able to serve in local government without facing financial barriers, recognising that pensions could help improve diversity and democratic participation.

At the same time, members raised concerns that local government risks moving towards treating councillors as professionalised council employees rather than democratically elected representatives. While councillors should be properly supported, members agreed that further work is needed to strike the right balance and preserve the distinct constitutional role of elected members.

## **Security and resilience**

The Committee received confidential briefings during the year on councils' role in protective security and resilience planning.

This has been a busy and wide-ranging year for the Committee. Liberal Democrat members have continued to argue for stronger local accountability, properly funded prevention work and a community-led approach to public safety and cohesion. I would like to thank Committee members and officers and the fantastic team in our political group office for their work and support throughout the year.

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# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## Fire and Rescue

### Councillor Carolyn Lambert



There has been a significant change in the profile of the Fire and Rescue Service within the LGA with the establishment of a new committee to represent the sector: the Fire and Rescue Authority Committee. The increased visibility this gives the sector is welcome during what has been, and will continue to be, another year of turbulent change.

Liberal Democrat councillors on FRAC continue to push for a strong voice for Fire and Rescue in the changing environment of local authority reorganisation. We are continuing to lobby for ring-fenced funding for Fire and Rescue, and for funding for the critical non-statutory work we undertake, such as helping to deal with the increased incidents of flooding, assisting the police to deal with road traffic incidents by extracting passengers from crashed vehicles, and extracting people from buildings on behalf of the ambulance service. In particular, the sector has had no capital funding for the last few years which has left many services in a near impossible situation to find the investment needed to bring Fire Stations up to a standard that meets the needs of our staff, including enabling us to increase diversity among our fire fighters.

This year's Fire Conference was held in Manchester and was, as always, educational and informative, offering good networking opportunities. The Fire Minister, Dame Diana Johnson DBE MP attended but was unfortunately unable to take questions. We do however still have access to the Minister through the Ministerial Advisory Group attended by the Chair of FRAC.

As always, thanks are due not only to my supportive colleagues on FRAC but also to the LGA officers who support the Committee. They are small in number but mighty in impact! I want to give a particular mention to Cllr Roger Price who has spent an incredible 55 years as a councillor including many of those years on the Fire Authority and on the various iterations of Fire Committees at the LGA. Have a happy and well-deserved retirement Roger!

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# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## Liberal Democrat retained peers

### Councillor Alan Connett



#### LGA Member Peers, Peer work and assignments

Over the year, Liberal Democrat Member Peers have undertaken a total of 169 assignments (including Change of Control). In addition to those delivered, there were a further two which did not go ahead (Cambridgeshire CPC and Wirral Planning Mentoring), six where a non-

Liberal Democrat Member Peer was selected and one where an Officer was selected (as opposed to a Member Peer). One was postponed until after the local elections.

We put forward a shortlist of Member Peers for assignments with the decision made by the host authority. In the past year, we have used 74 different Member Peers for these assignments and at least 112 different Member Peers have been shortlisted.

Of the assignments, 33 were CPCs or CPC Progress Reviews, there were some other Peer Challenges – including two Highways Challenges, two Planning Challenges and one Housing Challenge. There were 78 mentoring assignments.

Other notable types of were 14 planning committee training/reviews and 10 were LGR related.

#### Member Peers

We currently have 118 Liberal Democrat Member Peers. Of these:

at least 55 have attended recent Peer Mentoring training and some 48 have attended Corporate Peer Challenge training.

## LGA member development

It was a very good year for Liberal Democrats taking up the LGA in house courses such as the Leadership Academy and Leadership Essentials. In total, 175 Liberal Democrat councillors attended LGA courses, which was the second-best attendance level of any of the LGA Groups.

## Post election 'change of control' support for Liberal Democrat council groups

We again prepared well in advance for the May elections in both 2025 and this year. We extended our offer for 2026 by providing a volunteer 'Change of Control Ambassador' to link with each of our Council and Group leaders, so they had a central point of contact leading up to the elections and in the important days afterwards.

The three Retained Member Peers provide a wide range of support for our council groups and Leaders across the country and ensure the hugely supportive LGA 'change of control' package of support to councillors finding themselves running councils, is in place very quickly.

We are especially grateful to the volunteers who take on the role of 'ambassador' for change of control/change of circumstances. They provide greatly valued early contact, help and guidance and a vital link with the Lead Peers and Group Office.

## Peer assignments and mentoring

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

Email [colin.ross@local.gov.uk](mailto:colin.ross@local.gov.uk) for an application form. **Do it now!**

## Help and support throughout the year

The Retained Member Peers help and support Liberal Democrat Groups on local authorities in LGA membership. Our support includes, facilitated events for Groups, future-planning for the council, putting that planning into reality, group issues, general advice and arranging mentoring.

Contact points

### **Cllr Alan Connett**

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### **Cllr Howard Sykes**

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### **Cllr Sarah Butikofer**

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Thank you

My thanks to the LGA Group Officers, Joe Harris, Bridget Smith, Lucy Nethsingha, Amanda Hopgood and Heather Kidd, their support over the year. I also want to particularly thank Sarah, Howard and the Group Office (Terry, Rob and Colin), along with all our Member Peers and ALDC for their great help and support. Also, to the LGA Principal Advisors and the Improvement Team.

Councillor Alan Connett

# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and International

### Councillor Flo Clucas



I am the Liberal Democrat English LGA representative at the Council of European Municipalities and Regions. This body represents some 41 European nations and about 1 million councillors! I was re-elected Chair of the Standing Committee for Equality of Women and Men, earlier this year. I am also a member of the Leadership Committee, Policy Committee and

attend the Housing Task Group.

It is an opportunity to speak truth to power and propose effective change that will encompass all of Europe, not just the EU.

I have attended, and been invited to speak at a range of meetings:

#### UN

The 70th meeting, in New York, of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, where, in my speech, I raised issues related to local democracy, social media and intimidation of local politicians and candidates and the impact on women standing for election.

It has been really useful to be able to speak about councils and LGA help, advice and assistance to all councillors who may have been affected.

In a private meeting the EU Commissioner met European representatives and, having met two parents whose children died as a result of social media activity, I raised the issue of social media, addictive algorithms and impact on children and young people.

She agreed to look at this at EU level.

## Meetings

I also attended and spoke at the Hungarian Mayors' meeting; Climate Impact meeting; Policy Committee meetings; Standing Committee on Equality of Women and Men; Leadership meetings.

## Housing

The Housing Task Group is looking at a range of topics and I have suggested that training for skills, finance of new and retrofitting of homes should be looked at within the next round of EU Cohesion Policy through the MFF. All European countries – not just EU countries – are having similar problems in this area.

## Official EU UK meetings

The EU UK Contact Group - Parliamentary and Local representatives met in London and in Brussels and LGA representatives attended. Closer cooperation was a significant topic, as was the issue of local and regional authorities having formal recognition. The Committee of the Regions is very supportive of that happening. The UK government will need to agree it with the Commission.

Hopefully that will happen!

Finally, LGA Officers working in Brussels have been very supportive and have been very helpful. My thanks to them.

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# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## County Councils Network

### Councillor Lucy Nethsingha



It has been a busy and strange year at CCN.

The 2025 elections left the Conservatives as the largest party at CCN, but by a far narrower margin than at any time in the past, with Reform jumping to become second largest party. The Conservatives only held onto largest party due to the elections in Surrey, Hampshire, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk having been cancelled. Throughout the year it has been fairly clear that both the Conservatives and Reform were expecting Reform to be the largest party should elections in those County areas take place this year.

Labour, Green and Independent group were all reduced significantly. There is an expectation that Labour may not have enough councillors at CCN authorities to form a group following the 2026 elections. I am writing this in the week before the elections, so may be able to update before this report is published, although CCN are sometimes a bit slow in calculating the numbers.

Along with the changing political landscape, CCN has also been much absorbed by local government re-organisation (LGR), somewhat to the irritation of the significant number of large unitaries, who are not affected by LGR. CCNs position on LGR has not changed significantly over the year, but there has been a new press protocol which has meant statements from CCN have to be agreed by Lead Members.

While this hasn't always worked as it should, it has toned down some of the CCN commentary, (had the new protocol not been introduced there would have been even stronger statements on the process). CCN has always been in favour of larger unitaries. While I am aware this has been annoying to some Lib Dems, there are valid reasons for concern over the disaggregation of social care services, and concerns over this are shared by many Lib Dems on CCN.

While much time has been taken up with discussions on LGR, CCN has also been working on other areas for lobbying and increasing awareness. The key area this year has been SEND reform.

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# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## Local Councils Network

### Councillor Bridget Smith



The DCN has become the LCN in order to be ready for Local Council Reorganisation. It already has a number of unitary councils amongst its membership and hopes to attract many more in the coming months. Please do talk to me if you are a county councillor who would like to know more.

Following the elections there are now some Reform District Councillors. We do not yet know what they are going to do as far as forming a district group is concerned but it seems that the Conservatives will keep the chair with Lib Dems in second place and Labour in third.

This will be my last annual report for the LCN (DCN) as I have served my full term and I will be handing over to a new Lib Dem Vice Chair this summer. It has been one of the most enjoyable and rewarding roles I have ever had. The LCN has always succeeded in being politics blind, has always attracted really nice and clever people and has an officer team of the very highest calibre.

LCN has got through a massive workload in the past year, acting fast and effectively to deal with even unforeseen political situations and events. Huge numbers of members attend the regular webinars and this year's conference was a sell out and the biggest to date. Members have given evidence at a large number of parliamentary committees and are always well received.

LGR has obviously been the biggest topic and the credit for the government doing an about turn on their intention for all Unitary Councils to be over 500,000 is down to LCN without a doubt.

Similar, on the Devolution Bill, we lobbied hard and successfully for government not to be able to direct the establishment of a strategic authority or to provide directly for a mayor of an existing non mayoral authority without local council approval.

Additionally, there was some movement on the government's insistence of Leader/ Cabinet models over committees such that there will be flexibility for moving from the committee system where 'there is already a clear path to devolution'. and change would be of little benefit.

The King's Speech has given us a lot to think about and we have already run one webinar on the detail and will be publishing our summary very soon.

I hope that my successor enjoys themselves as much as I have.

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# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## Local Partnerships

### Councillor Howard Sykes MBE



Local Partnerships is an in-house public sector delivery partner jointly owned by the Local Government Association, HM Treasury, and the Welsh Government.

It is the bridge between central government policy and local delivery, by providing expert advice, practical resources and hands on support across areas such as housing delivery, energy, devolution, local government reorganisation, transformation and zero waste.

I am the Liberal Democrat member on the Board and the longest serving. At this time of great change and very ambitious growth plans this is very important and it is a mistake that other groups keep chopping and changing their members.

Local Partnerships ended the 2025/26 financial year with revenue of £14.1m, its best performance to date, representing an increase of £1.5m (approximately 12 per cent) year on year. It also delivered a surplus in line with annual Board requirements. This growth reflects its ability to expand its support and deliver increased value and effectiveness for the public sector.

Notable successes this year include:

- Local Government Reorganisation: A free webinar series providing practical support on navigating LGR reached 1,265 registrations, alongside 886 downloads of tools and resources. Hands-on support has also helped four councils work through the implications of reorganisation in their areas.
- Support for council housebuilding: CHoSS is an MHCLG initiative delivered by the LGA with on-the-ground support from Local Partnerships. It provides fully funded, tailored advice and practical tools to boost delivery. Since its launch, CHoSS has helped councils across England unlock stalled projects, strengthen business cases and build confidence in delivery.
- Energy efficiency: Projects delivered through the Re:fit framework, now in its fifth iteration and co-owned by Local Partnerships, are generating £34.7m in annual energy cost savings.

During 2025/26, Local Partnerships provided direct support to several Liberal Democrat controlled councils. This is alongside wider support to no overall control councils and cross-cutting national programmes benefiting authorities across the country.

Project examples include:

<b>Council</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Bath & Northeast Somerset	Commercial programme support	Improved contract management and value for money
Lewes	Solar farm support	Enabling delivery of local energy infrastructure
Wokingham	Energy and infrastructure support	Strengthening long term service planning
Eastbourne	Housing delivery support	Increasing housing supply
Winchester	National housing programme (CHoSS)	Strengthening council housebuilding capability

For the current financial year, Local Partnerships will focus on securing more long-term nationally funded mandates from national government with a particular focus on supporting housing delivery and local government reorganisation.

To better support the public sector in priority areas, Local Partnerships has recently evolved its structure to establish nine Practice Areas: Housing Delivery, Devolution and Circular Economy, LGR and Transformation, Zero Waste, Energy, Regeneration, Environment, Transport & Infrastructure and Complex Contracting.

Please don't hesitate to contact me for more information on the excellent work of Local Partnerships and how they could help you.

For further detail on what Local Partnerships does and how it can help your council, please visit the website: [localpartnerships.gov.uk](http://localpartnerships.gov.uk) .

Local Partnerships maintains an active presence at the LGA Conference, so do pop by the stand to find out more!

You can also contact me anytime: [cllrhowardsykes@gmail.com](mailto:cllrhowardsykes@gmail.com)

# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC)

### Councillor Alan Connett



The Committee has overall responsibility for monitoring the integrity of the financial statements of the LGA and the companies under its control (the “LGA Group”), and for overseeing their internal control and risk management systems.

Alongside that, the Committee also reports annually to the General Assembly on the LGA Group, and to the individual company boards on specific issues. The next annual report is presented to the LGA General Assembly in July this year (2026).

I was appointed to the Committee from 1st September 2025, succeeding Cllr Paul Smith (Colchester). I am grateful to Paul and, previously, Cllr Howard Sykes, for their stewardship on behalf of the Group.

Most recently, the Committee has been considering the Reserves policy for the LGA and IDeA as part of the Board’s wider financial health-review of the organisation.

Current committee membership is:

Cllr Alan Connett – Liberal Democrat – Devon County Council

Cllr Bella Sankey (chair) – Labour Brighton & Hove City Council

Cllr Abi Brown OBE – Conservative – Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Cllr Patricia Anne Mary Dale – Independent – Northumberland County Council

Cllr Luke Parker Reform UK – Lancashire County Council

For more information about the remit of the Committee

<https://lga.moderngov.co.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=165>

[alan.connett@btinternet.com](mailto:alan.connett@btinternet.com)

# LEAD MEMBER REPORT

## Finance and Performance Committee

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### Councillor Bridget Smith



The Finance and Performance committee has met four times since June 2025. I have chaired the committee consisting of all parties including Reform. It was set up in response to the corporate peer review of the LGA and with hindsight should have been in place years ago. It provides oversight and assurance on all things financial and of performance. This includes

ensuring that the MTFS matches the Future Operating Model (we don't know that it does) and the performance of the LGA assets which have very complex ownership and operating models. It has had a massive workload under huge time constraints throughout the year.

Each meeting it is required to produce a three As report for the Board of Directors indicating how it would Alert, Advise and Assure the company regarding its affairs. We have had excellent officer support throughout the year and have generally had board support for our concerns. The exception was our recommendation that fees were increased this year. Initially the leadership refused to let the whole board debate this but after robust pushback from all of the committee this was achieved and all bar 1 Tory agreed to a 2 per cent increase.

Other matters that have been and in many cases continue to be under consideration are:

- projected Budget concerns in short and longer term
- the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy
- the roll out of the Transformation Fund which includes the major IT project to update security and digital services,
- the ongoing uncertainty regarding 26/27 Budget introduced by the as yet incomplete Future Operating Model
- the operation of cash flow affected by repairs required to the LGA building and possible costs for staff restructure
- the way that LGR both presents extra resource requirement on the LGA and is likely to reduce income.
- ongoing legal concerns regarding Leyden House
- the need to maximise income, reorganise the accommodation in Smith Square and acquire new tenants

I wish my successor in this role the best – it is far from an easy ride!

[cllr.bridgetsmith@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.bridgetsmith@scambs.gov.uk)

# The LGA Liberal Democrat Group Office

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

We currently have three full-time members of staff. Terry Stacy, the Head of Office, Rob Banks, Political Advisor, and Colin Ross, Political Officer. Rob and Terry both have experience as Liberal Democrat Councillors and Colin was previously Head of Office for the Liberal Democrat Mayor of Bedford Borough, Dave Hodgson.

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

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

We also use Bluesky [@libdemlocalgov.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/libdemlocalgov.bsky.social); or follow us on 'x' at [@libdemlocalgov](https://twitter.com/libdemlocalgov), on LinkedIn at [LGA Liberal Democrat Group](https://www.linkedin.com/company/lga-liberal-democrat-group), and on Instagram at [LGALibDems](https://www.instagram.com/LGALibDems).

# The LGA Liberal Democrat Group Office



## **Terry Stacy MBE**

Head of the Group Office [terry.stacy@local.gov.uk](mailto:terry.stacy@local.gov.uk)

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



## **Rob Banks**

Political Adviser [rob.banks@local.gov.uk](mailto:rob.banks@local.gov.uk)

Rob provides support for: Local Infrastructure and Net Zero; Community Wellbeing including Adult Social Care; People and Places; and Rob supports the weekly councillor email bulletins, the regular council leader calls and helps co-ordinate the group's presence at party and LGA conferences.



## **Colin Ross**

Political Officer [colin.ross@local.gov.uk](mailto:colin.ross@local.gov.uk)

Colin provides support for Children and Young People and supports the group's presence on social media. He co-ordinates the work for Local Government Improvement and the Liberal Democrat Group's peer support work.



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