

2015 report & review



 Labour

Morgan McSweeney, Head of the LGA Labour Group Office

Foreword

Labour local government's story of the last twelve months has had its ups and downs. It is one that started with hope with Labour taking control of the LGA when David Sparks became the first Labour Chair of the LGA in ten years. Sadly that was too short lived and the disappointing results in May this year has let the Tories back in.

One of the strongest political currents over the last twelve months has been devolution. The Scottish referendum campaign and fallout brought devolution in England to the front of the news agenda and it is an issue that will continue to strongly influence political discourse in the months ahead.

Labour's policy-making process came to its conclusion at the final National Policy Forum last July. Delegations from the LGA Labour Group and the ALC worked together to push local government's agenda: devolution, housing and fair funding.

What was clear throughout the party policy-making process was that there is more support amongst activists, Trade Unionists and MPs for greater devolution and local decision-making and accountability.

This led to a General Election manifesto that was the most localist in character and content that the party has ever produced, but there is still a lot of work to do to build broader support in the party for the principle that the best decisions are made locally.

Supporting councillors with training, mentoring and external reviews of services will always be the bread and butter of the Labour Group office. In the main this is delivered by three main programmes: From Opposition to Power is for opposition group leaders with a realistic chance of taking control of their council; Next Generation is designed for new cabinet members; and Be A Councillor is designed to encourage more members to stand in local elections. This year we further developed our Be A Councillor programme when we launched a guidebook to support more disabled members to become council candidates.

Sharing best practice continues to be one of the most important roles of the group office. This year we produced an updated best practice catalogue of Labour Councils' achievements – "Labour Local Government Agenda 2015." We continue to share local manifestos on our website and try and keep all Labour Councillors up to date with the latest innovations and ideas from around the country through our weekly bulletin.

Aicha Less, Political Assistant in the Labour Group Office, has left the LGA after nineteen years' service. I would like to thank Aicha for her dedication and hard work over the years.

The General Election results mean the Tories are back in government on their own for the first time in eighteen years and this will lead to a fresh attack on local services through draconian funding cuts as well as a clear plan to reduce the number of council homes.

So the challenges for the year ahead are clear: we must do more to build wider support for devolution, campaign hard against cuts to local government funding and against attempts to sell off council homes. We need to also make sure that we support Labour Councillors as they face unprecedented budget cuts.

With the Labour Party in a state of flux following the General Election, the party must look to local government for solutions on how to rebuild. All across the country Labour councillors in power and opposition are leading campaigns and delivering Labour values while managing drastically shrinking budgets. Labour in local government is transforming the way public services are delivered. We are providing the national party with a blueprint for winning the 2020 General Election.



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Message from the Leader of the LGA Labour Group



Cllr Jim McMahon

It's fair to say my first year as Leader of the LGA Labour Group has been one of highs and lows for Labour local government. We have had many highlights and a brilliant build-up to the General Election, only to then be struck down by the disappointing result.

I became Leader of the LGA Labour Group last July at the same time the Local Government Innovation Taskforce Final Report was launched, led by Sir Richard Leese, Cllr Sharon Taylor and Mayor Jules Pipe. It is unprecedented that councillors played such a direct role in formulating Labour's policy and the report laid the foundations for Labour's devolution offer.

I led Labour Local Government's delegation at the summer 2014 National Policy Forum in Milton Keynes – where we ensured that Labour Local Government's priorities such as re-stating the role of the local authority in education were included in Labour's policy platform.

Our Labour Local Government Conference in early spring this year, co-hosted with the ALC, brought together councillors from across the country with shadow ministers to discuss policy, campaigns and share ideas, and was another great success. **'Our build up to the manifesto demonstrated the strong influence within our Party Labour Local Government has developed: it included commitments to an English Devolution Act, an English Regional Cabinet Committee and an end to a century of centralisation.'**

But we weren't to get the chance to put it all into practice. A terrible election result saw not only a majority Conservative Government, but us losing councillors overall for the first time since 2009. There were a few glimmers of hope in the results – our gain of Cheshire West and Chester Council and kicking out the Greens from Brighton Council among few positives.



The local election results meant that unfortunately Labour is now no longer the largest party at the LGA, and the Conservatives will nominate the Chair for the coming year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Cllr David Sparks OBE for his hard work and dedication, having been Chair of the LGA for an all too brief year.

At this point the next five years feels like a lifetime. As the Labour Party picks itself up I am determined that Labour councillors will be at the forefront of our renewal. We will make sure devolution and local government are at the core of the Leader and Deputy Leader contest debates. And we will make sure the Labour party rebuilds from the ground up to ensure the expertise of Labour Local Government informs our campaigning, policy development and how we seek to govern differently in 2020.

We will need to focus our energies on fighting the Tory Government who think they now have a mandate to behave with impunity. As we know from previous experience they think that local government is an easy target and we need to make sure it isn't. As the Labour Vice-Chair of the LGA I will be fighting to ensure the organisation takes a strong line where the Government's policies undermine the interests of Labour local government.

It will be a long road back for the Labour Party – but if Labour Local Government is listened to and involved we can and will win power nationally again. For now – as since 2010 – local government is the last place in England where Labour actually holds power. We need to make sure we lead by example and continue to demonstrate the benefits of Labour in power. I look forward to continuing to work with you all over the next year to ensure this.



Cllr Jim McMahon with graduates of the Next Generation 8 Programme.

Message from the acting leader of The Labour Party



Harriet Harman MP



I'd like to thank all our Labour councillors for all the work you do. What you do builds confidence in politics - people see you out and about in your community and know that you are there for them and on their side. What you do helps show Labour values. Especially where you are in a Labour council, people can see Labour values in action by what you do in your council. Even against the background of swingeing government spending cuts Labour councils are innovating and working with individuals and communities in different ways. What you do helps protect people from even worse Tory cuts. It's terrible having a Tory Government slashing local government and other important services. But having Labour councillors gives a voice to local communities hit by the cuts and having a Labour council mitigates the impact of the cuts. You are a vital part of Labour's team helping build our party locally.

We were very disappointed with the General Election result and our local election results were, in some areas, not as strong as we hoped. But we will be holding the government to account, keeping the party united, learning the lessons from our defeat and electing a new leadership team.

Thank you for all that you do for your local community and for Labour and I look forward to working with you.

I want to pay tribute to Cllr David Sparks OBE. A great ambassador for Labour, he has played an outstanding role in the LGA for many years. As your representative on the NEC and then as LGA Chair since last July, he's brought your voice to the heart of our party.



Message from the Shadow Local Government Secretary



Emma Reynolds MP

It is a great privilege to take up my new position as Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. I am looking forward to working with the LGA Labour Leader, Jim McMahon, and his team who have done a fantastic job over the past year. As we seek to rebuild our party and elect a new leader over the coming months, I would also like to hear, learn from and work with all of you who are in power and delivering for their communities as well as those in areas where we needed to win but failed to do so in May.

The results of the General Election were deeply disappointing for Labour. I know how hard Labour councillors, who are the backbone of every CLP, and our members, activists, and supporters fought not just over six weeks but over five years to secure a Labour Government. As well as campaigning week in, week out you also helped shape Labour's policy agenda on devolution and housing. Our failure to win the election was certainly not due to a lack of hard work or commitment.

The local election results also mean that we lost control of the LGA and a fantastic Chair in David Sparks. He has been a longstanding and tireless champion for local government and a strong advocate for devolution and local democracy.

Despite the poor results, we must not be downhearted. '**While Labour is not in power in Whitehall, we are in power in town halls all across the country**' and I know that Labour Councillors will continue to make a real difference to people's lives.

Working together, I am confident that we can win power from other parties in local government over the coming years and also ensure local government wins power from Whitehall too. Because if the last few years have proved anything, it's that Labour councils have done extraordinary things, managing a financial crisis and finding ways to improve public services. I will use this job not just to shout from the roof tops about the great work Labour in local government is doing but fighting to ensure you get more power to do even more. In the last parliament, local government was on the receiving end of bigger cuts than other government departments, so I will also stand up for local government and seek a fairer funding settlement.

I want to see every part of the country benefit from additional powers and devolved funding. We are clear that devolution needs to be part of a UK-wide plan not a series of one-off deals. The Government's piecemeal approach threatens to leave many areas behind. Every community across the country should be able to benefit from devolution, from our great cities, to towns and our county regions too.



To achieve this I will be working together with the Labour team in the House of Commons (Roberta Blackman-Woods, Lyn Brown and Steve Reed) and in the House of Lords (Bill McKenzie, Jeremy Beecham and Roy Kennedy), holding the government to account where it doesn't deliver.

We should use the next few months to learn from our defeat which will mean hearing some difficult truths and learning some hard lessons. I am confident that we can do that, rebuild and regain people's trust so that we are ready to win again at the next General Election. But I will also make sure that we carry out the job of the Opposition, holding the Government to account with the same commitment and energy we would have brought to Government. I look forward to working with Labour Councillors to do just that.



Local government finance – the challenges ahead



Cllr Claire Kober



Just a fortnight after the General Election George Osborne unveiled plans for an emergency budget on 8 July, his second in less than four months. This announcement provided confirmation, if it were ever needed, that a majority Tory Government will continue to embrace austerity. The suggestion is that it will mean £230 million in-year cuts for local government; for councils around the country this will mean the job of coming in on budget this year is set to become even more challenging. It is fair to say that we've never had it so tough, but local government cannot be in the business of managing decline. We have faced significant challenges in the last few years, and will continue to do so. Measures such as those set out in the proposed Housing and Planning Bill we must argue against, but there are other proposals such as the Cities Devolution Bill that are to be welcomed. In the face of massive reductions in Government grant, it must surely be our job not only to continue to argue for fair funding but to find new and different ways to generate income, promote economic growth, support and develop resilient communities and provide good quality services. In order to achieve this ambition, we need the government to give councils greater financial freedom and flexibility.

In the aftermath of the Scottish referendum and the Greater Manchester devolution deal there are now well rehearsed arguments about where power is best placed. We need the freedom to create vibrant and dynamic local economies across the country. This means allowing councils – either individually or collectively – to make their own decisions, and transferring power from Whitehall. In the absence of such devolution Central Government will continue to apply twentieth century solutions to twenty first century problems – and it will fail those in our communities who depend on effective government. By allocating funding and enabling different levels of government to generate income and investment where the benefits are retained locally, councils can become more confident, resilient and financially self-sufficient. Departmental silos, replicated in communities, can only treat the symptoms rather than the root causes. In the face of further spending cuts following five years of austerity we have a choice of either continuing to salami slice Whitehall budgets or reconfigure the system and link public service reform to growth. We all want the best return for public money and the reality is that local government must become more financially independent.

Empowering local leadership will create better places to live. And it's not just a question of making the case for localism – but to build on what we already know is working. Ernst & Young research has showed that rolling out the lessons of the community budgets nationally could save up to £20 billion in five years. The Troubled Families programme has already helped turn around the lives of tens of thousands of families. Local pilots in Leeds, Wakefield and Bradford have shown that a devolved youth contract could double the number of young people receiving support. We also need to continue to work with the rest of the public sector and our community partners to make this local approach a success.

This is our vision for local government. On a range of issues, councils have already proven they can deliver. We have become the most efficient part of the public sector and pioneered tailor-made solutions which work. Now, it's time for the new Government to prove their commitment and give councils the powers they need to deliver for our communities.



Winning in Cheshire West and Chester



Cllr Samantha Dixon



Cheshire West and Chester Council was created in 2008/9. At first, Labour held only 13 of the 75 seats. This year, we won 38 seats and overall control for Labour – making it the only council in the country to pass from Conservative to Labour this year.

We won because hundreds of party members and supporters came together to form an unstoppable borough-wide team. Our targeted doorstep campaign began four years ago. Thanks to first-rate support from Labour North West, the Labour Group and our local LCF, we could recruit a fantastic organiser for the borough joined later by Parliamentary organisers. Moreover, our candidates were in place early and we made sure our borough-wide strategy complimented the Parliamentary campaign. Yet a solid ground campaign was not the only ingredient for our success.

Last summer, I was invited to join the LGA Labour Group's Opposition to Power programme. The course proved to be invaluable. As a result, we developed a Labour Plan based on priorities most important to local people – one which represented our core Labour values. It was both targeted and relevant.

Above all, our candidates became the front line for a new kind of community-based politics. We spoke and listened to 90,000 people over two years.

This successful campaign was delivered against the backdrop of one of the most difficult national results for Labour. We need to remember Cheshire West now has a Labour Council with a majority of only one. However, our success was not limited as we also helped to deliver Labour MPs for Ellesmere Port and Neston as well as the City of Chester.

Our success is a small ray of light in an uncertain national picture for Labour. The next few years are going to be hard, but we aim to make sure that our glimmer of hope only glows brighter.



Effective Opposition



Cllr Paul Dimoldenberg



Doing the hardest job in politics

Opposition is the hardest job in politics and Westminster City Council Labour Group has more experience than most!

At the last City Council elections we won 4 seats from the Tories to bring us up to 16 Councillors (out of 60). Importantly, we are the only opposition group on the Council and so we represent the almost 60% of Westminster residents who do not vote Conservative.

Our job is to not only speak up for the 33% of Westminster residents who vote Labour, but to be a voice for the majority of Westminster residents.

Westminster Council has, so far, always been Conservative-controlled, and our task is to hold this elected dictatorship to account on a daily basis.

Our approach is to constantly challenge the Conservatives for their hard-hearted and mean-minded decisions by communicating the facts and issues through regular press releases, email newsletters and reports to residents and tweets to our followers.

At every Council meeting we put down motions highlighting a local community issue, ask questions and present petitions to demonstrate to residents that Labour represents their concerns.

We have built alliances with local groups, such as parents whose play groups and children's centres are threatened with cuts. We support local communities campaigning for 20mph zones or against inappropriate developments and to save local pubs.

We have had our successes. Two years ago we led a campaign against the Council's plans to introduce new parking charges in the West End which united churches with casino operators, trade unions with restaurants and theatres, and residents with retailers. Not only did we get the Council to drop its unpopular plans but the Leader of the Council resigned, too.

And we have won positive campaigns, too. Last year, in my Queen's Park ward, we saw the election of the first parish council in London for 50 years. Working closely with local residents of all political persuasions we made the case for a new tier of local government, including an extra precept, and persuaded the Council to vote for it unanimously.

The only way to 'do' opposition is to get stuck in, constantly challenge and be the authentic voice of the community.

And at the next elections we plan to elect more Labour Councillors!

I stood down as leader of the Labour Group in 2015 after eleven years and would like to wish my successor, Cllr Adam Hug, all the very best.

Devolution for all

 Cllr Anne Western



As the reality of life under a majority Conservative government starts to take shape, what does this mean for devolution in England? George Osborne has shown himself to be serious about his Northern Powerhouse vision, speaking in Manchester within days of the election about how he sees this developing. More powers for northern cities over transport, housing, skills and health for those willing to accept elected mayors.

He also mentioned towns and counties, specifically Lancashire, Cheshire and Yorkshire, and expressed his intention to extend 'a form of the City Deal programme' to cover counties and towns.

Combined authorities have so far been seen as a prerequisite to a devolution deal. They are the legal entity to which power and resources can be devolved and the delivery vehicle by which change can be driven. Their very creation is a demonstration of strong and mature governance at the sub-regional level.

In Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire we have been alive to the national political consensus around devolution and determined to bring these opportunities for self-determination to our area. In April the 19 councils across Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire presented our submissions to DCLG to form two combined authorities. This was no mean feat and to achieve this across two cities, two counties and fifteen districts and boroughs has required strong leadership, clear vision and cross-party co-operation on an unprecedented scale. Our two combined authorities will work with our LEP to drive economic growth, create jobs, improve skills, build houses, strengthen transport links and bring 21st Century infrastructure to our area. Located as we are in the heart of the country, with the M1 corridor giving us a strategic north-south link we are a strong economic area in our own right, but our position as the bridge between the Northern Powerhouse and the emerging West Midlands combined authority is another real advantage.

The diversity of Derbyshire's economy is staggering: global giants such as Toyota and Rolls Royce sit alongside thousands of SMEs; hi-tech digital companies are making their home in the traditional farming and tourism economies of the Peak District; we export minerals and aggregates for the construction of roads and railways and we build the cars and trains to go on them.

'There is capacity to do much more. We need the full range of levers and powers to improve the economic, social, health and environmental conditions of our area.'

These powers would enable better integration and effectiveness. It's not enough just to create more jobs. They need to be decent jobs with a future, accessible via effective transport links, available to an up-skilled workforce with access to a choice of affordable, energy-efficient housing. This can only be achieved through the deep understanding of the local area and democratic legitimacy that local government has.

As for the issue of elected mayors, it is entirely reasonable for the government to require strong governance and accountability. However, this can take many forms and an absolute insistence on one model in every area undermines the principles of localism. Governance models should be part of the devo negotiations, not a compulsory bolt-on if there is no tangible added value.

The LGA Labour Group

Year In View



Local Government Conference

Over three hundred people attended the 2015 Labour Local Government Conference held on 7 February at the East Midlands Conference Centre in Beeston. The conference was jointly run by the LGA Labour Group and the Association of Labour Councillors (ALC).

The Conference started with a dinner on the Friday evening and then a packed conference agenda on the Saturday. Key local government speakers included: Cllr Jim McMahon, Leader of Labour Local Government; Sir Richard Leese (Manchester & LGA City Regions Board); Cllr Anne Western (Derbyshire & LGA People & Places Board); Cllr Claire Kober (Haringey & Resources Board) and Cllr Judith Blake (Leeds).

Ed Miliband, Leader of the Labour Party and Hilary Benn, shadow Local Government Secretary were keynote parliamentary speakers.

Breakout sessions covered topics such as: driving growth locally, keeping our communities safe, housing and health and wellbeing. Partner organisations also held sessions at the conference.



National Policy Forum

The Labour Party held its National Policy Forum, to finalise policy for the manifesto, in Milton Keynes in July 2014. Labour Local Government delegates, led by Jim McMahon, arrived at the conference with a clear agenda to ensure devolution of power to communities would be at the heart of Labour's agenda and armed with an array of amendments to secure these commitments.

In his speech to the Policy Forum, Ed Miliband talked explicitly about the importance and influence of Labour councillors. The Labour Local Government delegation secured a number of amendments including to ensure the role of the local authority in education, to reform the HRA borrowing cap to invest more in housing and to ensure health and wellbeing boards were at the centre of whole person care plans.

Following on from the NPF, Ed Miliband announced that a Labour Government would bring forward an English Devolution Act which would be used to transfer £30bn of funding to city and county regions, along with powers over economic development, skills, employment, housing, and business support.

The place of devolution at the core of Labour's agenda was confirmed at the launch of Labour's General Election manifesto when Ed Miliband announced "it's time to end a century of centralisation. We want to win power in order to give it away."

The manifesto included commitments to devolve power and work with local government. Although the election outcome prevents it being put into practice immediately, there is a strong body of work for the next Labour Leader to build on as Labour renews.

The LGA Labour Group

Year In View

Labour Local Government Agenda 2015

To set out a vision for a devolving Labour Government in the run-up to the General Election campaign, the Labour Group Office published the Labour Local Government Agenda 2015.

The report used examples of innovation and good practice from Labour councils across core policy areas such as local economic growth; delivering more homes; reducing unemployment and tackling the skills gap; safer communities; health and wellbeing and supporting the environment.

It demonstrated how these local successes in turn had implications for Labour's policy programme approach nationally and for the prospect of devolution within England. Ideas from Labour Local Government were at the forefront of Labour's Policy Review with the Local Government Innovation Taskforce setting out a clear agenda for devolution, building on the lessons of local innovation.

The publication provided ideas for practical manifesto commitments which embody and take forward a clear commitment to localism, many of which were taken up in Labour's Manifesto 2015 itself. Unfortunately the opportunity for a Labour Government to put these into practice in 2015 wasn't to be, so the central proposals provide a strong foundation for Labour's revitalised policy programme in the coming years.



Greg Cook, Head of Political Strategy, the Labour Party

Local elections analysis

As in the General Election which they accompanied, the local elections in May accelerated the collapse of the Liberal Democrats. The 9,300 seats being contested across 279 local authorities in England saw their winning just 658, a net loss of 411 added to the 720 which they lost in this cycle of elections in 2011 and leaving them with fewer than 2,000 councillors across the country for the first time since 1983.

This was also the first time since 1987 that this cycle of contests, including all those shire districts and unitary authorities which elect their whole council every four years, has been held on General Election day and as might be expected this provided a boost to the Conservatives in their rural and semi-rural heartlands where the higher turnout and more party-based voting was a particular disadvantage for independents. The Tories' 541 net seat gains were mainly at the expense of the Lib Dems, but independents also lost 125, and this was enough to allow the Tories to take majority control of an additional 34 councils with two losses.

Labour had net seat losses of 203 and made three council gains. These included the large unitary authority of Cheshire West and Chester, previously held by the Tories. There were three district councils which were lost direct to the Tories, and three unitary authorities to no overall control.

Despite these changes the balance between Labour and Conservative was similar to that in 2011 and there were relatively few seats changing hands between them. The picture of local government in Britain is now one of stark division with Labour holding most of the councils in the large urban conurbations and big cities, the Tories most of the rest, the Liberal Democrats retaining just one London borough and four shire districts.

Results summary	Seats	Councils
Conservative	+541	+32
Labour	-203	-3
Lib Dem	-411	-4
Other	+54	0
No overall control	-	-25

The LGA Labour Group



Executive Team 2014-15

Leadership team:

Cllr Jim McMahon (Oldham), Leader Labour Group and Vice-Chair of the LGA

Cllr Sharon Taylor (Stevenage and Hertfordshire), Deputy Leader Labour Group and Labour Lead on Districts Councils Network

Mayor Sir Steve Bullock (Lewisham), Deputy Leader Labour Group

Cllr David Sparks (Dudley), Chair of the LGA

Cllr Keith Wakefield (Leeds), Deputy Chair LGA

Cllr Ann Lucas (Coventry), Chair Labour Group

Cllr Simon Henig (Durham), Vice-Chair Labour Group and Chair ALC

Cllr Bryony Rudkin (Ipswich and Suffolk), Chief Whip Labour Group and Labour Regional Lead member Peer for the Eastern, South East and South West regions

Cllr Simon Blackburn (Blackpool), Deputy Whip of the Labour Group and Lead member Peer for the West Midlands' and East Midlands' regions

Cllr Judith Blake (Leeds), Lead member Peer for the Yorkshire & Humberside and North East regions

Cllr Steve Houghton (Barnsley), Lead member Peer for the North West region

Cllr Clyde Loakes (Waltham Forest), Lead member Peer for the London region

Regional Representatives:

East Midlands:

Cllr Caitlin Bisknell (Derbyshire)

Eastern:

Cllr Judi Billing (North Hertfordshire)

London:

Cllr Sarah Hayward (Camden)

North East:

Cllr Paul Watson (Sunderland)

North West:

Cllr John Merry (Salford)

South East:

Cllr Colin Lloyd (Crawley)

South West:

Cllr Kate Haigh (Gloucester)

Wales:

Cllr David Phillips (Swansea)

West Midlands:

Cllr Sue Woodward (Staffordshire and Lichfield)

Yorkshire and Humberside:

Cllr James Alexander (York)

LGA Board Representatives:

Cllr Nick Forbes (Newcastle), Vice-Chair Children & Young People Board

Sir Richard Leese (Manchester), Chair City Regions Board

Cllr Linda Thomas (Bolton), Deputy Chair Community & Wellbeing Board

Cllr Simon Henig (Durham), Vice-Chair Culture, Tourism & Sport Board

Cllr Peter Box (Wakefield), Chair Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board

Cllr David Acton (Trafford and GMFRA), Deputy Chair Fire Services Management Committee and Fire Commission

Cllr Judi Billing (North Hertfordshire), Deputy Chair Improvement & Innovation Board

Cllr Anne Western (Derbyshire), Vice-Chair People & Places Board

Cllr Claire Kober (Haringey), Chair Resources Board

Cllr Ann Lucas (Coventry), Chair Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Cllr Ian Swindenbank (Northumberland), Chair Audit Committee

Cllr Graham Chapman (Nottingham), Labour Lead on Local Partnerships

Lord Peter Smith (Wigan) Labour Lead on Local Government Leadership



The LGA Labour Group

Board reports



Cllr Nick Forbes,
(Newcastle)

Children and Young People

In the past year, the Children and Young People's Board has continued to engage constructively with Government, demonstrating a willingness to debate big policy issues as well as responding on technical detail in areas such as reform to the Special Educational Needs provision.

- Supporting all councils to deal with Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) – the disturbing revelations of CSE have been of critical concern to all Board Members. We have promoted the better sharing of knowledge and best methods for dealing with CSE, as well as provided up-to-date support and advice to authorities. This included a summit on CSE in January of this year as well as developing a resource pack aimed at supporting all members and officers to identify and respond effectively to CSE.
- Calling for a review of Ofsted – following publication of Ofsted's annual report earlier in the year, we raised concerns over Ofsted's ability to undertake inspections of local authority children's services and schools. The LGA has called for an independent review of the inspectorate.
- Protecting Sure Start services – In March of this year, we submitted a response to the Education Committee's follow-up enquiry on Sure Start centres. In our submission, we were clear that councils – not Whitehall – are best placed to make decisions on local delivery, based on need. We also proposed a review of all early years funding to reduce complexity and called for freedom to pool funding between (protected) schools' budgets and early years.
- Arguing for a greater role for councils in local schools and education – we have set out 'education and schools' asks for the 'first hundred days' of a new government. These include powers for councils to intervene in all local, state-funded schools where concerns arise. We have also called for councils to be given a stronger role in place planning, with adequate capital funding to provide extra places required.

I would like to thank the Labour Board members (John Merry, Salford; Richard Watts, Islington; Dora Dixon-Fyle, Southwark; Bob Cook, Stockton-on-Tees; John Kent, Thurrock; and Anne Burns, Cumbria) for their hard work over the year – and a special thank you to Tim Cheetham, Barnsley, for being a willing substitute member.



Sir Richard Leese,
(Manchester)

City Regions

"The City Regions Board is not only new but has been established with a

composition very different from most other boards. As it says on the tin, membership is drawn entirely from city-regions along with smaller, free-standing cities, and consists almost entirely of Council Leaders, which in itself makes chairing an interesting exercise. However, this composition does guarantee that - for the first time - there is a genuinely urban voice for the LGA. This has allowed us to pursue the core agenda of devolution to support economic growth and job creation as well as public service reform from the perspective of cities as drivers (though not the sole repository) of economic growth.

The Board had a quick win through its sponsorship of the work of the independent City Growth Commission. Their final report was published in the autumn with a massive amount of media and political attention. From a Labour perspective, it very much built on the work of Adonis and the Local Government Innovation Task Force, giving real weight to the devolution case. We have built on this through supporting the LGA's own campaigns and those of partner organisations like the Core Cities' Modern Charter for Local Freedom.

Beyond making the general case for devolution, the Board has also been looking in more detail at the practical requirements of doing so. In some cases, this has been jointly done with our non-metropolitan equivalent: the People and Places Board. Further, our work on skills employment and welfare reform has culminated in the presentation of Realising Talent: a new framework for employment and skills which has allowed us to develop a shared sector-wide approach aimed at the successor to the failed work programme.

The first year of the new board does give ground for optimism as to how we drive forward the urban agenda, but as a new board, we do need to review it during the course of this year to ensure it is fit for purpose."



Cllr Simon Henig
(Durham)

Culture, Tourism and Sport

The Culture, Tourism and Sport Board has continued to deal with a wide range of issues over the past year, including the future of libraries, culture and the arts, sport, leisure, the visitor economy, Magna Carta 800 commemorations and broadband rollout. Many are delivered or dependent on funding from local authorities and have badly hit by government austerity since 2010, presenting real challenges to councils, particularly those who have suffered from the unfair imposition of greater than average levels of cuts.

In this context we continue to draw attention to the real impact on the ground of government spending cuts and have also supported the continued LGA Leadership Programmes with the Arts Council and Sport England, which enable portfolio holders from across the country to share best practice in difficult times. We have also continued to meet with our

parliamentary front bench colleagues, holding a successful meeting of our 'Creative Councillors' network with Harriet Harman MP in Buxton, attended by twenty council leaders and portfolio holders.

We were also delighted to host a very successful LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport conference in Durham and have contributed to the LGA '100 Days' campaign.

I would like to thank all of our board members and substitute members for their continued hard work, Alyson Barnes (Rossendale), Caitlin Bisknell (High Peak), Muhammed Butt (Brent), Barrie Grunewald (St. Helens), Terry O'Neill (Warrington), David Phillips (Swansea) and Sonja Crisp (York). Can I also thank everyone in the Labour group office for their continued support.



Cllr Linda Thomas (Bolton) Community and Wellbeing

The 'frail, elderly ticking time bomb' highlights the demographic changes representing the increasing numbers of persons over 85 years of age pleasingly living longer but sadly with more complex health and care needs.

Despite constant lobbying and warning from the Coalition Government for the last five years that Adult Social Care (ASC) was unsustainable, the government's response was to mercilessly slash councils' budgets by over 40%. The result was a reduction in eligibility criteria for social care and the diminishment of preventative support for the elderly whilst cuts to other valued council services deepened and local authorities were forced to prop up their ASC departments.

The government's answer was the introduction of the Better Care Fund for each council monitored by our board. This was never new money. Rather, it was much-needed NHS funds transferred to councils to jointly deliver Integrated Health and Social Care. Our request for an additional transformation fund to underpin integration fell on deaf ministerial ears.

On top of this, other unfunded burdens were placed on local authorities this year in the Care Act and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards. Our requests for adequate long-term funding for these new massive pressures were once again deflected.

Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWB) have developed at different rates to reflect local health needs while the Community and Wellbeing Board (CWB) has created opportunities across the regions for HWB members and partners to share good practice and their aspirations for better health outcomes in our communities.

Across parties there was agreement on strengthening the HWB role to create greater accountability and parity with CCGs as a necessity if Integration is to become embedded and flourish.

The Government's U-turn on the Greater Manchester Health Devolution is seen as a move in this direction.

Public Health and prevention is the key to reducing health inequalities and is high on the board's agenda in addition to Children's Mental Health Services (CAMHS)/the new local authorities commissioning of Health Visitors/Autism Strategy/Dementia Strategy and Workforce Reform and recruitment in the health and social care sector with better training, pay and conditions.

Thanks to all CWB Labour members and Jessica Studdert for your valuable input and support.

Thanks also to Andy Burnham, Liz Kendall and Andrew Gwynne on the Labour frontbench Shadow Health team for their collaboration throughout the year.



Cllr Peter Box CBE (Wakefield) Economy, Environment, Housing and Transport

Over the last year, the Board's focus has been lobbying to ensure that councils have the resources, freedoms and powers to drive local growth in a way that meets the needs of their communities and businesses.

We published business-endorsed research on the limitations of the current system for funding growth in support of our continuing call for a genuine, and much more ambitious single-pot to local areas to promote economic growth. Our work identified over 120 separate funding streams for local growth and regeneration worth more than £22 billion, of which over 75% could not be accessed by councils or LEPs.

We achieved greater certainty of funding for councils for highways maintenance until 2020/21 and gained public support for our call for the equivalent of 2p of existing fuel duty to pay for the £12 billion backlog of road repairs. Our campaigning ensured that children and parents were protected outside schools from inconsiderate drivers through gaining exemptions from the Government's ban on use of CCTV for parking enforcement, including exemption at bus stops, bus lanes and red routes. We have continued to call for Government to fully fund councils for the cost of the national concessionary fares scheme, as well as devolving the Bus Service Operators Grant to those that want it, in order to help protect bus services. We secured a legal obligation requiring the Highways Agency to consult councils on its plans which will help support local growth and local traffic management.

We have campaigned for recognition from Government of the crucial role that councils have to play in building the homes the nation needs – particularly in delivering affordable and social housing. We have lobbied for the removal of unnecessary restrictions on councils' powers to borrow for investment in housing. We have pushed for the scrapping of complex restrictions on the use of Right to Buy receipts to allow councils to replace homes sold and demonstrated the potential of council-led housebuilding both directly and in partnership.

We have campaigned against changes imposed by the Government which undermine local decision-making on development. For example: allowing the conversion of offices to residential space without planning permission, resulting in government not making these changes permanent. We have evidenced the damaging impact of centrally-imposed exemptions for developers from contributions to affordable housing and infrastructure required to support development. We have continued to argue that adequate resourcing through locally-set planning fees is the best way to deliver efficient and effective services rather than the targets and performance regimes imposed by the government. We have worked with councils, business and government agencies to promote partnership and early engagement in planning. Through the

Planning Advisory Service, we continue to support councils in their efforts to improve their planning services.



Cllr David Acton (GMFRA) Fire Services Management Committee

It has been an interesting and challenging year for the fire service.

Labour Fire & Rescue Authority members have worked extremely hard to ensure we cushion the impact of austerity and the massive Tory cuts inflicted on the fire service. I am proud that we have led the way in ensuring we continue to drive down fires and incidents across the country and at the same time ensure our fire & rescue services respond effectively to every eventuality that occurs. I want to put on record the superb work the firefighters carry out on our behalf; they put themselves in danger when most people run from it. Government should never forget this fact.

Progress has been achieved despite a divisive national pension dispute between the Government and the Fire Brigades Union. I believe Labour Members who sit on Fire Authorities have managed the situation with the upmost skill and integrity, which has lessened the impact and ensured the continuity of the service throughout the strike period, all without support from the Government.

In local and national crises, the fire service rises to every challenge to keep people safe. Whether the situation at hand is a natural disaster, flood, terrorist threat or other large-scale incident, the fire services and authorities effectively and professionally tackle the incident.

We have seen progressive Labour Fire & Rescue Authorities positioning the fire service into new ways of working, collaborating with ambulance, police, local authorities and others in pioneering initiatives to meet the future demands and pressures which exist in health, police, ambulance and many other services across the country.

Throughout the last year, I and my Labour colleagues have met Ministers, Shadow Ministers and other decision-makers to try to ensure the fire-service is fully supported so that it can continue to carry out the excellent work it does, and is able to meet the demands of the future in the changing world we live in.

I am proud to be a part of the fire & rescue service and thank all those that work within it. I particularly want to thank all my Labour colleagues for the work they have done, and continue to do and for the support they have given me.



Cllr Judi Billing (North Herts) Improvement & Innovation

It has been a busy year for the Improvement and

Innovation Board (IIB) and for the LGA in its commitment to sector-led improvement and supporting high-quality political leadership.

Leadership and innovation are right at the centre of local government's current challenges, such as: finding ever-more-complex and anxiety-inducing ways of working with diminishing resources, looking for partnerships in delivery (which makes more sense than working alone), and dealing with some of the huge challenges to our services inherent in current and historical failures for our children whether looked after, troubled or thought to be thriving.

I have been pleased to contribute to the design and delivery of a number of programmes, conferences and events including Next Generation, Be a Councillor and a brand new programme for Opposition Leaders which was piloted in February and will now be added to the Leadership Offer.

Labour authorities, groups and councillors have taken an active part in the development of and participation in the LGA's new suite of Leadership Programmes. Councillors across all parties continue to demand new and innovative programmes, reviews and peer support as part of what they recognise as a key component of their membership of the LGA.

Leading for the LGA Labour Group on the IIB has been a new role for me as has been leading on Leadership itself for the Board. I would like to thank the outgoing Chair Peter Fleming, Dennis Skinner and Pascoe Sawyers for their help in understanding the structures and programmes we offer.

It has been a good year for Labour members. As the largest local government group, I have been able to work with a diverse group of Labour improvement enthusiasts including Sue Woodward, Kate Hollern, Sue Whitaker, Darren Cooper, Bob Price, Claudia Webbe, Phil Davies, Sean Fielding and Imran Hussain, and I thank them for their contributions and enthusiasm.



Cllr Anne Western (Derbyshire) People and Places

The People and Places Board is comprised of representatives from county, district, borough and county unitary councils, such as Cornwall and Shropshire. It is predominantly Conservative and is chaired by Cllr David Hodge, the Leader of Surrey County Council, who also chairs the County Councils Network.

The board operates on a consensual basis wherein there is a shared appetite for greater autonomy from central government and devolution of powers and resources. However, this is not yet translating into widespread action. The notable exceptions are in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, where 19 councils (14 Labour and 5 Conservative at the time of writing) have agreed to form two combined authorities within the LEP area and are actively discussing a devolution deal.

The work of the board in the past year has centred on four themes: employment, skills and economic growth, housing,

planning and infrastructure (including broadband) and public sector transformation. A series of reports have been finalised, some of which have been jointly-commissioned with the City Regions Board. The two most significant of these are:

- The report of the non-metropolitan commission, chaired by Sir John Peace: 'Devolution to Non-Metropolitan England: Seven Steps to Growth and Prosperity.' This report makes a strong economic case for devolution into county regions based on strong, democratically accountable governance.
- The Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion report, 'Realising Talent: A New Framework for Employment and Skills.' This three part study has identified the wide and growing skills gap as being a key cause of inequality and an inhibitor of economic growth.

The direction the board has taken in the past year is entirely consistent with Labour policy and builds on the work of our Local Government Innovation Taskforce.

I would like to thank all the Labour members for their contribution.



Cllr Claire Kober (Haringey)

Resources

The Resources Board was established last September. I would like to start by paying tribute to the work of the predecessor Boards for championing the issues of local government finance, welfare reform, workforce and EU funding as part of the previous governance arrangements. In particular, I am grateful to the Labour Members who served on its predecessor bodies for the support and advice they have provided me over the year.

Local Government finance issues have dominated many of our Board meetings. Last May, the LGA and CIPFA established an Independent Commission on Local Government Finance, tasked with making recommendations for the reform of local government finance, finding better ways to fund local services and to promote economic growth. The Commission reported in February and its recommendations will form the basis of Board work over the coming months. The Board has also retained oversight of the Municipal Bonds Agency which continues to make good progress towards becoming an independent entity with its own governance.

I was pleased that the Board contributed to a partial victory on Local Welfare Assistance funding. Following lobbying, the Government announced in the Local Government Settlement an additional £74 million for local welfare and social care in 2015/16. This funding will help councils continue to provide a crucial support safety net to some of their most vulnerable residents.

In relation to EU Funding the news is less positive. While the LGA successfully lobbied for EU funding allocations to be devolved in England, Ministers have reneged on their promise to give strategic decision-making powers to the 39 LEP areas over how, when and on what their share of England's 2014-2020 £5.3 billion European Structural and Investment Funds is spent. We have called for a reversal of this decision, so far to no avail.

On workforce, the Board has discussed strategic pay and reward challenges at every level of the pay structure. This includes

attracting those with low pay to attracting professionals in the middle pay ranges and ensuring we have a fair and transparent approach to top pay.



Cllr Ann Lucas OBE (Coventry)

Safer and Stronger Communities

Over the last year, the Board has pushed the Government, councils and businesses to put safeguarding communities and people at the heart of what they do. I am pleased to report some good successes.

Working with the Children and Young People's Board, we have examined the reports on child sexual exploitation and ensured that we can contribute positively to wider work in the sector. Along with awareness raising and support to individual councils, we have campaigned to get the Government to drop their proposals around taxi licensing, given the part that taxis can play in grooming. We led opposition to legislation that would have allowed anyone to drive a minicab when off duty without any checks being in place. I am glad that common sense prevailed and the Government withdrew this proposal.

The Betting Commission completed its work on betting shops to respond to our member authorities' concerns about clustering, and the menace of FOBTs. We have agreed on a framework with the betting industry for future working but also re-emphasised the need for stronger powers for councils on this issue and worked with individual authorities to make the case for this. We are pleased that just this week the Government confirmed a separate planning class for betting shops and payday lenders which will mean we have more say over high streets.

I am personally delighted with the work we have done on tackling female genital mutilation (FGM). The group published a guide to FGM for councillors, and won £2.14 million of funding jointly with Barnardo's from Government to create a centre to improve the social work response to FGM.

Councils have often raised concern about the damage being done to their communities by legal highs, or as I call them, lethal highs. We have pushed for new legislation banning their sale, and will make the case to a new government to ban legal highs as a priority. Until then, our guide provides useful advice on what councils can do.

Smoke alarms save lives and it is right that the Government has just agreed to commence legislation requiring private sector landlords to install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms from October 2015.

The Labour team on the Board has played a significant role in driving this work and I would like to thank them for all they have done.



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

Cllr Michael Payne

Deputy Leader, Gedling Borough Council and Nottinghamshire County Council

The LGA Labour Group has continued to work on the LGA's 'Be a Councillor' project. This last year events have been held in many different authorities and at events such as Labour Party Annual Conference. Hundreds of people have attended events to hear from council leaders and discuss the reality of what's involved in being a Labour councillor.

I have worked with the LGA Labour Group to deliver these events and this past year Be A Councillor sessions have been run in partnership with Local Labour Parties and the trade unions. Work has continued to specifically target under-represented groups. The LGA Labour Group office also launched a guide aimed at recruiting more disabled members to stand for their Council.

If you would like further information on Be a Councillor please contact Martin Angus in the LGA Labour Group Office.



Opposition to Power

Cllr Warren Morgan

Leader, Brighton and Hove City Council

I attended the LGA Labour Group's Opposition to Power training programme for leaders of Labour groups in councils where there was a possibility we could take control in the 2015 local elections. Until the elections the Green Party were running Brighton and Hove with minority control.

The programme supports Labour group leaders with preparations for the transition from opposition to power. The course, run over three weekends, included a wide range of briefings and practical sessions. We started by looking at developing a clear message and manifesto in the run up to the elections and understanding values and how they may influence our campaigning. Having then spent some time on preparing the group for power, the final weekend looked at the challenges we would face as we took control.

The programme was extremely helpful. In Brighton and Hove we made a net gain of 10 seats which made us the largest Party and are now running the authority in minority control. The Green Party went into third place on the Council.



Next Generation

Cllr Saima Ashraf

Deputy Leader, Barking and Dagenham Borough Council

I was elected as a councillor in May 2010 and have developed greatly in the past four years. Last May, I was re-elected and appointed Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, both of which are positions that come with huge responsibilities.

The Next Generation programme exposed me to the challenges I face as a Deputy Leader. Those in attendance shared views on a range of issues, established development programmes and learnt from each other. Although not everyone is gifted with public speaking, the programme changed my views and perception of it.

The different venues helped me understand a variety of issues – especially those coming from outside of London. Additionally, having Leaders, chief executives and senior Party members in attendance was beneficial as we not only learnt from them, but also received useful advice.

Having councillors from across the county in different positions and from different backgrounds was also helpful. Working in teams on different issues helped us push the boundaries of conventional thought.

Since being on the programme, I have improved my public speaking and become more confident in dealing with the media.

Sir Steve Houghton

Member Peer Support



Much has been said about austerity in the last few years and its potential impact on the future of local government. There is no doubt councils have exceeded expectations in coping with severe cuts to budgets and finding alternative ways to deliver and protect vital services.

Peer work has been integral to that process and is likely to become even more important if, as suspected, local councils face even bigger financial challenges in the years ahead.

To survive, councils and their services will need to continue to adapt, change and innovate. We will need to not only learn with and from each other, but also be comfortable taking increasingly difficult decisions.

The peer support process and member peers in particular are well set to help councils, councillors and services meet that change.

Corporate and service-based peer challenges have helped significant numbers of authorities over the past year and the new offer of a financial peer challenge and support will take the process a stage further.

In short, improvement work is for many becoming the way councils and their services will learn to survive this harsh financial climate.

Of course, peers continue to work with councils on the traditional agenda such as change of control, mentoring and working in places where councils have got into significant difficulty.

It is important that the sector continues to show that its own improvement processes are fit for purpose if central government interventions are to be avoided.

Equally, peers have been supporting new developments around devolution and the establishment of combined authorities enabling early learning to be disseminated and to put councils on the front foot when negotiating with government.

The biggest advantage of peer work in the last year, however, has been how peers across party lines and professional regional associates have come together as one to ensure local authorities get the right support in the right way and to show sector led improvement really does work.

We really have all been in it together.

So as the challenges start to mount in future, it is important that region by region and political group by group that people know what is on offer and who can help them.

Here is a full list of member peers and the areas they service.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch; we are here to help. As they say – if you don't call us, we will probably call you. For further information or support please contact the Labour Group Office.

North West

Sir Steve Houghton



East of England, South East and South West

Cllr Bryony Rudkin



West Midlands and East Midlands

Cllr Simon Blackburn



London

Cllr Clyde Loakes



Yorkshire and Humberside and the North East

Cllr Judith Blake





News from The Association of Labour Councillors



Association of
Labour Councillors
labour.org.uk/councillors

The Association of Labour Councillors (ALC) is a Labour Party affiliated organisation with the aim of enabling Labour in local government to speak with one unified voice and to effectively lobby and input into the national Labour Party structure. The ALC executive has been an important voice in the creation of Labour Party policy pertaining to local government since its creation in 2013 and will continue this role moving forward.

Since the creation of the Association of Labour Councillors executive in 2013 we have held three Local Government Conferences. Hundreds of Councillors, candidates, and MPs have come together to share best practice, feed into policy, and pick up training advice and support.

The Association of Labour Councillors has also pursued a far reaching programme of bespoke training and delivery of best practice. As always, the Labour Party and the ALC executive are keen to expand upon this programme and explore further opportunities to provide the training that Councillors need. If you have any thoughts on how we can improve on what has been offered in recent years, please contact the Labour Party on councillors@labour.org.uk.

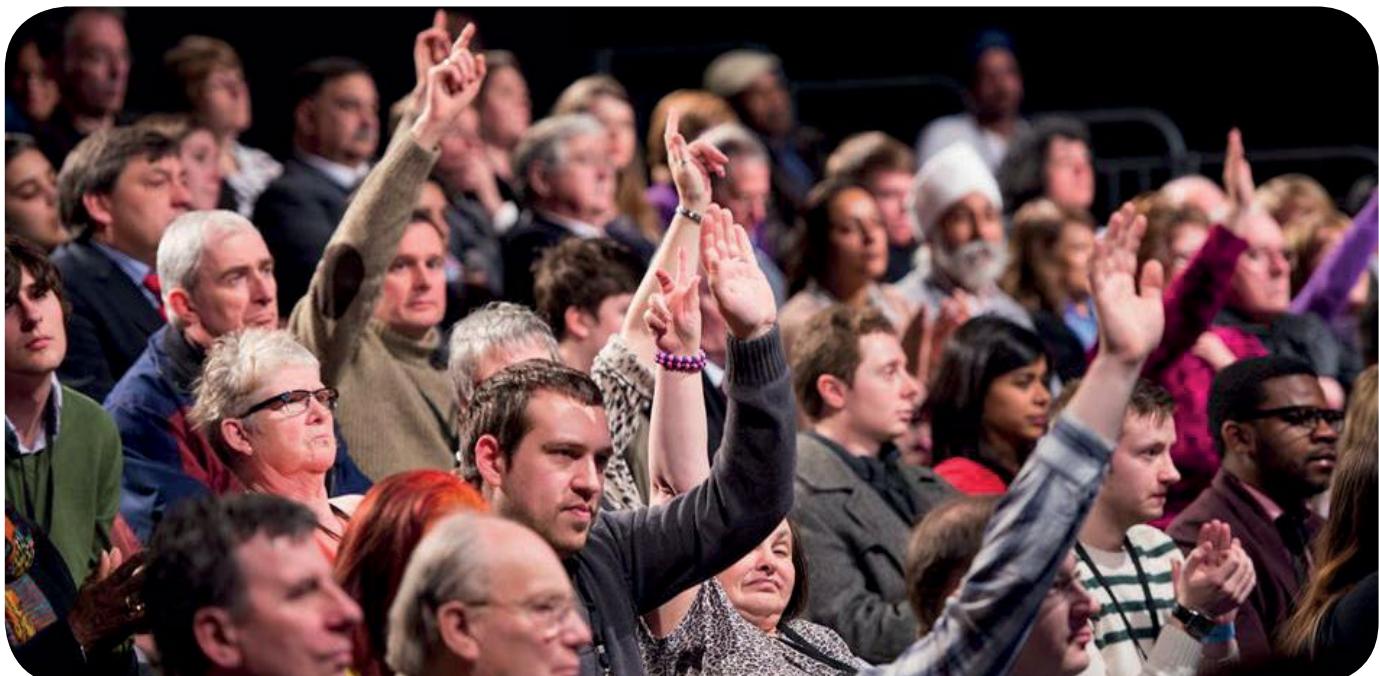
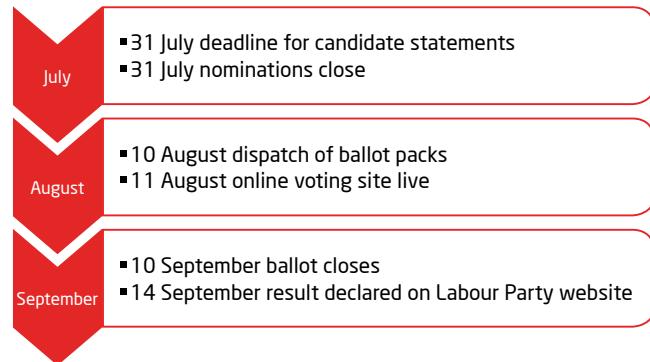
At this year's Annual Party Conference you will once again have the opportunity to visit the ALC Stand. This will accompany an enhanced programme of in depth training and activities at conference and will serve as a place to drop by, meet the Executive, hold small meetings and get conference information. We have also launched our official Labour Councillors website www.labourcouncillors.co.uk, which we hope will be a hub for Councillors to share best practice and showcase innovation in local government.

As well as training and best practice, Local Government Conference and a variety of events at Annual Conference, all of our Labour Councillors have access to legal insurance, support and

representation on standards and legal matters when they need it. You can access support by calling our local government lawyer, Frances Randle on 0870 890 3778 between 9am – 12pm, Monday – Wednesday or by email at randle@steelandsashamash.co.uk.

Members of the Association of Labour Councillors have a brilliant opportunity to shape the future of Councillors in the Labour Party this summer. The new ALC executive will be elected on the 14th of November and you can have your say on who will represent you for the next two years. A full election timetable for the ALC executive can be found below.

The Association of Labour Councillors executive election timetable



LGA Labour Group Office

The LGA Labour Group exists to fight the corner for Labour councillors 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 councillors 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 the 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.

The LGA Labour Group staff, based at Local Government House.



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