

2013 report & review





Foreword

The last year has been one of important advancements for Labour in local government. Despite the Government's scorched earth approach to local government, social security and public services, the reputation of Labour in local government continues to grow.

The return of Labour's Local Government Conference in February was one of the highlights of our political year. After a seven year absence, five hundred councillors gathered in Nottingham on a cold Saturday in February and showed through their ideas, energy and optimism just what the Labour Party has been missing. The last time there was a local government conference there were no local government speakers on the platform; this time the vast majority of speakers were from local government, allowing the conference to feel more like a genuine dialogue between Labour's front bench and our councillors.

We took forward our mission for more localism in the Labour Party through our well-received pamphlet One Nation Localism. Jon Cruddas' speech in June showed we are on the right track when he announced that Labour's policy review "will push power downwards and build a new kind of state."

As we look towards the 2015 General Election, our purpose is to make sure Labour's next manifesto is committed to localism. The achievements of our councillors shows what Labour is capable of delivering when we are in power. The grassroots activity of our councillors is keeping Labour rooted in communities across the country. And the innovation of our councillors is setting the blueprint for the future of public services. We look forward to supporting the local government taskforce Ed Miliband set up at the National Policy Forum in June.

We have established important relationships to play our role in influencing Labour's national policies by working with Jack Dromey on the Housing Innovation Network, Harriet Harman on the Creative Councils Network, Toby Perkins on the Labour Councillors' Business Network, Andy Burnham on the role of local government in delivering whole person care and many others.

The Government's attacks on the most vulnerable mean that social security continues to be a key battleground. Our campaign to kill the Bedroom Tax began to take shape in early June, when we met in Manchester to establish a plan for how Labour councils can work together to make sure that Labour is committed to dismantling this unfair policy, and to set out a clear set of principles to protect the victims of the tax that Labour councils can sign up to.

We have developed our capacity to help our councillors share ideas through our new website, our new Facebook page and our increased efforts on Twitter.

Victories in Derbyshire, Cumbria, Lancashire and Nottinghamshire have rebuilt our base in County Councils. Doncaster and North Tyneside have given Labour our first women Mayors.

Our office team has also changed, Nathan Yeowell moved on after seven years of service and Martin Angus, an experienced Labour campaigner, joined our small team.

These are just some of the highlights of an event-filled year. We know that the year ahead will present us with bigger challenges than Labour local government has ever faced: the summer spending review; the impact of social services changes; and the continued economic rut. So we need to plan big, to be ambitious about the next Labour manifesto, and to continue our commitment to Labour councils and councillors.

We must be clear in what we need from a potentially Labour-led LGA and unrelenting in standing up to the Government and forces of centralism.



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Message from The Leader of the Labour Party



Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP

A lot has changed in the last year. Earlier this year we saw the first Labour Local Government Conference in seven years which I had the privilege of addressing. Over 500 local councillors from across the country gathered together for an incredibly lively discussion and debate.

I know from some of my conversations with you there that the scale of the challenges you are all facing is enormous. But I was also struck by the innovation and drive for delivering the best that you can for your residents in a world of tighter resources. I'm pleased to say we will be holding another Labour Local Government conference next year in conjunction with the LGA Labour group.

In May we gained 291 more Labour councillors serving our communities and we took control of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire county councils. I want to thank every one of you who worked so hard to campaign in May's elections. This is a solid foundation to build on for 2014, when I hope we will take back control of the LGA, and for the general election in 2015.

One thing which has certainly not changed over the past year, is the importance of the LGA itself, raising issues, lobbying hard against some of the measures this Conservative-led government are bringing in which damage our communities. I'd like to thank David Sparks and Ann Lucas for their continued leadership and commitment to the LGA Labour group and the wider local government community.

Power at local level is an opportunity to show people that we have different priorities to this government and the difference Labour can make, even from opposition. That is true of the councillors in Brandon and Basildon training a team of residents to speak to their neighbours to find out what elderly residents want from their council. It is true of Ipswich and Liverpool councils pledging



to build hundreds of new homes. It is true of York, setting up an annual business conference and working to improve employment opportunities for local residents. It is true of the many Labour councils now paying all their employees the Living Wage. Across this country, Labour councillors are showing people how our party is on the side of working people. We are working to turn our values into practical results.

Because in the end, that is what One Nation Labour is all about – making sure that we put the right values back into our town halls and into government in Westminster. It is about making sure that every single person has a stake, that prosperity is fairly shared, and that we protect our common life and the institutions which express it. If we carry on showing the difference Labour councils can make, if we work hard, and if we stay united, we can put those values back where they belong – at the heart of our national life as a country.



Message from the Shadow Local Government Secretary



Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP

It's been another tough year for our communities. The economy is bumping along the bottom and neither George Osborne nor David Cameron have any credible answers. The biggest cuts have continued to be unfairly inflicted on the most deprived local areas. And changes to benefits – in particular the shameful Bedroom Tax and Pickles' poll tax – are hitting the very poorest households and undermining family life and a sense of community.

But there are also signs of hope. Over the past 12 months I have had the chance to meet with Labour groups in control and in opposition, and I continue to be struck by the quiet determination with which all of you are working hard to mitigate the damage being done by this out-of-touch government and to show why Labour values make a difference.

Whether it's implementing the Living Wage, schemes to bring household energy bills down, promoting apprenticeships, building social housing, or attracting new investment into local high streets and communities, you should be proud of what you are doing. As Ed Miliband has often said, if you want to know what a Labour Government will do, then look at Labour in local government.

And that's why we had good election results in May, taking back Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire and making inroads all over the country – including in the East, South East and South West. We even took Witney Central, right in the heart of the Prime Minister's constituency!

But we have much still to do, not least to get across to those voters who feel alienated from the political process and the established parties. As you know better than anyone else, the answer is to get out there, listen and respond to people's concerns. The way we win trust is to show people that we are with them, that we aren't helpless, and that we will use the opportunity of being in government to make a difference. That's why I am passionate about localism. We can't afford to carry on doing things in the way we did before. People want to feel that they can shape their lives where they live, and strong local communities and strong local government are the best way to do this. This is what the Policy Review is working on; for more information and to encourage party members to join in the debate, visit www.yourbritain.org.uk.

Two years before the next general election, and a year before crucial local and European elections in which we will look to make further gains across the country, our job is to show that we are relentlessly focussed on what matters to people. Keeping living costs down and as Ed says, if necessary, legislating to stop energy companies and others ripping off Britain. Showing that it is Labour that will help to build the homes we need and improve standards in the private rented sector. And ensuring we are creating a different future by giving people more power to shape their communities and build their local economy.

Finally, on behalf of Jack, Roberta, Helen, Chris, Bill, Jeremy, Paul, Karl and the whole team, I want to thank you for everything you do – the hours you put in, the work you do for the people you represent and your determination to show that Labour politics does change things for the better. It really is appreciated – keep it up!



Message from the Leader of the LGA Labour Group



Cllr David Sparks (Dudley)

Three years into this Tory-led Government, the financial cuts and political attacks from those who inhabit the corridors of Whitehall are relentless. Councils continue to take the brunt of austerity – cuts to our budgets are now 33 per cent overall, with the poorest areas hit the hardest. The low regard in which the Tory high command views councillors was evident with Shapps' infamous comments likening our work to that of volunteer scoutmasters.

While his department seeks to sap the lifeblood out of our communities, Pickles continues to meddle in the day-to-day affairs of councils – issuing constant edicts on bins, how councils communicate with their residents, whatever seems to take his fancy.

In the face of this, Labour councils are showing their mettle. The cuts have been severe, but Labour councils are striking a realistic balance – standing up for their communities, setting balanced budgets and finding new ways to deliver for people. It is not easy, and there will of course be tensions but by working with our residents, trade unions, the voluntary sector and local businesses we are showing that local leadership is what counts.

The LGA Labour Group makes sure we represent the voice and interests of our councillors in everything we do. We have worked closely with the Labour frontbench in Parliament to provide information and intelligence as they make their case nationally about the damage the Government is doing and the potential for Labour in power.

This year we saw the return of the local government conference to its rightful home with the Labour Party. That we held such a successful conference of 500 councillors and MPs sharing platforms and the audience is testament to the strength of our renewed relationship between local and national politicians. Our One Nation Localism report, launched at the conference, set the tone for a positive event highlighting the good work of Labour councils, what lessons Labour nationally can learn and why localism matters to the left. As we build towards 2015 we would like to see a future Labour government committed to proper devolution to local authorities in England, just as the previous Labour Government granted more powers to Wales and Scotland.

At the LGA itself our members work hard to ensure that although not the largest party (a position we hope to change next May), our concerns are advocated. As the board reports show (see pages 14-17) your Labour members are working to represent the interests of Labour councils across all policy areas. The LGA itself has been building up the pressure on the Government with last year's "Graph of Doom" highlighting the funding gap councils are facing, and increasing pressure this year on the unsustainability of council finances. The battle continues but we are fighting hard.

The local election results attest to the strength of Labour's appeal locally: Labour candidates put in a good performance, starting from the very low base from the 2009 elections. We took back the key counties of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire and the mayoralities of North Tyneside and Doncaster. Beyond that Labour is now represented in every English county – having made significant gains across the country including in traditional "Tory heartland" areas like Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire.

I would like to end by thanking you all for your hard work this past year. The reason we all came into politics is to represent our communities and to improve our public services – now has never been a more important time to have so many passionate and committed Labour councillors. Your hard work makes all the difference to people in these tough times, and we will continue to ensure our Labour values are put into practice despite the odds.



The LGA Labour Group



Executive Team 2012-13

Leadership team:

Cllr David Sparks (Dudley)

Leader of the Labour Group and Vice-chair of the LGA

Cllr Sharon Taylor (Stevenage and Hertfordshire)

Deputy Leader of the Labour Group, Chair of the Finance Panel and Labour Lead on Districts Councils Network

Mayor Sir Steve Bullock (Lewisham)

Deputy Leader of the Labour Group and Chair of the Workforce Board

Cllr Bryony Rudkin (Ipswich and Suffolk)

Chief Whip of the Labour Group and Labour National Lead Member Peer for England

Cllr Ann Lucas (Coventry)

Chair of the Labour Group, Deputy-Chair of the Urban Commission and Urban Commission Steering Committee

Cllr Simon Henig (Durham)

Vice-Chair of the Labour Group and Vice-Chair of the Culture, Tourism & Sport Board

Cllr Tim Moore (Liverpool)

Deputy Whip of the Labour Group

Regional Representatives:

East Midlands:

Cllr Caitlin Bisknell (High Peak)

Eastern:

Cllr Judi Billing (North Hertfordshire)

London:

Cllr Catherine West (Islington)

North East:

Cllr Paul Watson (Sunderland)

North West:

Cllr Jim McMahon (Oldham)

and Deputy Chair of the Resources Panel

South East:

Cllr Colin Lloyd (Crawley)

South West:

Cllr Helen Holland (Bristol)

Wales:

Cllr David Phillips (Swansea)

West Midlands:

Cllr Roger Lawrence (Wolverhampton)

Yorkshire and Humberside:

Cllr James Alexander (York)

LGA Board and Panel Representatives:

Cllr John Merry (Salford)

Vice-Chair of the Children & Young People Board

Cllr Linda Thomas (Bolton)

Deputy-Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Board

Cllr Peter Box (Wakefield)

Chair of the Economy & Transport Board

Cllr Clyde Loakes (Waltham Forest)

Vice-Chair of the Environment & Housing Board

Cllr Dave Wilcox (Derbyshire)

Chair of the European & International Board and Lead on County Councils Network

Cllr Ruth Cadbury (Hounslow)

Deputy-Chair of the Improvement & Innovation Board

Cllr Mehboob Khan (Kirklees)

Chair of the Safer & Stronger Communities Board and Deputy Chair of the LGA

Cllr Ian Swithenbank (Northumberland)

Chair of the Audit Committee

Cllr Graham Chapman (Nottingham)

Labour Lead on Local Partnerships

Cllr Sian Timoney (Luton)

Vice-Chair of the Fire Services Management Committee and Fire Commission

Lord Peter Smith (Wigan)

Labour Lead on Local Government Leadership

Cllr Eion Watts (Bolsover)

Vice-Chair of the Rural Commission and Rural Policy Review Group





The return of Local Government Conference



This year saw the return of Labour's local government conference after seven years. For a whole weekend in February over 500 Labour councillors, MPs and activists met in Nottingham to discuss priorities for Labour local government. Ed Milliband gave the keynote speech, and participants

also heard from Harriet Harman, Hilary Benn, Jon Cruddas, Chuka Umunna, Stephen Twigg, Liam Byrne, Jack Dromey and Angela Eagle. Plenary sessions were combined with policy workshops so that councillors had lots of opportunities to feed their views and experiences into the Labour

policy-making process. A number of training sessions focussed on practical political skills and partners such as Hope Not Hate, the Co-op Party, Unison, GMB and Progress. The conference was such a success that the Labour Party will be organising another next Spring that will be bigger and better.

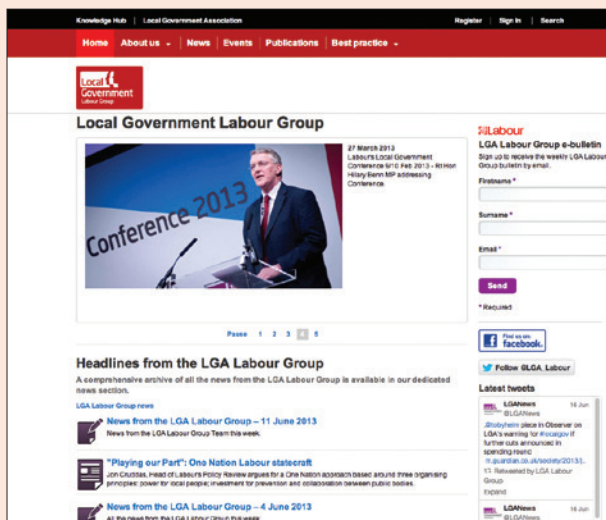


One Nation Localism report

The LGA Labour Group published One Nation Localism: How Labour councils are delivering fairness in tough times earlier this year. The report was based on evidence of best practice collected from Labour councils and interviews with 24 Labour leaders and mayors. It argued that the innovation coming from Labour councils charts a new 'Labour localism' which is developing new ways to deliver on our social justice goals against the financial odds. Using examples and case studies it argued that Labour nationally needs to recognise the value of localism and commit to a genuine programme of devolution to local authorities in England including legislative and financial reforms.

New website launched

The LGA Labour Group launched a new website earlier this year, which you can visit at lgaLabour.local.gov.uk. For the first time the weekly bulletins are all online and you can sign up to receive them. There is a new best practice section with details of innovative approaches from Labour councils across different policy and service delivery areas. The site is also linked up to Twitter (@LGA_Labour) and Facebook (/LGALabourGroup) profiles for instant updates – which are building followers and ‘likes’ daily. All these platforms are being used to showcase news and developments from Labour councils, to spread ideas and good practice and better link people up.



Bedroom Tax Summit

Representatives from 36 Labour councils and groups held a special summit at Manchester Town Hall in June to discuss the damage being caused by the government’s Bedroom Tax. Labour councillors expressed their serious concerns about families being forced to leave their homes, people getting into negative debt cycles, more people being forced into private rented accommodation – forcing benefit bills up – and the impact on local economies. The councils agreed to keep the issue on the agenda, raise the profile of the unfair tax locally and work with the national party to gather evidence about the costs and effects of the tax. The participating councils also agreed to work with housing organisations on a set of interventions to support residents who get into financial difficulty as a result of the government’s changes to housing benefit. They will continue to work together to share information and advice, and campaign to protect residents and overturn this policy.

Goodbye to Steve, welcome to Steve

The departure of Steve Reed to contest the Croydon North parliamentary seat for Labour left a vacancy in the LGA Labour Group leadership team for Deputy Leader. All Labour councillors were invited to self-nominate for the position in January 2013 and there were six candidates: Simon Blackburn (Blackpool); Steve Bullock (Lewisham); Nick Forbes (Newcastle); Tony Howard (East Lindsey); Tom Ross (Trafford); Chris Shaw (North East Lincolnshire). The election campaign period included a hustings at Labour’s Local Government Conference. Steve Bullock won the contest on second preferences and is new Deputy Leader of the LGA Labour Group alongside Sharon Taylor.






Local elections analysis

This year showed Labour making solid progress throughout the 35 authorities (mainly counties) with elections. Overall Labour made a net gain of 291 councillors from the 2009 results. In the counties Labour took control of Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lancashire and Northumberland and there is a Labour Leader of the coalitions leading Cumbria and Norfolk. The Tories lost control of six other county authorities to no overall control. In Durham, Labour made 24 gains to reach a total of 94 of the 126 councillors, and becoming the largest Labour Group in the country.

Labour also made solid progress in the key general election battleground areas in the South taking seven of the eight seats in Hastings, five out of six in Stevenage, as well as gains in Harlow, Crawley and Ipswich.

Labour is now the largest group on Bristol City Council. The two mayoral elections were also won by Labour: North Tyneside (from an incumbent Conservative) and Doncaster (from an English Democrat). Doncaster’s Ros Jones and North Tyneside’s Norma Redfearn are Labour’s first women Mayors.

Overall it was a bad set of results for the Conservatives with a net loss of 338 seats many to Labour as well as some to UKIP. The Liberal Democrats also fared badly with a net loss of 122 Councillors.

Results summary	Seats	Councils
Conservative 	-338	-11
Labour 	+291	+2
Lib Dem 	-122	0
Other	+169	0
No overall control	–	+9



Winning in Derbyshire



The County Council elections in May saw a landslide victory for Labour in Derbyshire. With a majority of 22, we now hold two-thirds of the council seats. From Glossop to Swadlincote, from Dronfield to Wirksworth, the political map of Derbyshire turned from blue to red. We have won seats in the Tory heartlands and almost eliminated the Lib Dems from Chesterfield.

I have been fighting elections for the past 20 years, but never before have I been approached by so many people who wanted me to know how badly government and council cuts were affecting them and their families. The Derbyshire results show what can happen when there is huge dissatisfaction with government, anger about cuts to local services and a positive Labour campaign.

Our campaign was a long one. We dusted ourselves down after the defeat in 2009 and resolved to be an active opposition, not fighting every single cut but defending the services that really mattered to people. So, for example, after the two bad winters at the beginning and end of 2010, when the Tories cut £1m from the winter maintenance budget, we ran a high profile campaign pointing out the dangers that would surely arise in subsequent winters. We supported young people to campaign against proposals to close down the county youth service which forced a massive U-turn.

In parallel to opposing cuts, we began in 2011 to plan our alternative vision for Derbyshire which ultimately became our manifesto. We held public events for young people and older people to listen to what was important to them and to establish the type of services they valued. This gave us the confidence to run a positive election campaign based on our values and principles which reflected back what people had told us was important to them.

So what did we campaign on? We started by re-affirming an obvious but often overlooked truth which is that the council exists to serve the needs of the people of Derbyshire and not the needs of the organisation itself. We considered what those needs were; the increasing pressures building on individuals, families



and communities from rising food and energy prices, the fear of unemployment especially for young people, the growth of food banks and the impact of the bedroom tax and other benefits changes.

This grew into a vision for Derbyshire's future – a place with a thriving economy, where hard work is rewarded and our children have a bright future; a place where people feel safe and supported; a place where all are valued and all feel that their voice is heard. Firm pledges were made to introduce the Living Wage and to develop a better apprenticeship scheme, to defend the NHS and tackle health inequalities, to re-invest in council-run services that are highly valued.

In a county the size of Derbyshire, covering nine constituency parties, it is impossible to run a centralised campaign. But although there were nine campaigning styles there was a single consistent message.

The challenge now is to deliver on the promises we made. The first few weeks have been intense, as we get to grips with budgets and changing the direction of travel. But whenever there is a tough decision to be made we return to our manifesto, built on solid principles and a clear vision and so far, it is guiding us well.





The drive for growth



When we talk of growth we talk of inward investment, economic development and jobs – three areas of the economy in which local councils play a central role.

Councils are facing unprecedented change – massive funding cuts coupled with unparalleled pressure upon services. However, there is strong evidence portraying local government as the most efficient area within the public sector and the best at adapting to meet local needs.

The only barrier remaining to the delivery of transformational growth by councils is Governmental red tape. As the work of the Commission on the Future of Local Government showed, the restraints placed on local government activity are impeding the Government's own policies to stimulate economic growth. Greater freedom and autonomy is required to enable councils to fulfil their potential as local drivers for growth.

Local government has the history and ambition to meet the challenges facing the varied communities they represent and democratically accountable local and regional leadership will be pivotal to rebalancing the national economy. Through innovative investment, City Deals and campaigns to tackle unemployment, councils can become the catalysts to economic recovery and sustainability. In my view, local government should shout louder about being the best conduit through which growth can be stimulated and sustained.

In Leeds we are working hard to deliver services tailored to meet local needs through effective partnership arrangements. The growing influence of the LEP and Leeds City Region has shown that partnership working is key to transformation. Through our City Deal and major development projects, we have experience of local empowerment – we know it works.

We are proud of our work. The Leeds Apprenticeship Training Agency, established in partnership with Leeds City College, helps businesses to take on apprentices by removing much of the associated bureaucracy. The First Direct Arena, opening in July, is already attracting the top names in entertainment and is expected to bring £24m to the Leeds economy each year. The Victoria Gate development, with the John Lewis flagship store, will attract 10 to 15 million visitors annually – a fantastic opportunity for £12.3m to be invested into the adjacent Kirkgate Market to ensure its sustainable future. Alongside these is Trinity Leeds (pictured). With 120 businesses and 3,000 jobs it will prove a catalyst for other developments and initiatives. We are also looking to invest in our local district centres to encourage micro-economies across Leeds.

Unemployment is an extremely concerning issue in our communities. Local authorities are best-placed to address this as they know their labour market – such knowledge is priceless when determining how to focus services. Under the nationally-procured Devolved Youth Contract, Leeds City Council was given the freedom to locally design and commission activity for young people aged 16 and 17 who are no longer in education, employment or training. Since the start of the local programme in September 2012, 250 young people have been engaged and 1,110 participants will be supported over the next three years.

Local ambition is being curtailed by national bureaucracy. This is why Leeds is calling for greater devolution of support, particularly in the areas of jobs and skills. It is time to rethink the relationship between local and national government and move towards an equal partnership. Local government needs autonomy, freedom and power to deliver the economic success that our cities deserve.



Community co-operation



Oldham has embarked on an ambitious programme of social and economic regeneration, underpinned by a new co-operative ethos. Gone are the days of the municipal council doing things to its residents. Instead, we are supporting communities to recognise their own strengths and working with them towards a shared vision for the town.

Central to this is our drive to become more accountable, more relevant, and more outward-focussed. When we opened up Full Council last February, live-streaming via webcam and encouraging Twitter interaction, we received more questions in one meeting than in the previous 5 years combined. Community appetite to engage with us was there all along, we just had to change our ways of working to make the most of it.

Our approach of co-operation extends to everyone who lives and works here, all doing their bit and all benefiting. This is championed through the devolution of more power and decision making to communities through District Town Halls with neighbourhood teams embedded within them, and supported by our 'Love Where You Live' campaign which encourages each and every resident to realise that they are a valued stakeholder in the future of the borough.

But devolutionary process is in itself no silver bullet. We knew the risk of creating merely another inward-facing committee system was very real unless ward councillors were ready and able to take on new responsibilities. That's why for the past year all councillors have been attending a tailored Local Leaders course, with six modules covering essential areas such as finance, planning, and working with communities. Councillors are not accredited unless they attend at least half, and failure bars them from using their ward budgets.

As well as developing the skills and talents of our existing councillors, we are supporting our leaders of the future with the country's first local Labour Apprentice Scheme. Our first

cohort of a dozen young people from across the borough have begun a year of activity that includes attending lessons and council events, getting involved in canvassing, shadowing Councillors, and working with our MPs' teams. Many are already involved in community work that aligns with our values, but the apprenticeship is showing them how they might be able to harness their existing enthusiasm in new and challenging ways within a Labour setting.

This has added to a diverse range of over 1,200 apprenticeships currently on offer in Oldham, part of a menu of work-related opportunities which we are currently expanding in co-operation with the public and private organisations in the town. We want to ensure that our young people have the skills and opportunities to be at the heart of the borough's future, working to reap the rewards of our £100 million capital investment programme.

We hope to nurture our apprentices' talents so that they might one day emulate the successes of our three current youngest councillors, who this year won the LGIU's Young Councillor of the Year Award. They have played an important role in leading our fairness campaigns, galvanizing the support and activity of the community to work towards better outcomes for everyone. Our Fair Energy campaign began in Oldham and later stretched across Greater Manchester to use the collective buying power of over 70,000 residents to secure average savings of between £120 and £170 per household. Our Fair Fares campaign saw similar success with the council working with transport providers to reduce the cost of a weekly bus ticket in Oldham by 30% (and again subsequently rolling out across Greater Manchester).

Genuine co-operation with our residents is beginning to trigger meaningful action on the issues that they have told us matter most to them, but our work is far from complete. We are currently taking our devolution work forward in new ways to ensure that the council's structures and priorities better reflect those of the communities it serves. We have achieved a lot in the past year, but with the combined effort of our whole community, we are capable of much more in the year to come.

CLlr Catherine West, Leader of Islington London Borough Council



Creating a fairer borough



In 2010 we created The Islington Fairness Commission with Professor Richard Wilkinson in an attempt to explore the role that local leadership can play in closing the gaps that divide us. In Islington the wealthiest fifth of our households have a yearly income of more than £60,000, the poorest fifth earn less than £15,000. We wanted to examine those inequalities and produce practical ideas for reducing them, even in the current financial climate.

After a year-long listening exercise in which over 500 local residents, businesses, voluntary sector organisations and unions took part, the Commission came up with 19 radical yet realistic recommendations to make Islington a fairer place.

Many of the Commission's recommendations were about addressing income inequality, helping people into work and ensuring everyone receives a fair wage. Others tackle problems with housing overcrowding or health inequalities. What they all have in common is that they aim to reduce poverty and inequality in the areas that matter most to people's lives and make Islington a fairer place for everyone who lives and works here.

Three years since the start of the project, what difference has it made?

Last year we became one of the first councils in the country to earn living wage employer accreditation. Not only do we now pay all our directly contracted staff the London Living Wage, but so do 80% of our contractors. We're working to get the remaining 20% to do the same by the end of 2014 - including adult social care where for too long people doing vital work caring for our loved ones have struggled on poverty pay.

By reducing our chief executive's salary by £50,000, we've taken tough action on top pay and reduced our pay ratio to 1:10.4

(down from 1:14 in 2010). We knew that if we were serious about lecturing other organisations we needed to lead by example.

We've also looked at what we can do locally to help young people into employment. In February 2012 we passed our youth employment strategy with the aim of ensuring that by 2015 all Islington's young people aged 16 to 18 would be in education, employment or training and that youth unemployment would be below 1000 for those aged 19-24.

To achieve this we've introduced a student bursaries scheme of £300 per year to help Islington students from low income families continue studying past 16. We're also working to increase the number of local apprenticeships in partnership with local businesses - and doing what we can ourselves. Our new Junior Assistants Programme, which offers up to eight hours paid work a week for 14 to 16 year olds living on estates in the borough with high unemployment is just one example.

However, our number one priority is tackling the housing crisis. Creating a fairer borough means making sure families on low incomes have homes that are decent, secure and affordable. We're keeping social rents and secure tenancies for our council homes and are the only London borough using our planning policy and land ownership to reject the Tory-led government's 'Affordable Rent' model. We're also building new homes and are on target for 2,000 genuinely affordable new homes by 2015, our biggest affordable house building programme for 30 years.

The commission's recommendations are at the heart of our decision making process and shape everything we do as a council. For us 'fairness in tough times' is about tackling poverty and reducing inequality where it matters most.

I'm delighted that other councils have already established Fairness Commissions in their local areas and hope this is the start of many more. To find out more about Islington Fairness Commission, visit: www.islington.gov.uk/fairness





Board reports



**Cllr John Merry
(Salford)**

Children & Young People

The Labour Group on the Children's Board has continued to play a constructive role within the LGA and to engage with the front bench. Where necessary we have made clear our differences with the Conservative leadership of the LGA – for example when I appeared on BBC Breakfast to talk about Education Secretary Gove's mishandling of the school building programme.

At the highly successful Labour local government conference we succeeded in obtaining a commitment from Shadow Education Secretary Stephen Twigg to reinstate a measure of accountability for academies to local government. We look forward to working on the detail of the policy in the next 12 months.

We organised a session at the National Children and Adult Social Care Conference, which was an opportunity for Labour lead members to question LGA Board members and the Parliamentary front bench team and for them to hear about front line experiences.

Many lead members were angry about the bullying tactics employed by Gove in the furtherance of his ambition to take every school out of local accountability. It is also clear that many Conservative and Lib Dem lead members share this anger and we have sought to make common cause with them as appropriate. As a result the Board has become a united voice for local accountability.

We have met with Labour members of the Education Select Committee and agreed to coordinate activity and to provide information to aid their work. We would like to thank Jessica Studdert for her unceasing work on behalf of the group. We would also like to express our regret that Jude Robinson who provided a unique insight from Cornwall did not get re-elected in the county council elections and thank her for her contribution to the work of the board this year.



**Cllr Linda Thomas
(Bolton)**

Community Wellbeing

Adult social care is in crisis and time is running out. The steep demographic rise in the elderly population, coupled with draconian government cuts to local

authorities' controllable budgets, means that within a few years councils delivering social care will have insufficient resources to meet even statutory demand.

Hence the LGA has placed this as a key priority to lobby government. The LGA's much publicised Graph of Doom – its name reminiscent of a Harry Potter novel but just as effective – evidences the issue. The government's response is that we take funding from local NHS budgets. No new money, just recycle another overstretched budget in the public sector. Par for the course!

We cannot wait for another Labour government to address the unfairness of the coalition's approach. Labour councils are actively seeking through community budget pilots to develop integrated health and social care models whereby the acute sector, GPs, CCGs and local authorities pool their health, adult social care and public health monies creating a "health pound" for their area. The goal is the reduction of frail elderly patients often with dementia occupying expensive hospital beds but being supported more appropriately in the community. Savings to the acute sector will be redistributed to deliver this outcome and there will be the ability to invest in improvements and gaps in the provision. If Labour authorities can achieve this we will have positive examples for the party to demonstrate that Labour councils do offer a credible local alternative to this government's austerity measures.

This approach steered by the new health and wellbeing boards will help but we need as a party to decide our election priority for caring for our most vulnerable elderly and disabled citizens and their army of unpaid carers. Our system would have collapsed years ago without this voluntary support which makes up a sizable portion of our voters and we ignore them at our peril.



**Cllr Simon Henig
(Durham)**

Culture, Tourism & Sport

The areas of culture, tourism and sport remain a great challenge for local authorities at a time of unprecedented funding cuts. Funding pressures have been exacerbated by the abolition of Regional Development Agencies and School Sports Partnerships, while the unfair map of spending cuts has put a massive strain on Labour councils across the country. In the face of such great pressures, the record of our councils and councillors in continuing to deliver services for the public, while protecting the advances made under the last Labour government, has been outstanding.

We have joined forces with our parliamentary front bench team, led by Shadow Secretary of State for Culture Harriet Harman MP and ably assisted by Shadow Libraries Minister Dan Jarvis MP in establishing a Creative Councils Network, bringing together Labour councillors from across the country to discuss how best to respond to the government cuts. A number of successful meetings and workshops have been held during the year, including a very positive meeting with arts groups in London. It is vital that we continue to work with partner bodies as we communicate the message that it is national, not local, government which bears responsibility for the current cuts.

Can I thank all of my fellow board members for their hard work, Cllrs Caitlin Bisknell (High Peak), Simon Blackburn (Blackpool), Sonia Crisp (City of York), David Phillips (Swansea) and Veronica Ward (Southwark). We also held a successful group meeting as part of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport conference in Chester, while the support of the LGA Labour group office has, as always, been unstinting and is greatly appreciated.



Cllr Peter Box (Wakefield) Economy & Transport

As chair of the Economy and Transport Board, in the last year, I have continued to focus on promoting what more council and their partners can do to drive economic growth and job creation in their areas. Some important achievements have included:

- The announcement that 20 more areas have been given the green light to negotiate City Deals – which is a great sign that ministers are listening to the LGA's call for more funding and powers to be devolved to local areas.
- The positive response to the messages in the LGA's 'Hidden Talents' campaign to improve support for youth unemployment through the devolution of budgets for skills.
- The LGA's strong partnership with councils' communications teams to make sure the great work councils were doing to combat inclement weather was widely reported in the national media.
- The return of £330 million of road maintenance – which was a very positive response to LGA lobbying, as were the proposals to devolve greater responsibilities for transport and EU funds.
- The LGA's successful series of Town Hall Summits. I have now travelled the length and breadth of the country and met with scores of local authority leaders and partners in business, education and other agencies about what the role of the council is in promoting economic recovery and local employment.

I've strongly argued Labour's case for local investment to help create growth and jobs and have contributed to the work of shadow ministers in preparing an economic growth policy review paper and a submission to Labour's independent Skills Taskforce.



Cllr Clyde Loakes (Waltham Forest) Environment & Housing

It's been a very busy and challenging year!

We've been at the forefront of leading the response to the Growth & Infrastructure Bill (now Act). It has been apparent that the LGA Tories were equally as angry and anxious as we were, but it took Labour leadership on the Board to ensure challenge and opposition was put down by the LGA, leading to a lobby and mobilisation of Parliamentarians. However the subsequent legislation is a bitter blow for local government and clearly doesn't reflect the government's rhetoric on 'localism'.

We should not let our residents forget it is this government that has allowed 'urban blight' with its increase in residential permitted development, with barely a reference to councils' planning departments. Offices can now be converted to residential use without recourse to CIL or Section 106 requirements which would fund the required community infrastructure to support new residents. And there has been a "relaxing" of class usage for 'pop up' fast food, betting and loan shark shops: cheers Eric – that's exactly what our residents have been calling for!

On waste the Labour Board team forced the LGA and DEFRA to fight the Judicial Review on 'co-mingling collections' to the bitter end – to ensure local decision making on how our bins are emptied. Our victory was a great result for Labour localism – if we can't even decide locally how our bins are emptied, what would be the point of localism!

Subsequently Labour instigated the LGA Waste Review to fill the shocking gap and dearth of ideas in DEFRA and to get in front of the CLG domination of this agenda. We hope the recommendations will be radical and bold, with quick wins thrown in for good measure.

On housing we have continued to make the case and with the support of the shadow front bench team, win the arguments, but it is clear this Government just doesn't get the role housing plays in the 'growth' agenda or in the social and community fabric of our communities.

Disappointment with DECC continues. The components of the Green Deal look increasingly complex and poorly targeted, leading to poor levels of take up – as we said at the time of its conception! We hope the new 'Memorandum of Understanding' with DECC – that we have led the negotiations on – leads to better outcomes on this agenda.

I'd like to thank my team for their fantastic performances this year.



**Cllr Dave Wilcox
(Derbyshire)**
European
& International

Sharing laughter round the kitchen table has always been important in my life. When my daughter (now County Councillor Ellie Wilcox) was 10, she sought reaction from the gathering with a new joke.

"What's the difference between a catfish and a lawyer?" she asked. The answer, which depended on careful articulation, was that one is a bottom dwelling scum sucker, and the other is a fish.

When it comes to Europe there's a similar question, "What's the difference between Germany, Holland, Denmark and Britain?"

Answer. Unlike Britain, the rest have high standards of living and see EU employment rights as a positive advantage rather than a burden on their economies.

Understanding other countries gives us ammunition to challenge the myriad of prejudices that characterize the traditional straight jacket of UK domestic policy. Although our European and International Board agenda encompasses worldwide governance practice, Europe has permanently topped the menu of important items in 2012/13.

Structural Funding is being re-negotiated for 2014 to 2020. The money available and the distribution formulae will affect our job creating capacity. So much for this year.

Next year, Labour's carte du jour will include fighting UKIP. Let's not underestimate the task. Last weekend I showed someone the damage snails had done to my pear tree. "We didn't have them until the French started importing soil into England," she confidently confided to me.

For desert we'll exploit Tory discomfort over Europe. Crumble springs to mind as first choice, but Eton Mess is probably even more apposite.



**Cllr Sharon Taylor
(Stevenage)**
Finance
Panel

It took many years of nagging to persuade the LGA that we need a Panel dedicated to local government finance and developing the strategy to ensure we can make an effective case with a sound evidence base.

Following the successful launch at last year's LGA Conference of the document showing the increasing gap in funding growing to £16bn by 2020, the Finance Panel commenced in September 2012 and has hit the ground running. We started straight away lobbying in advance of the local government settlement and responding to it when it arrived (very late) at the end of December.

We have been working intensively on welfare reform and the LGA's unique ability to provide evidence backed up by experience from councils is giving real weight to these discussions. We have been very concerned that Government has not considered the cumulative impact of the various welfare reforms on people, communities or council finances and we have commissioned a piece of research to look at this. We are also working on the design of a framework for the role of councils in delivering universal credit, on the basis that councils should be helping to design this rather than having something imposed on us that we may not like.

Our response to the challenge of the Spending Review set out the impact on our joint working across major government departments and provided an illustration through a fictional 'Anycouncil' document which showed how the further cuts being proposed would lead to devastating cuts to frontline services. This makes it quite clear that further cuts in funding drastically reduces the ability of local government to contribute to economic growth. Importantly, for the first time, our response to SR talks about the distributional issues in local government funding which mean the areas who need funding the most have had the biggest cuts.

My thanks go to Catherine West and Steve Houghton who have worked with me on the Finance Panel. At this most challenging time for local government when we are increasingly left to pick up the pieces for our communities, I am pleased we have a clear voice on these crucial funding issues.



**Cllr Ruth Cadbury
(Hounslow)**
Improvement
& Innovation

Local Government is the most efficient part of the public sector, but is under increasing pressure from the government's funding cuts. Labour authorities are actively involved in all of the various programmes of the Improvement and Innovation Board, and provide the best examples of successful adaptation to the challenges thrown down by the Government.

The productivity programme supports a range of initiatives where councils learn from each other in "doing better, with less". These include the Commissioning Academy, Future Councils, Shared services, Procurement and Capital Assets and sharing services. The Creative Councils Programme highlighted work in high performing Labour councils like Wigan and the "Rotherham Ready" programme.

Many Labour authorities have taken advantage of the range of Sector-led improvement services such as the free Corporate Peer Challenge. This has been effective in supporting council leaderships to address their challenges in a creative way, and Labour members support the publication of the completed review reports. The Change of Control offer has been well-used by new Labour council leaders and cabinets who are allocated a peer and five days free support to use as they wish.

We are leading the work to adapt the leadership offer of the LGA to ensure the range of development opportunities for leading councillors is coherent, and relevant to their needs.

On Transparency, Labour members have been central to the LGA work influencing DCLG on open data publication and sharing. This has helped to challenge central government rhetoric on “un-burdening” local government and to discover much more about the weak evidence basis for some of their policies.

It is good to see so many Labour authorities featuring among the winners of awards such as “Fighting Fraud” and the “Best Councils to do business with” (focussing on SMEs).

We work closely with Children’s and the Community Wellbeing Boards, and with the four Labour national lead peers. I would like to thank my fellow Board members for all they have put in over the year – Tim Cheetham, Tony McDermot, Helen Holland, Rory Palmer, Judith Blake (until Feb 2013) and Kate Hollern (from Feb 2013).



**Cllr Mehboob Khan
(Kirklees)**

Safer & Stronger Communities

This year saw the culmination of the Board’s work on a number of areas.

November of course saw the election of police and crime commissioners across England and Wales. Prior to the elections the Board highlighted to candidates the key role local authorities play in protecting communities and reducing crime. This included speaking at events alongside government ministers, meeting Labour candidates and producing briefings on topics ranging from anti-social behaviour, through domestic abuse to managing the night time economy.

Over the last year the Board also continued to provide support to councils in establishing police and crime panels. This included publishing further guides, providing training for panel members and assisting panels as they conducted confirmation hearings and scrutinised the police precept.

A significant success was getting the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 on the statute book. This brings in a proper licensing regime for all scrap metal dealers, administered by councils and which should drive down metal theft. As this was taken forward as a private member’s bill the Board actively supported it through its parliamentary course to ensure it became law. This included bringing LGA pressure to bear on the two Conservative MPs who threatened to talk the bill out at its last stage in the Commons. We are now working with the Home Office on implementation of the Act, which is due to take place in October.

Other areas of important work have included giving evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on the draft Anti-Social Behaviour Bill, arguing the case for councils to be able to retain access to communications data as the Communications Data Bill is developed, and persuading the government to change its proposals to fully deregulate entertainment licensing.



**Sir Steve Bullock
(Lewisham)**

Workforce

The key issues for the Board and its negotiating bodies over the last year have been pensions and pay.

At the time of writing there is agreement on a new Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) based on career average pay. However progress on implementation is painfully slow because of conflicting approaches by different parts of central government. The work between the employers and the trade unions has been excellent however. The new scheme will be significantly fairer to lower paid employees as well addressing the future affordability challenges for authorities.

Similarly on pay we have made progress but have yet to reach a final resolution. Like many other Labour leaders I feel that our employees have been hit harder than any other public sector workers and we have attempted to recognise that by entering in to genuine negotiations this year.

Those negotiations are always difficult because we have to find approaches which are acceptable to a majority of local authorities and this requires the support of at least two of the LGA’s political groups. We lead the negotiations but do not have the votes to impose an approach.

Initially discussions focussed on trying to find away to get some changes to terms and conditions from the trade union side in order to enable an offer to be made. However when this proved impossible we undertook a consultation from which it was clear that a majority of councils would support an offer around 1% which has now been made. We are currently awaiting the trade union response.

Over the two years since the last report there have been significant changes among the members involved in leading this area of work.

Our work on pensions was led by Ian Greenwood and his loss after losing his seat deprived us of someone whose knowledge of the LGPS is second to none. Pay negotiations were led for many years by Brian Baldwin from Wigan Labour Group who retired as a councillor in May 2012. Brian had a wealth of experience in this field and is owed a debt of thanks by us all. He has been succeeded by Cllr Sian Timoney who has had the difficult task of restarting meaningful negotiations after the three year freeze.

The Labour members of the Workforce Board will endeavour to keep colleagues involved and up to date on progress over the coming year.



Training and support for Labour councillors

The LGA Labour Group has provided a range of training and support to Labour councillors during the past year and will continue to do so in the year ahead. In particular our training has focused on:

Be A Councillor

The LGA Labour Group Office, working in partnership with The Labour Party, has been instrumental in rolling out the LGA's successful 'Be a Councillor' campaign. Hundreds of people have attended events to hear from council leaders and members about the reality of what's involved in being a Labour councillor.

This past year we ran Be A Councillor sessions in partnership with Labour groups, regional Labour offices, CLPs, and trade unions. We ran sessions across the country including Leeds, Brighton, Brent, Nottingham, Manchester and Greenwich. We also ran two Be A Councillor sessions at Labour's Annual Conference: one for all party members interested in finding out more about being a councillor, and one for women members only (pictured), which were both very popular.

Model presentations and materials are available for those authorities that may wish to run their own events. In addition the Labour Group has worked with trade unions and wants to specifically target under-represented groups. Please get in touch with us if you'd like to get involved in this campaign.

Next Generation

24 leading councillors from around the country completed the Next Generation training programme for future leaders. The aim of the programme is to develop councillors who have the potential to be the leaders of the future. It runs over three weekends and covers policy and strategy, community leadership, political management and personal skill development. Facilitators of the weekends included Cllr Catherine West (Islington) and Cllr Jim McMahon (Oldham).

There was a wide range of speakers from within the LGA and from external organisations; including Hilary Benn MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the Labour Party's political strategist, Greg Cook and Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the RSA. Practical sessions looked at how to communicate with confidence with the sessions led by RADA and speaking in a hostile environment.

There was a highly competitive recruitment process for the 24 places available. If you are interested in applying for this year's course the recruitment process will be launched at the LGA Annual Conference in July. Please get in touch if you'd like more information about this year's course. This will be the eighth year the programme has been run.

Opposition to Power

The Opposition to Power training programme for leaders of Labour groups in councils where we were likely to take control took place last year to help groups prepare for taking control. The aim of the programme is to support Labour group leaders with preparations for the transition from opposition to power. This year the programme will be run over three weekends and will consist of briefings from officers, council leaders and communications professionals about what to expect in the run up to and the first months of taking control. Cllr Simon Henig (Durham) and David Evans from The Campaign Company are the programme directors.





Policy development and the road to 2015

Over this mid-point in the electoral cycle while the Labour party is developing policy, the LGA Labour Group is actively involved in making sure local government is an integral part of our party's manifesto for 2015.

The ideas and energy coming from Labour councils is at the core of our approach. We published *One Nation Localism: How Labour councils are delivering fairness in tough times* to highlight all the innovation coming from Labour councils across a range of policy areas including jobs & growth, housing, health & social care and education & children's services.



This was based on interviews with Labour leaders and a call for evidence to which many Labour councils responded. The report argued that not only did this innovation have lessons for what works which the party can replicate more broadly, but it also showed the value of empowering local areas to meet varying needs and ensure social justice overall.

The report was launched at the Labour Party's Local Government Conference and set a strong agenda for the policy debates during the weekend between councillors and parliamentarians present. The conference itself was a great opportunity for the 500 councillors present to feed in their policy ideas and practical experiences to shadow ministers present. We've continued the theme of 'One Nation Localism' with articles published in the Guardian, the New Statesman, Progress and Labourlist from the LGA Labour leadership team and council leaders making a strong case for localism and social justice going hand in hand.

The reports from our board leads (see pages 14-17) give an idea of the activity across the range of policy areas led by members and working with colleagues in Parliament to ensure the voice of local government is represented. Many members of the shadow front bench have worked directly with councils as they develop their thinking – Harriet Harman's Creative Councils Network, Liam Byrne's Youth Jobs Taskforce, Jack Dromey's Housing Innovation Network and Toby Perkins' Small Business Taskforce are just some examples of how shadow ministers are working with Labour councils to learn from their innovations and demonstrate the difference Labour makes. The Shadow Cabinet are working closely with Labour

members: Hilary Benn on localism, Andy Burnham and Liz Kendall on social care, Stephen Twigg on education, Maria Eagle on transport and Chuka Umunna on skills and economic development.

The Labour Party's Your Britain policy process is also underway with Policy Commissions consulting on different issues. We've encouraged councillors and Labour Groups to respond to these consultations so that we make our voice heard in the wider process. The LGA Labour Group is responding formally to these setting out a strong case for local government's role in housing, transport, childcare, NHS & social care and apprenticeships & jobs. We are working with the councillors on the National Policy Forum to coordinate a shared approach across local government which will have greater voice.

In each stage of our policy approach members' views play an important role. We have surveyed leaders on their views and priorities which has informed our own policy direction. We are working with board members in each policy area to develop better links with lead members nationwide so that our policy approach is firmly linked in to the reality that councillors are facing in their communities. It is important that we continue to build on this work, and we actively encourage you in the months to come to tell us about your best practice so that we can in turn promote it. We need to make sure local initiatives play a central part in Labour's national vision, and that a future Labour government has a strong commitment to localism in principle and to devolution of power to local government in practice.



LGA Labour Group Office

The LGA Labour Group exists to fight the corner for Labour Local Government and localism at a national level, both within the cross-party Local Government Association and with the Labour Party at Westminster. The Group provides a strong voice for Labour Local Government and acts as a platform for ideas and argument for all those committed to an effective localist element to Labour politics and policies.

The LGA Labour Group has good working relationships with the Parliamentary Labour Party and Labour Party Head Office, and holds frequent meetings, events and workshops with Labour councillors across the country. We influence policy and political decisions through communications, publications and frequent meetings between our leading members and senior national politicians, to ensure local experience is represented in national priorities.

The LGA Labour Group office have four staff based at Local Government House.



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