

# first

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the magazine for local government

## Interview:

"No lead member wants to be in a position where **they can't meet children's basic safeguarding needs**"

Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive of the National Children's Bureau

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## Finance update



The final local government finance settlement is expected next month, and this edition of **first** takes a look at the provisional deal announced just before Christmas (p5, p10-11, and p24-25).

I had the pleasure of addressing the LGA Independent Group's annual conference, and you can find out more about the event on p12. We also review the proposals for council reorganisation in Dorset (p13) and the LGA's youth services strategy (p15).

Two combined authority mayors – Ben Houchen, Mayor of Tees Valley, and Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester – share their early experiences in their new roles (p16-17).

Our interview this month is with Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive of the National Children's Bureau (p18). She takes a look at the Government's Green Paper on children's mental health, and highlights the funding pressures facing children's services.

The LGA's parliamentary team has also been working hard on children's services, in support of our Bright Futures campaign calling for children's services to be properly funded (p30).

Elsewhere in the magazine, we hear from Cllr Paul Carter, Chairman of the County Councils Network (p23) and we review the local electoral ups and downs of 2017 (p31).

**Lord Porter** is Chairman of the LGA

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# news



## Life chances of young 'best they've ever been'

**More than nine out of 10 maintained schools are now rated as either outstanding or good, according to Ofsted's annual report.**

The regulator gave the same rating to 34 per cent of council children's services – up from 26 per cent last year.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman said the life chances of the vast majority of young people last year were the best they have ever been. However, she stressed that areas of under-performance in the education and care systems persist – citing a group of around 130 schools that have under-performed for up to a decade.

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said the success of maintained schools meant councils "must now be recognised as improvement partners, and be allowed to help all schools improve where necessary, including academies and free schools".

"Every child, regardless of their circumstances, deserves a good education," he said.

"To ensure every child has a good school place, councils must be allowed to direct all schools to expand to meet sharply increasing demand for school places; ensure they take vulnerable pupils if it's in the child's best

interests; have a say on where new schools are built; and be able to set up their own trusts to support any orphaned schools forced into becoming an academy, if they cannot find a willing sponsor."

Cllr Watts added: "It is good news that the number of children's services departments rated as either good or outstanding is rising. Children's services face a £2 billion funding gap by 2020. Councils fear that without adequate funding from government in next month's final local government finance settlement, this improvement work will be severely jeopardised."

Elsewhere, the report highlights that some children and young people needing support because of their special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) "are having a very poor experience of the education system". The LGA was clear with government from the outset that SEND reforms were significantly underfunded.

Ofsted also warns of an increasing number of illegal and conservative, religious schools "deliberately flouting British values and equalities law". In response, the LGA reiterated its call for councils to have powers and appropriate funding to check that children who are listed as home schooled are not, in fact, attending illegal schools.

## Children's mental health plans

The Government has published a Green Paper that aims to improve children and young people's mental health by focusing on early intervention in and around schools and colleges.

'Transforming children and young people's mental health provision' includes plans to fund new mental health support teams to give support to those with emerging and more moderate needs, and the piloting of a four-week waiting time standard for accessing children's mental health services.

Pupils will be taught about mental health and wellbeing as part of relationships education and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lessons. The Green Paper also wants to see a trained, designated member of staff for mental health in every school and college.

Cllr Izzi Seccombe, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Measures to tackle the crisis in children and young people's mental health are long overdue and we are pleased the Government is taking steps to address this.

"However, children and their families need help and support right now. Depression, anxiety, bereavement, and family crises do not wait.

"The reality is that all children need support and we hope this can be extended to all schools.

"This support needs to be available on the same day, at the point of request. Councils have previously called for an independent counselling service in all schools, as evidence shows that children and young people find it a crucial support, and such a service would reduce overall demand on specialist services, too.

"Today's measures are a step in the right direction, but we need a root-and-branch overhaul of children's mental health services if we're to develop a system that says yes, rather than no, to children when they ask for help."

**i** **Consultations on the Green Paper close on 2 March 2018.** For more information and to respond, please visit [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-provision-a-green-paper](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-provision-a-green-paper)  
● See also p18

**i** See [www.gov.uk/government/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/ofsted) for Ofsted's annual report and [www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-ofsted-annual-report](http://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-ofsted-annual-report) for the LGA's full response

# Finance deal 'fails to address funding gap'

The LGA is pressing the Government to provide new funding for all councils in next month's final local government finance settlement, after the provisional deal contained almost no new money.

Local authorities will be able to increase general council tax from 1.99 to 2.99 per cent in 2018/19 and 2019/20 without triggering a referendum, according to the provisional finance settlement, published just before Christmas. The LGA estimates the extra 1 per cent would raise around £250 million, if used in full by all councils.

But LGA Chairman Lord Porter warned that years of "unprecedented" central government funding cuts had left many councils "beyond the point where council tax income can be expected to plug the growing funding gaps they face".

"Local government faces an overall funding gap of £5.8 billion by 2020. Children's services, adult social care and homelessness services are at a tipping point as a result of funding gaps and rising demand, and increasingly little is left to fund other services, such as cleaning streets, running leisure centres and libraries, and fixing potholes," he said.

"While some councils will receive extra funding next year, the Government needs to provide new funding for all councils over

the next few years so they can protect vital local services from further cutbacks."

Other measures in the provisional settlement included plans for 10 more 100 per cent business rate retention pilots, and a formal consultation on a review of relative needs and resources. The Government dropped previously announced changes to the New Homes Bonus (NHB), and said it was aiming for councils to retain 75 per cent of business rates from 2020/21.

Lord Porter said: "It is good that the Government has accepted our call to avoid further NHB changes and clarified plans to introduce a fairer funding system and to allow local government to keep more of its business rates income.

"We look forward to continuing our work with the Government on further business rates retention and the Fair Funding Review. We remain clear that the extra business rates income should go towards meeting the funding gap facing local government and no council should see its funding reduce as a result of a new distribution system.

"The Government must now also use the final settlement to slow the pace of funding cuts and provide replacement funding to all councils over the next two years."

● See also p10-11 and p24-25



## Hospital discharge delays down

Delays in getting mainly older people home after hospital stays because of a lack of social care continue to fall, according to the latest figures.

Councils have reduced the number of 'delayed transfers of care' by 12 per cent since July 2017, when their targets were set by government. This compares to the NHS reducing delays by 4 per cent.

Cllr Izzi Seccombe, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "This is testament to the huge ongoing efforts by councils to get people out of hospital and back into the community, close to their loved ones.

"But councils aren't complacent, and we know more needs to be done in close collaboration with NHS partners locally to ensure everyone gets the care they need in their own home wherever possible.

"It is vital that government and NHS England work with councils to make sure we all make the best use of our scarce resources."

Meanwhile, the Government has confirmed that it will not be proceeding with plans to introduce a cap on individuals' care costs by 2020, as proposed by the 2011 Dilnot Commission.

Cllr Seccombe said: "We continue to support a cap on care, but the most urgent priority remains funding the system adequately now before implementing any wider reforms.

"We have supported the need for changes to the way people pay for their care, and it is important that thinking about how we can limit people's exposure to potentially catastrophic care costs is part of the social care Green Paper [expected by summer 2018].

"However, if the Green Paper is to succeed, it is vital that councils, which have responsibility for adult social care services, are at the heart of all discussions and given a key role in defining and shaping the future of social care."

## Child protection investigations up

Government figures have revealed that, on average, more than 500 child protection investigations were started every day last year by councils concerned about children at risk of harm.

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said the alarming figures revealed an increase of 300 extra cases a day compared with a decade ago.

He warned that children's services were under immense pressure and reiterated the LGA's warning to government that by 2020, council's children's services departments will be facing a funding gap of £2 billion.

The LGA was keen to stress that children would only be taken into care if it was absolutely necessary for their own protection. But it said that if concerns were raised, it was absolutely right for councils to investigate, where necessary.

Cllr Watts said: "The Government has been warned repeatedly that ongoing funding cuts have left councils struggling to offer the support that vulnerable children and families need. With councils now starting 500 child protection investigations each day, along with providing the other vital services that they deliver, children's services have now reached a tipping point.

"Unless there is an injection of funding to support crucial early intervention services, many more vulnerable children and families will need formal support from council child protection services in the years to come."

He added: "Last year, 75 per cent of councils were forced to overspend their budgets by millions to ensure children at immediate risk of harm were protected. We've reached the point where this service can no longer be ignored. It is absolutely crucial that next month's local government finance settlement addresses this funding gap."

## Rising homelessness

Councils are placing 79,190 homeless households in temporary accommodation – a 50 per cent increase from five years ago, according to the most recent government statistics. The figures include 121,360 homeless children, which continues the trend of councils, on average, having to house the equivalent of an extra secondary school's worth of children each month. Cllr Martin Tett, the LGA's Housing Spokesman, said: "The Government can help councils tackle homelessness by adapting welfare reforms to ensure housing remains affordable for low-income families, and allowing all councils, across the country, to borrow to build new homes as part of the final local government finance settlement."

## Right to Buy sales

Councils sold 2,558 homes under Right to Buy between July and September 2017 – but just 744 were started to replace them. The LGA has called for councils to keep all their Right to Buy receipts, saying the current arrangements restrict their ability to build replacement homes. Cllr Martin Tett, the LGA's Housing Spokesman, warned: "Councils have lost out on enough homes to house the population of Oxford in the last five years. If the Government doesn't allow councils to replace homes sold off, the Right to Buy itself could grind to a halt."

## Public land

More than 90 per cent of councils are now part of a programme that will create 44,000 new jobs and release land for 25,000 new homes. The One Public Estate programme, a partnership between the Cabinet Office and the LGA, is giving local authorities and their public sector partners access to £8.7 million of funding, as well as practical support and expertise, to help them make better use of publicly owned land and assets. By 2020, partnerships on the programme are expected to deliver £615 million in capital receipts, £158 million running costs savings, create 44,000 new jobs and release land for 25,000 new homes. See [www.local.gov.uk/topics/housing-planning-and-homelessness/one-public-estate](http://www.local.gov.uk/topics/housing-planning-and-homelessness/one-public-estate)



## The number of people using buses in England each year has fallen to its lowest level in a decade – down to 4.44 billion passenger journeys in 2016/17.

The LGA is warning that this continued decline could have an impact on traffic congestion and poorer air quality in local communities, as well as leaving those who rely on the bus network unsupported.

Meanwhile, cherished bus services and routes will remain under threat unless councils are given the powers and funding to protect them. The LGA wants government to reduce the pace of reductions in core grant funding to all councils over the next two years, so they can protect the services communities rely on.

The Government also needs to fund the concessionary fares scheme fully. Councils are spending at least £200 million a year to subsidise the scheme – which provides free, off-peak travel for elderly and disabled residents.

This comes at the cost of other discretionary subsidised bus services, such as free peak travel, community transport services and post-16 school transport, and other local services such as collecting bins and filling potholes.

Cllr Martin Tett, the LGA's Transport Spokesman, said: "Buses provide a vital service for our communities and a lifeline for our most vulnerable residents to go shopping, pick up medication, attend doctor appointments or socialise with friends."

"Councils know how important buses are for their residents and local economies and are desperate to protect them."

"It's nearly impossible for councils to keep subsidising free travel while having to find billions of pounds worth of savings and protect other vital services like caring for the elderly, filling potholes and collecting bins. Faced with significant funding pressures, many across the country are being forced into taking difficult decisions to scale back services and review subsidised routes."

He added: "The way the concessionary travel scheme is funded by Whitehall has not kept up with growing demand and cost. By giving councils control over the Bus Service Operators' Grant, and properly funding the free bus pass schemes, the Government could help us support and maintain our essential bus services, reduce congestion and protect vital routes."

## 'Let all councils borrow to build homes'

All councils should be enabled to borrow to build new homes, the LGA's Senior Vice-Chair, Cllr Nick Forbes, has told MPs.

November's Autumn Budget revealed measures to allow some councils – those with 'high affordability pressure' – to be able to bid for an additional £1 billion extension to their housing revenue accounts (HRA).

The LGA has long called for the cap on HRA accounts to be lifted in its entirety, with no conditions attached, to help trigger a renaissance in council house building.

Cllr Nick Forbes, appearing before the House of Commons Treasury Select Committee before Christmas, said: "We have a situation where most of the borrowing caps for local authorities are operating under 20 per cent of their cap, so the flexibility to manoeuvre is very limited."

"The Government's indication in the Budget of £1 billion for housing revenue accounts goes some way towards helping tackle our housing shortage, but I don't think it is necessarily going to meet the scale of the challenges we face."

Also appearing at the committee, the National Housing Federation and the Federation of Master Builders backed the LGA in calling for councils to be able to borrow to build.

Cllr Forbes also argued passionately for councils to be able to keep 100 per cent of their Right to Buy receipts: "Currently, we only retain 30 per cent of the Right to Buy receipts and the rest goes to the Treasury."

"Our argument would be that we should be allowed to use 100 per cent of the receipts from Right to Buy sales to invest in new homes."

# 'Not fit for purpose' – buildings regs review

Building regulations are “not fit for purpose”, according to an interim report from an independent review set up following the Grenfell Tower fire.

Ahead of a final report in the spring, Dame Judith Hackitt, who is leading the review, said a “cultural and behavioural change of some magnitude” was needed across the whole sector.

LGA Chairman Lord Porter said the interim report reinforced councils’ warnings around the complexity and confusion of the current system of ensuring buildings are safe.

“The Government needs to endorse the report’s findings without delay and work with councils and the industry to take the process of reform forward in the way Dame Judith has set out. This will obviously need to include rewriting the documents relating to the installation of cladding and insulation on external walls of buildings, so they are easier to understand and comply with.

“What happened at Grenfell Tower can never be allowed to happen again and no-one should have to live in fear about their safety, be that in the buildings they live in,

work in or visit. It is clear that landlords also need urgent clarity about how they should be replacing materials on their high-rise blocks that have failed fire safety tests, while we have raised wider concerns about the general safety of other clad buildings.”

Lord Porter said councils had acted quickly to put in safety measures in their high-rise blocks to reassure residents. But the majority of high-rise buildings affected by fire safety test fails are owned by private landlords.

Councils continue to work hard to support local building owners to deal with the issue and identify the cladding and insulation systems on those blocks.

He added: “While councils will continue to get on with what they need to do and are ready to play a leading role in making sure a new system of building regulation works, significant funding concerns remain. The Government needs to meet the unexpected exceptional costs for councils arising from conducting fire safety and major remedial work and for any essential fire and safety measures needed.”

## Call for plastic bottle deposit scheme

There should be a UK-wide deposit return scheme for plastic bottles and a requirement to provide free drinking water in public premises, according to a report from MPs.

The Environmental Audit Committee also wants to see producers become more financially responsible for the plastic packaging they produce.

Mary Creagh MP, Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, said urgent action is needed to protect the marine environment from plastic pollution.

“Our throwaway society uses 13 billion plastic bottles each year, around half of which are not recycled. Plastic bottles make up a third of all plastic pollution in the sea, and are a growing litter problem on UK beaches. We need action at individual, council, regional and national levels to turn back the plastic tide.”

Cllr Martin Tett, the LGA’s Environment Spokesman, described the committee’s recommendations as “constructive”. But he added: “It’s crucial that local authorities are consulted on the introduction of any new plastic bottle deposit return scheme.

“If councils are to be given the responsibilities to facilitate such a service, it must be matched in funding and resources so that councils are able to implement it



successfully. We look forward to seeing more detail on any proposals in due course.

“One small but effective way we can cut down on plastic waste is for premises that serve food and drink to offer free drinking water, and for water companies to provide more public water fountains in our communities, and we support these recommendations.

“To reduce the amount of unrecyclable waste we produce in the first place, it’s essential that manufacturers and retailers work with us to achieve this. What we need is packaging that is easily recyclable – this would not only make waste disposal easier for our residents, but save considerable amounts of money and energy, while protecting our environment.”

## Honours for local government

Council leaders, officers and other representatives from the public sector who work with local government were recognised in the New Year’s Honours for 2018.

Among them were the Vice-Chairman of the LGA’s Safer and Stronger Communities Board, Cllr Morris Bright (Con). The Leader of Hertsmer Council becomes an MBE, for services to local government.

Other recipients of MBEs include Cllr Hazel Simmons (Lab), Leader of Luton Borough Council; Cllr Geoffrey Evans (Con), of Cornwall and Falmouth Town Councils; and Cllr Ann Reid (Lib Dem), Interim Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Tourism at City of York Council. Michele Hodgson, former Chair of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service and former Durham county councillor, is also made an MBE, for services to fire and rescue.

Cllr Stephen Brady (Lab), Leader of Hull City Council, becomes an OBE for services to local government, as does Cllr Dennis Harvey (Lab), Leader of Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, for political service in Warwickshire.

There is a CBE for North Tyneside Council’s elected Mayor Norma Redfean (Lab), and OBEs for Cllr Ranjit Dheer (Lab), Deputy Leader of Ealing Council, and Oldham Council’s Cllr John Hudson (Con).

Alan Wood CBE, Hackney’s former Corporate Director for Children and Young People’s Services, is knighted.

Among the other local government officers recognised for their work, with CBEs, were Amanda Skelton, Chief Executive of Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council; Ray James, lately President of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services and Director of Health, Housing and Adult Social Care at Enfield Council; and Dave Hill, Executive Director for Social Care and Education at Essex County Council.

Judith Hay, Assistant Director for Children and Families, and Martin Kelly, Head of Resources, Children and Young People’s Services, both at North Yorkshire County Council, are made OBEs.

There were also MBEs for Susan Smith, former Joint Chief Executive of South Northamptonshire and Cherwell District Councils, and Robert Tinlin, former Chief Executive of Southend-on-Sea Borough Council.

**i** The full New Year’s Honours list 2018 can be viewed at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-years-honours-list-2018](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-years-honours-list-2018)

## Staff pay offer

Council employees have been offered a two-year pay increase from 1 April 2018. The majority of employees (those earning £19,430 a year or more) would receive 2 per cent each year, with higher increases for those on lower salaries. The offer also includes the introduction of a new national pay spine on 1 April 2019. The national pay bill would rise 5.6 per cent over two years.



## City of culture

Coventry has been named the UK's City of Culture 2021. Congratulating Coventry, Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "Local authorities, alongside Arts Council England, are this country's biggest public sector investors in culture and this award should act as a catalyst to realise the full potential of all our places. Coventry's winning bid, and the benefits it will bring to the city, should be scaled up and replicated in communities across the country, so that our local museums, libraries, theatres, heritage sites and parks are front and centre of what makes an area great to visit, live and work in."

## Public health cuts

Councils' public health budgets will continue to face significant funding reductions over the next two years, and will have fallen by £531 million between 2015/16 and 2019/20. Cllr Izzi Seccombe, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, responding to a written ministerial statement on the figures, said taking money away from preventative services was "extremely counterproductive". She added: "Further reductions to the public health budget reinforces the view that central government sees prevention services as nice-to-do but ultimately non-essential. Interventions to tackle teenage pregnancy, child obesity, physical inactivity, sexually transmitted infections and substance misuse cannot be seen as an added extra for health budgets."

# EU regional funding 'to continue'

**EU regional and regeneration funding – worth £8.4 million to local communities in the UK – is to continue until the end of the current programme in 2020, the Government has confirmed.**

The LGA has been lobbying for clarity on the funding since the EU referendum.

The cash has been used by local areas to create jobs, support small and medium-sized enterprises, deliver skills training, invest in critical transport and digital infrastructure, and boost inclusive growth.

As part of the recent phase one negotiations on exiting the EU, concluded last month (Dec), the UK committed to contributing to the EU's budget up to 2020.

Its continued participation in the EU's 'Multi-annual Financial Framework' means the UK will continue to benefit from programmes such as the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, Interreg (which stimulates cooperation between EU regions), LEADER (which supports locally initiated rural development projects), the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, and almost all other EU funding programmes.

The LGA has said this is a welcome short-term solution, but that clarity is now



needed on the period beyond 2020. It wants to see funding to local areas fully replaced from 2021 as part of a locally-led successor to EU regional aid. This successor programme should be designed to give local areas a far greater say over how money is spent and enable them to deliver the ambitions of the Government's Industrial Strategy.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's Brexit Task and Finish Group, said: "We need to avoid the uncertainties and delays that have already plagued this programme from happening again. This has already had an impact across the country.

"Positive, tangible progress has been made on the issue, but there is work still to be done before we can call it a success."

## Councils key to industrial strategy

The Government's Industrial Strategy must recognise the vital contribution of councils and use yet-to-be devolved responsibilities to drive a successful, competitive economy, the LGA has said.

Cllr Martin Tett, Chairman of the LGA's Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board, said the recognition of the "crucial role of place" in the Industrial Strategy White Paper was encouraging.

"If we are to have a successful, modern and globally competitive economy, which enables everyone to succeed, it is essential that the Industrial Strategy recognises the strengths and opportunities that each area brings and the vital contribution of local government," he said.

"Council leaders are committed to working with business leaders to boost productivity and growth. But if we are to play a full part, we quickly need to develop a national regional aid scheme to replace all existing EU regeneration funding, and a devolved approach to skills and infrastructure that ensures that every local economy and individual has the potential to prosper.

"In particular, it is critical that all new skills initiatives join up across places, balancing national priorities with the varying needs of our local communities and businesses. Councils' efforts are essential in bringing this together."

He added: "Local industrial strategies provide a fresh opportunity for government, business leaders, universities and local councils to forge new, powerful relationships with each other, for the benefit of local residents, as well as to underline the need for new devolution deals across the country.

"Councils have a unique leadership role in developing local industrial strategies – but they need to be able to draw on the right powers and adequate funding to deliver successful and inclusive economies."

# letters

## Tackling fuel poverty

The Government's announcement of an extra £2 billion to encourage the building of affordable new council homes was very welcome news. But why do we persist in building homes with the same old materials that do nothing to tackle fuel poverty?

At a recent sitting of West Lindsey District Council's Challenge and Improve Committee, I suggested new houses should be built with solar tiles as standard, to alleviate fuel poverty and help families struggling with the rising costs of energy.

This would cost about £3,000 extra per home in West Lindsey, according to some house builders I have consulted and who support the initiative.

Implemented across the country, this would see a decrease in the cost of renewable energy, create thousands of jobs, reduce our reliance on imported fossil fuels and help meet green targets.

The excess energy could be given free to the National Grid in return for a fund to cover the cost of replacement tiles when their lifespan is over.

We need to be more proactive in the way we build affordable homes, using the resources available to make a difference to people's lives. This will change our country for the better and let it lead the world in house building.

**Cllr Roger Patterson (Con)**, West Lindsey District Council

## Renting versus owning

The housing crisis continues apace and there seems to be little that local authorities can do. I believe the root cause is that government is operating under a misapprehension that all young people want to own property. I do not think this is the case.

Studies have shown that many young people are more interested in experiences than owning bricks and mortar. People are marrying later and delaying having children. They do not appear to want the huge commitment of a mortgage.

It can also take more than a year to sell and buy a house. This is reducing social mobility. I have recently met someone who commuted nearly 200 miles daily for nine months because of the process of selling and buying. In rented property, this could have been a month.

What is needed is to ask younger people what they want, instead of government telling them they need to buy property. People want decent places to live. They are not too bothered about owning property until they are much older than their parents were. We have to encourage the building of good quality homes available at a reasonable rent. Only then, will we start to solve the problem.

**Cllr Alan Seldon (It's Our County)**, Herefordshire County Council

## Looking after children

New figures for Bradford Metropolitan District Council show the number of children aged 16 who are looked after and who are not in education, employment and training (NEET) is currently zero.

This is the first time that Bradford has recorded a zero figure for a vulnerable NEET group. The equivalent figure for 2016 was 10.1 per cent.

The council works in partnership with a range of organisations, including Prospects, Connexions, and local schools and colleges, to help young people find positive ways forward in education or training that will benefit them in the future.

The Virtual School for looked-after children, which supports young

## sound bites

**Cllr Stephen Hibbert (Con, Northampton)**

"Delighted to entertain councillors from Charnwood and housing officers from Nottingham at the Guildhall. Lots of national interest in Northampton's Housing Enforcement Policy."

[www.twitter.com/CllrHibbert](http://www.twitter.com/CllrHibbert)

**Cllr Julian Ellacott (Con, Reigate & Banstead)**

"Heartening presentation at O&S committee hearing about the work being done by @reigatebanstead for those in need in our community – homelessness, family support, Syrian refugees."

[www.twitter.com/Cllr\\_Julian](http://www.twitter.com/Cllr_Julian)

**Cllr Lib Peck (Lab, Lambeth)**

"Great to start the day with @MayorofLondon at Platonos College in Stockwell, launching the campaign to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of women's suffrage and to drive forward gender equality across our capital #BehindEveryGreatCity."

[www.twitter.com/cllrpeck](http://www.twitter.com/cllrpeck)

**Cllr John Fulham, (Lab, St Helens Council)**

"Extremely proud that @AshurstPrimary School #StHelens, where I'm a Governor, is 1 of Mersey's #Top20 schools. A testament to staff, pupils & parents who've all worked so hard to create a fun, friendly, hardworking & successful environment! Congratulations."

[www.twitter.com/johnfulham](http://www.twitter.com/johnfulham)

**Cllr Jude Deakin, (Lib Dem, Chelmsford)**

"On my way to #London for an @LGACOMMS Conference on 'A New Vision For Youth Services'. The vision I have is for Youth Services to be mandatory. #OurFuture."

[www.twitter.com/judedekain](http://www.twitter.com/judedekain)

**Cllr Karen Walker, (Ind, Bath and North East Somerset)**

"New finger post erected at the bottom of Braysdown Lane! I managed to secure £1,500 from B&NES Council for the design, production and installation work #InitiativeFund #lovepeasedown."

[www.twitter.com/Karenwalker3434](http://www.twitter.com/Karenwalker3434)

people in care, and the council's Through Care Team, also play a key role in working with schools and colleges so that young people keep accessing education. They offer bespoke support to help young apprentices sustain their attendance, and give support to young mums and care leavers with disabilities to help them find employment opportunities. Great credit needs to go to the young people who have taken the positive step to go into education and training.

This joined-up approach to raising attainment reflects the ambition of our Education Covenant, which is about keeping education a top priority.

**Cllr Imran Khan (Lab)**, Portfolio Holder for Education, Employment and Skills, Bradford Metropolitan District Council



**What do you think?** Please submit letters for publication by emailing [frist@local.gov.uk](mailto:frist@local.gov.uk). Letters may be edited and published online

# features

## The provisional finance settlement

Councils will be able to increase council tax but the funding gaps facing children's services and adult social care have not been addressed by ministers

**T**he LGA is calling on the Government to use next month's final local government finance settlement to slow the pace of funding cuts and give replacement funding to all councils over the next two years.

The provisional settlement, published before Christmas, handed councils greater flexibility in setting council tax levels, reversed planned changes to the New Homes Bonus, and clarified plans to introduce a fairer funding system and to allow local government to keep more of its business rates income.

However, it was extremely disappointing that the Government failed to use the settlement to address the funding gaps facing children's services and adult social care. With almost no new money from central government included, the LGA said new funding needs to be found for all councils over the next few years so they can protect vital local services from further cutbacks.

The provisional settlement announced that councils will be able to increase general council tax by 2.99 per cent in 2018/19. The LGA estimates that the extra 1 per cent above the previous year's limit would raise around £250 million, if used in full. While giving some councils the option of raising extra money next year, the LGA said council tax income cannot plug the funding gap facing local services.

It also highlighted that 88 shire districts with the lowest council tax levels will not benefit from the extra flexibility because they can already increase council tax by up to £5, which to them amounts to more than a 3 per cent increase.

The provisional settlement saw the Government accept the LGA's call not to make any further changes to the New Homes Bonus. It will not increase the housing growth threshold above 0.4 per cent and, this year, it is not going ahead on further changes to the bonus that it consulted on earlier in 2017 – to hold back funding for decisions on new homes approved by the Planning Inspectorate.

This means that the New Homes Bonus in 2018/19 will be £946 million – £8 million more than previously forecast.

The Government announced its intention to phase out grants and increase the share of business rates collectively kept by local government to 75 per cent from 2020/21. A further 10 local authority areas – Berkshire, Derbyshire, Devon, Gloucestershire, Kent and Medway, Leeds, Lincolnshire, Solent, Suffolk, and Surrey – will pilot 100 per cent business rates retention alongside London.

The Government also confirmed its intention to conclude the Fair Funding Review in time for the 2020/21 financial year and published a consultation on progress to date.

The LGA said councils will see their core



### Business rates

- The Government intends to introduce 75 per cent business rates retention in 2020/21.
- An additional 10 council areas will pilot 100 per cent business rates – alongside all London boroughs and the City of London Corporation.

LGA view: *"We look forward to continuing our work with the Government on further business rates retention and remain clear that the extra business rates income should go towards meeting the funding gap facing local government."*

funding from central government further cut in half over the next two years and almost phased out completely by the end of the decade. Delays to when business rates reforms will be implemented mean councils are facing a financial cliff-edge that the Government has to address. New government funding is essential to avoid councils reaching a financial breaking point that will threaten the existence of some local services.

The LGA also continues to call on the Government to publish the provisional local government finance settlement earlier in the year to help councils in their financial planning. The final settlement is expected to be published in February.



### New Homes Bonus

- The New Homes Bonus threshold will remain at 0.4 per cent, but the length of time that the bonus is paid for will reduce from five years to four years in 2018/19.

**LGA view:** *“NHB makes up considerable funding for some councils, particularly shire districts. It is good news that the Government accepted the LGA’s call to avoid further increases to the threshold.”*



### Funding

- Almost no new money was included in the settlement.
- The Rural Services Delivery Grant will be £65 million, an increase of £15 million.

**LGA view:** *“The Government needs to provide new funding for all councils over the next few years. This could be done either through further business rates retention or additional grant funding.”*



### Fair Funding Review

- The Government intends to implement the Fair Funding Review in April 2020.
- It has published a consultation looking at approaches to measure the relative needs of local authorities.

**LGA view:** *“In our response to the consultation, we will be making clear that no council should see its funding reduce as a result of a new distribution system.”*



### Planning fees

- Local authorities will be able to increase planning fees by 20 per cent to fund their planning services.

**LGA view:** *“We call on the Government to go even further and allow local authorities the freedom to set their own fees, so that council taxpayers no longer have to subsidise the planning system.”*

### Council tax

- The general council tax referendum limit was increased from 1.99 per cent to 2.99 per cent for 2018/19 and 2019/20.
- District councils can increase council tax by the higher of 3 per cent or £5 for a Band D property.
- Social care authorities can increase bills by up to a further 3 per cent to pay for adult social care.

**LGA view:** *“With no other national tax subject to referenda, the referendum limit should be abolished completely. Councils are beyond the point where council tax income can be expected to plug the growing funding gaps they face.”*



**i** For detailed analysis of the provisional local government finance settlement, read the LGA’s on-the-day briefing at [www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses](http://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses). A government consultation on the provisional settlement closes on 16 January, see [www.gov.uk/government/collections/provisional-local-government-finance-settlement-england-2018-to-2019](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/provisional-local-government-finance-settlement-england-2018-to-2019). Please share your response with us by emailing [lgfinance@local.gov.uk](mailto:lgfinance@local.gov.uk)

# A diversity of views

Commercialisation, local democracy and electoral reform were among the subjects discussed at the LGA Independent Group's recent conference



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



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The new white décor of 18 Smith Square was a welcoming sight for Independent Group members at our flagship annual conference in November.

Inspired by vibrant ideas being delivered both by fellow councillors and other national leaders in local government, members freely discussed the pressing issues facing local government, from Brexit and finance to housing and democracy.

Discussing with old friends and new, members also strengthened our national network for sharing good sense and support. One of the key strengths of our group is the diversity of views and the courage to voice them – often very persuasively.

The session on commercialisation was chaired by Lord Kerslake, President of the LGA, and featured enlightening presentations by Julie McEver, a Programme Director at Local Partnerships, a joint venture between the LGA and the Treasury, and Ken Lyon, Head of Commercialism at Birmingham City Council. Discussion from the floor showed both strong enthusiasm and thoughtful scepticism about the trend where half our councils now rely on raising funds through business enterprise, in order to support our core work of delivering local services.

Whether we like it or not, the continuing financial strains that we face make this conversation particularly urgent, so it was

*“One of the key strengths of our group is the diversity of views and the courage to voice them”*

good for us to take away a few well-proven ideas, especially those that can be local and are close to our normal business. At the time of writing, we remain hopeful that next month's final local government finance settlement will contain some good news (see p25).

The diversity of views and interests held by members of our group also shone throughout the Q&As, the workshops, and our 'Speakers' Corner' session, where all delegates are encouraged to take a few minutes to talk passionately about a host of issues, including good democracy, the environment, housing and health.

Clearly, one thing we all share is our passion for representing our residents! Recruiting more candidates to stand alongside us at elections remains vital. Delegates made neat 30-second videos for social media, as part of our Be a Councillor campaign.

Colin Copus, Professor of Local Politics and Director of the Local Governance

Research Unit at De Montfort University, chaired a session giving insight into the character of councils when under the leadership of our Independent Group members. These leaders talked about winning support from their group and from the council, and focusing on achieving the best outcomes for their residents, often using innovative ideas.

We were also joined by guests from Make Votes Matter, an organisation that campaigns for a system of more proportional representation – electoral reform designed to make a more inclusive government. A motion on this through your council would give you the platform to speak about the kind of democracy you would like to see.

We've received some excellent feedback on this year's conference, which shows how much delegates enjoyed and valued the day, and which will help us continue to improve our events. So, if you're a member of our group and didn't make it to the conference this year, you missed out – but we hope to see you next year, when I'm sure our annual event will be even better.



For more information about the LGA's Independent Group, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent](http://www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent)

# Reforming local government in Dorset

The motivation for reorganisation is how councils, as deliverers of local services, can be more agile and innovative



Cllr Rebecca Knox (Con)  
is Leader of Dorset  
County Council

Local government should always be on a journey of learning and innovation, based on the needs of the local residents and communities it serves.

The Dorset local government reorganisation experience gained more traction two years ago because of the obvious financial deficit facing the county. This impacted on the services delivered by councils and the wider public sector – health, fire, police and education – as we sit near the bottom in terms of national government spend per head as a geographical area.

What that financial wake-up call led to was a proposal endorsed by six – now eight – of Dorset’s nine councils to create two new unitary authorities structured around the established urban and rural geography of the county.

In November, Communities and Local Government Secretary Sajid Javid said he was “minded to approve” the proposals, and a consultation on them closed on 8 January, after this edition of **first** had gone to press.

Moving from the starting point of the financial case for change, the motivations for reorganisation in Dorset are now more about how ‘we’, as deliverers of local services, can be more agile and innovative, and embrace all the other partners and stakeholders who can help. The way local government works should reflect the way residents are served on a more frequent basis by other public services.

In terms of the provision of public services and wider local democracy, the starting point for residents is local

government, and that is critically important. As a local councillor, it is really gratifying and rewarding to be that point of contact.

What is difficult for some councillors is the realisation that there is confusion about local democracy; that residents actually don’t want to have to understand the layers that can exist. They just want us – as local councillors – to go fix a problem or explore their ideas. In residents’ eyes, the role of councillors is about service.

People want local democracy. However, they perhaps do not need so much of it, as long as a system works. Others can

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*“People want local democracy. However, they perhaps do not need so much of it, as long as a system works”*

help, including communities, the private sector and the health service. Local government reform offers an opportunity to move closer to shared and collective delivery with a democratic mandate that can act swiftly.

The way forward for Dorset is focusing on good service delivery. It is what our staff strive to deliver, what our residents need, and why councillors carry out the work they do.

Dorset’s ongoing journey has been independently assessed, and the process to move to a different structure agreed through independently audited consultation processes. Every day, councillors like me need to ask questions such as: ‘Is this the right thing to do? What or who is missing? What can we really do to seize on this opportunity and make a difference?’

As a society, we absolutely need democracy. Our residents expect a local governance structure, and it can be a real help for deliverers of key services, where councillors can facilitate and provide a conduit of understanding with individuals or communities.

They do not want to hear that a different council is responsible and then have to go and ask it. So we need a structure that is simpler to understand but has more influence.

Importantly, councillors need the ability to step into areas currently perhaps unknown, making the connections between whoever or whichever organisation can do the best for the people of Dorset. There are many exciting opportunities ahead for us to think and act differently about enabling services, rather than being the sole provider of them.



# Constructing social value

## Local jobs and apprenticeships can be built into council construction contracts

Councils spend around £55 billion each year on buying goods and services, with £18 billion of that related to construction.

Councils are leading the way on adopting best practice in construction procurement by developing standardised contracts or 'frameworks' that are compliant with current EU requirements.

These frameworks can reduce the time it takes to procure goods and services, and help ensure councils get value for money. They can also help build additional social value, or 'community benefits', into contracts, ranging from training opportunities for residents to commercial possibilities for local firms.

Employment and skills are a key element of the ethos of the frameworks

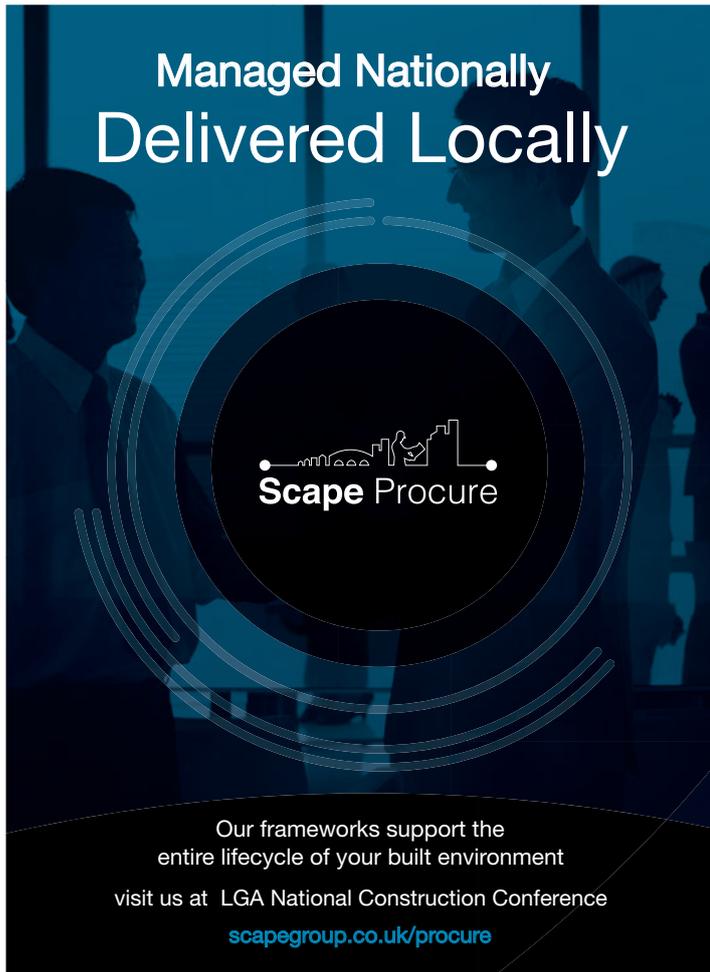
hosted by East Riding of Yorkshire Council. They are designed to deliver efficiencies, but also tangible opportunities for local people. All have employment and skills targets contractually embedded to create a supply chain for skills and offer local opportunities for training and apprenticeships.

The Southern Construction Framework, a collaboration between councils in the South East, South West and London,

encourages local small and medium-sized suppliers to bid for work both directly and through the supply chain. It runs 'meet the buyer' events and has identified more than 400 local businesses for the framework's supply chains.

The councils running the regional frameworks work together as the National Association of Construction Frameworks (NACF) to share good practice. They have been instrumental in developing the LGA's new construction strategy that will be launched on 1 February at our annual construction conference – see [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events) for more information and to book your place.

*“Frameworks can reduce the time it takes to procure goods and services, and help councils get value for money”*



**Managed Nationally  
Delivered Locally**

**Scape Procure**

Our frameworks support the entire lifecycle of your built environment  
visit us at [LGA National Construction Conference](http://LGA National Construction Conference)  
[scapegroup.co.uk/procure](http://scapegroup.co.uk/procure)

Nine regions in England and Wales are working together to drive efficiency, social value and quality buildings for the public sector

These best practice construction frameworks are designed by local government for the benefit of all public authorities.

Find out more and visit our website:  
[www.nacframework.org.uk](http://www.nacframework.org.uk)



**National Association Construction Frameworks**  
Serving the Public Sector

Or why not hear from NACF at the annual LGA construction conference on the **1st February**

The Government needs to recognise the importance of services that improve young people's lives, according to the LGA's vision for youth services



## A brighter future

**W**e want to support councils and work with government to get young people the properly funded youth services they deserve. That's the message of the LGA's long-term vision for youth services, launched at our one-day conference in December.

All young people should have the opportunity to enjoy their lives, reach their full potential and make a good transition to adulthood – but our children's services are under increasing pressure.

Councils were forced to overspend on their children's services budgets by £605 million across England in 2015/16. Recent research suggests that central government funding for services for children and young people has fallen by £2.4 billion since 2010, and an additional £2 billion funding gap will have opened up by 2020.

At the same time, demand for child-protection services has increased significantly, forcing councils to prioritise services for children in crisis over early help.

This has led to a major scaling back of the universal youth services that might reduce need later on. We know that providing early help to children and young people not only supports better outcomes, but it

saves significant amounts of money further down the line.

The Early Intervention Foundation, for example, estimates that nearly £17 billion is spent every year on late intervention, with £6.4 billion of that falling on local authorities, in particular children's services (see [www.eif.org.uk/publication/the-cost-of-late-intervention-eif-analysis-2016/](http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/the-cost-of-late-intervention-eif-analysis-2016/)).

Although youth services are unlikely to return to the same levels of funding as in the pre-austerity years, we have a duty to our younger citizens to do the very best we can with what we have, and to argue for better.

We need the Government to recognise the importance of services that improve all young people's lives, and that these should be youth-led, inclusive, respectful, good quality, empowering and positive.

We also need councils to have the right tools and funding to enable young people to access the universal services and targeted support that meets their needs.

Specifically, we are calling for the Government to:

- include responsibility for young people within a ministerial portfolio
- reverse the cuts to early intervention funding for local councils
- fund support for the measurement of outcomes and the development of a wider evidence base for youth services.

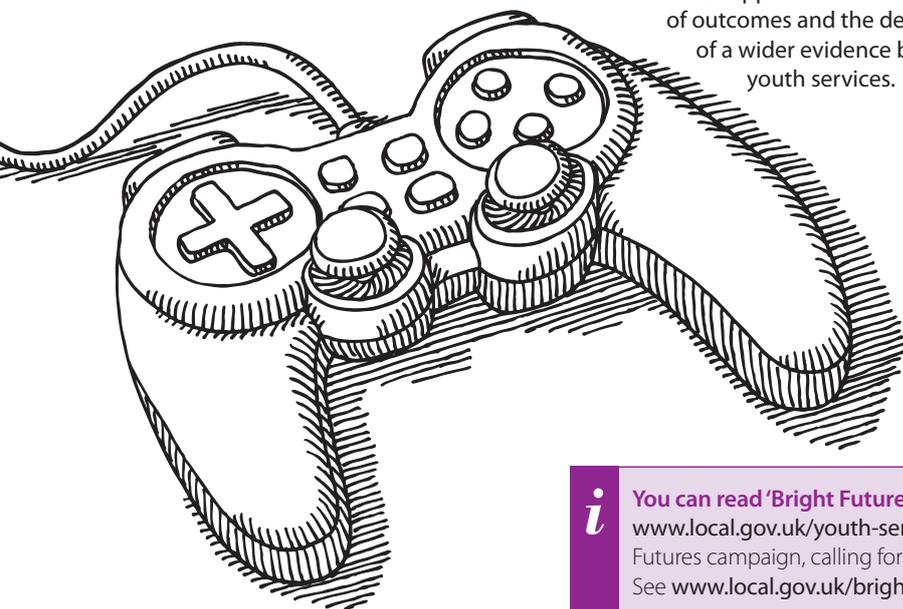
*“We are calling for a proportion of the National Citizen Service's funding to be devolved directly to councils for them to dedicate to supporting local youth services”*

We also want to work more closely with the NCS Trust in delivering the National Citizen Service locally, and will call for a proportion of the service's funding to be devolved directly to councils for them to dedicate to supporting local youth services.

'Bright Futures: our vision for youth services' is based on existing good practice around the country, and feedback from councils, partners and practitioners. We want to help councils to work across departments and with their partners to support all young people and provide the safe spaces and activities they need, want and value.

We will develop a range of support for local authorities to help them to work towards delivering the vision, and use it to help make the case for additional government funding for youth services that genuinely meet the needs of young people.

Our vision is a starting point for taking a fresh look at youth provision and encouraging true collaboration between all providers, so we can help all young people to have the brighter futures they deserve.



You can read 'Bright Futures: our vision for youth services' in full at [www.local.gov.uk/youth-services-vision](http://www.local.gov.uk/youth-services-vision). It forms part of the LGA's Bright Futures campaign, calling for fully funded children's services. See [www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures](http://www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures) and #gettingthebest on Twitter

# Branding metro mayors



Ben Houchen (Con)  
is Mayor of the Tees Valley

Raising awareness of the role of the new combined authority mayors and connecting with the public will be key to ensuring their success

**W**hen I was elected Mayor of the Tees Valley in May, I immediately realised the responsibility that rested on my shoulders.

While it is a great honour, and no small feat to represent the region I call home, the appointment also brings with it a litmus test for the future of the UK's political governance.

The introduction of the first six metro mayors has been a vital part of the Government's devolution scheme. We are tasked with bringing economic growth to our regions, and have been granted the tools to do this with powers over business investment, transport infrastructure, employment and skills, and culture and tourism.

The clearest way to evidence the worth of such a seismic move in how our country is run is by delivering results for my area. It has been a busy seven months since the election, during which time I have been working tirelessly to realise the vast potential of the move, engaging with businesses big and small, as well as pressing the Government on the key issues of our area.

One such early success story was the Prime Minister's visit to the region this summer. Theresa May launched the South Tees Development Corporation, the first mayoral development corporation outside Greater London and the single biggest regeneration opportunity in the UK.

This new body, which I chair, aims to transform a 4,500 acre area south of the River Tees into a hotbed of industry, creating 20,000 jobs over the next 25 years.

In December, I also had the pleasure of meeting Secretary of State for Transport Chris Grayling to outline our ambitious plans to transform Darlington Station, an essential hub for the region. He was receptive to my proposals to future-proof our transport infrastructure to benefit the area and form a vital part of the HS2 network.

However, engaging with Westminster is just one strand of a bigger plan to connect with the public and raise awareness of



*“The clearest way to evidence the worth of such a seismic move in how our country is run is by delivering results for my area”*

my role. As a relatively new creation, fewer are clear on the function, roles and responsibilities of a metro mayor than that of a ceremonial or London mayor. I have a responsibility to create a recognisable brand around the position, with talks with high-profile guests to our area increasing visibility.

Equally, involvement at a grass-roots level is crucial to this cause. This is why I

have also been committed to site visits and discussions with manufacturers, producers and businesses in my area, both local and national, listening to their plans for growth, as well as noting their concerns. I strive to be a voice not just from ministers, but to ministers on behalf of these hard-working individuals and firms. I can act as a representative for the Tees Valley in a way that MPs are not always able to.

The past year has demonstrated the Government's commitment to the Northern Powerhouse and also my dedication to the Tees Valley. Following constructive talks with ministers, Westminster seems receptive to a second devolution deal with the region.

It is my hope that the success of metro mayors across the UK will embolden government and further empower local communities to make decisions in their best interests.

*“Ours won’t be a place where politics is done to people, but with them and for them”*

## A joined-up approach

### Local power and accountability lie at the heart of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority



**Andy Burnham (Lab)**  
is Mayor of Greater Manchester

I was humbled to be elected Mayor of Greater Manchester last May. What was particularly satisfying was the endorsement of a vision of collaborative working – everyone pulling together to improve our vibrant and world-renowned city region.

I have always approached the mayoralty in the spirit of collaboration. My election manifesto was a document crafted with the input of the thousands who attended our public meetings and submitted their ideas.

And I have continued the conversation, working with the people and organisations that make up Greater Manchester.

From the local enterprise partnership to the voluntary sector, and from our public services to colleagues across all 10 boroughs, we will ensure that all children are given the best start in life and that we live in a region where people live healthy

lives and older people are valued.

Significant progress has already been made in, for example, tackling head-on the scourge of rough sleeping that blights our city region. We have also begun to address our too-frequently disrupted and overcrowded public transport network.

To offer a high level of public accountability and to set out what we all want to deliver, we published our Greater Manchester Strategy, ‘Our People, Our Place’, late last year.

It has been a joint effort right across the combined authority: all 10 councils, the NHS, transport, the police and the fire service, local businesses, the voluntary and social enterprise sectors, and – most importantly – the people across our region.

The strategy outlines our priorities for advancement and improvement and it commits to addressing the concerns of the millions of people we serve by harnessing the strengths of Greater Manchester’s people and places. It says what we all want Greater Manchester to become and how we intend to get there.

Its clear priorities include: all children to start school ready to learn; young people equipped for life; good quality housing and an end to rough sleeping; and Greater Manchester to pioneer a positive vision for growing older.

The strategy is the cornerstone of what all of us want to achieve, and I am more

than willing to be judged by our ability to deliver it.

Greater Manchester has always delivered ideas and invention – it is the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, after all – and we’ll remain a modern and productive economy that draws in investment, visitors and talent.

I want where I live to be somewhere with clean air and a flourishing natural environment. We’ll stay a place where people will live healthily and happily and older people feel valued.

At the heart of the combined authority is local power and local accountability. I want us to be a place where all voices are heard and where, working together, we can shape our future.

Back in May, I promised the people of Greater Manchester: “Ours won’t be a place where politics is done to people, but with them and for them.”

It’s important that I remember that promise every day. As Mayor, I know I’ll need the backing of the people who live and work here, and all our partners, if we’re to work together to radically improve where we live. We’ve already started to make a difference, but the year ahead should see real and lasting progress.

I’m proud to be Mayor, working to improve the lives of the people of Greater Manchester. Through devolution, we have the best chance we will ever get to do things differently and write our own future. It is time to grab it with both hands.



You can view the Greater Manchester Strategy, ‘Our People, Our Place’, at [www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/ourpeopleourplace](http://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/ourpeopleourplace)

# interview

## Championing children

Rising demand and reduced funding are creating a “perfect storm” for councils’ children’s services, says **Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive of the National Children’s Bureau**



It is “extraordinary” how well local authorities have done over the past 10 years to protect children’s services in the face of increasing demand and squeezed budgets.

But “enough is enough”, according to Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive of the National Children’s Bureau (NCB).

“While local authorities are very proud of what they’ve been able to achieve, there comes a time when you can’t not say anything,” she says.

“We, with the LGA and other voluntary-sector organisations, are making a big noise about this now [because]... we believe, if funding isn’t put in place and serious consideration given to how you pay for the help or services children need at the point they need them, then this crisis is going to be significantly worse.”

The NCB, Action for Children and The Children’s Society warned late last year that government funding cuts were leaving councils with no option but to help only children in crisis. Along with the LGA and Barnardo’s, they were also co-signatories of a letter calling on the Government to close the funding gap in children’s services – estimated at £2 billion by the LGA – in November’s Autumn Budget.

But the Budget failed to mention children at all, and the LGA continues to campaign for children’s services to be properly funded (see [www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures](http://www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures)). It is calling for more resources to be allocated



in next month's final local government finance settlement.

For the NCB, the concern is that the £2 billion funding gap "is already having a significant impact", says Ms Feuchtwang. Children and families are in crisis now, and local authorities are "really struggling" to meet their needs.

"Funding goes down, demand goes up, no money upstream for the sort of services that might keep kids that are on the threshold of needing those services off it. It's all a perfect storm," she says.

The NCB's recent, anonymous survey of 101 lead members for children's services reinforces those concerns. Of those surveyed, from across the political spectrum, 87 per cent said demand was rising, 66 per cent said they didn't have sufficient funding for universal and 'preventative' services such as youth clubs and children's centres, and 40 per cent said lack of resources was preventing them from meeting at least one of their statutory duties.

The latter is "really significant, because that means, in effect, they are breaking the law," says Ms Feuchtwang.

"I know from the work we do with local authorities that no lead member or officer wants to be in that position, where they can't meet children's basic safeguarding needs, never mind their long-term wellbeing."

She wants central government, working with local government, to deliver a 'whole children's strategy', given the unlikelihood of any shift in central government spend.

"The Budget made lots of great offers to young people – and about time too – but it didn't do anything for children at all. What we're not seeing is any kind of joined-up approach to children, and particularly children at the most vulnerable end of the spectrum – in other words, kids with disabilities and special needs," she adds.

"That's not to say the Department for Education isn't doing work around this. But it's much more about the funding of it; where you've got parts of government that are responsible for service delivery but don't get the budget allocated to them, there's not much they can do either.

"It is an argument that needs to be made to the whole of government, not just individual departments."

Ms Feuchtwang is also concerned about the uncertainty around changes to central government funding of councils from 2020. Local government was expecting all business rates income to be devolved by then, but the legislation that would have enacted that change fell after the General Election and was not revived in the Government's Queen's Speech.

"The way that local authorities are able to raise money is going to vary from council to council – some will do better than others," she says.

"But children's services are universal services, and I think there is a contract between the citizen and the state about what you pay your taxes for. That should be for >

*"What we're not seeing is any kind of joined-up approach to children, and particularly children at the most vulnerable end of the spectrum"*



*“The Budget made lots of great offers to young people – and about time too – but it didn’t do anything for children at all”*



> the universal services that everybody has an entitlement to, rather than it being down to the local level to raise the money for it.”

She adds: “The ability to make the decisions as close as possible to the person who is affected by the decisions is important. Devolution is great, because local solutions are often going to be much more adaptive and sensitive to local need.

“But if you take something like safeguarding, you couldn’t have a ‘well, we’ll cut that corner here because we think we can do it better in our own way’. You need those to be absolutely standardised and accountable wherever a child is.”

With 90 children going into care every day last year and reductions in early intervention funding, councils have had to focus their

limited resources on formal support rather than the prevention and support services that help keep children and their families away from crisis services.

Ms Feuchtwang notes that even those councils that have so far managed to protect children’s centres – “one of the most significant protective services for children and their families” – are now having to make “very difficult decisions” about them, while youth services are disappearing.

There is also a wider issue around the underfunding of local authorities and public services as a whole that impacts on vulnerable children, she adds.

“We all know that [children’s services] are not the only thing that affects children’s lives. If, at the same time, household income, housing, and all those other environmental factors are very volatile and fragile, then that will have as big an impact – if not a greater one – on a vulnerable child’s life.

“In other words, you can’t just have children’s services in place – you’ve got to have everything else around it.

“If councillors are making decisions about housing policy within their council, [they need to recognise] that will have an impact on children – and almost as much as their early intervention services will.”

However, Ms Feuchtwang is much more upbeat about the Government’s Green Paper on ‘Transforming children and young people’s mental health provision’ (see [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-provision-a-green-](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-provision-a-green-)



*“Forty per cent of lead members said lack of resources prevented them from meeting at least one of their statutory duties”*

**paper**), currently out for consultation until 2 March 2018.

“There are some really, really sensible policies there. We think if they were put in place now they could really make a difference to children’s lives around mental health,” she says.

“Reducing the waiting list to four weeks.... is fantastic. The one around a focus point within schools, like a special educational needs coordinator, who is responsible for mental health and wellbeing – we’ve been calling for that for quite a long time.

“There would also be mental health teams working with schools, and that’s probably the one we are most excited about. What’s happened in the past is, it’s either been seen as all the responsibility of child and

adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) or all the responsibility of the school, but ne’er the twain shall meet. A child is a child and for their family it is totally confusing about where you go. This is a way of joining the two up.”

But funding remains a worry – as does the timing for rolling out the measures set out in the Green Paper.

“The real concern is that most of the measures are by 2019, or 2020, and they’re roll-outs or pilots of things, rather than for all children. If you are suffering from a mental health crisis, on a waiting list for a CAMHS assessment that could take up to three months, and you’re missing education because you can’t go to school any longer, then waiting until 2019 isn’t going to do it for you.”



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



## CONFERENCES AND TRAINING

Our industry leading annual conference is focused this year on how to empower autistic voice and choice. Attend to hear the latest information from experts in the field and learn from case studies illustrating best practice. With four different seminar streams to choose from, you can select the seminars which are most relevant to your work.

### **AUTISM AND SOCIAL SKILLS**

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Join us at this one-day conference to develop a greater understanding of autism and anxiety, and to explore practical approaches to supporting autistic people experiencing stress and anxiety.

### **AUTISM PROFESSIONALS ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**7-8 March 2018, Harrogate**

Our industry leading annual conference is focused this year on how to empower autistic voice and choice.

Attend to hear the latest information from experts in the field and learn from case studies illustrating best practice. With four different seminar streams to choose from, you can select the seminars which are most relevant to your work.

**We run a full range of autism courses, many of which are CPD certified. Whether you're new to working with autistic people or a seasoned professional, we have training to meet your needs.**

### **SENSORY CONSIDERATIONS**

**20 February 18, London**

This course will help you understand more about sensory sensitivity and how it can impact daily life, and learn practical ways of giving support.

### **UNDERSTANDING STRESS AND ANXIETY IN AUTISM**

**27 March 18, London**

This course will explore the impact stress and anxiety has on behaviour, and provide strategies to understand and support this behaviour.

As well as open access training courses we offer a wide range of options for your organisation to benefit in a cost efficient way. Options include bespoke in-house training, consultancy, online training and NEW for 2018 – licensed user training, where you can become qualified to deliver our training to your team.

To find out more or to book your ticket now, visit

[www.autism.org.uk/professionals](http://www.autism.org.uk/professionals)

Until everyone understands

# comment

## Underfunded counties



Cllr Paul Carter is Chairman of the County Councils Network

**It will be no surprise that funding was at the top of the agenda at the County Councils Network's (CCN) recent annual conference.**

All councils are facing severe financial pressures and CCN's evidence shows that counties have particular pressures.

With an estimated funding gap of £2.54 billion facing the 37 CCN member councils by 2021, the pressures are no longer confined to valued, non-statutory services, but are on maintaining life-critical frontline statutory services.

However, it is not just the total amount of funding that matters, but how it is distributed. Whichever measure you use, CCN, the Society of County Treasurers (SCT) and independent analysis has shown that counties are underfunded and have disproportionate council tax burdens – a fact acknowledged by Rob Whiteman, Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, at the conference.

We are therefore disappointed that the Government has not heeded our calls for additional funding through the extension of transitional grants introduced in 2016. With no replacement announced in the provisional local government finance settlement for the vital £292 million of transitional funding counties received over the past two years, this further exacerbates the precarious position of rural county services.

At the same time, we must step up our work with government on the Fair Funding Review, which has been disappointingly delayed. CCN will continue to advocate for a simpler, more transparent funding formula based on a needs-led, cost-drivers approach that is fair for all councils and residents across the country.

We welcome the Government's announcement that the new methodology will be introduced in advance of 75 per cent business rate retention, and we look forward to assessing the impact of the seven county pilots starting next year.

The future sustainability of adult social care also featured at our conference. We have discussed social care reform and ideas emerging from CCN's own Green Paper with government, and it is important we work together to deliver a sustainable solution that is fair to all our residents.

Conference also heard a very positive speech from Communities and Local Government Secretary Sajid Javid, and we thank him for the warmth he showed to counties. He outlined the significance of counties, and their 'vital role' in the country's future. He said: "The future – not to mention the present – is about joined-up thinking, working strategically to get things done."

*"It is not just the total amount of funding that matters, but how it is distributed"*

Mr Javid also confirmed that he will consider non-mayoral devolution deals, and that his department is working on a 'common devolution framework' – two very welcome announcements.

These are votes of confidence in the vital strategic role counties play in providing the key infrastructure to support housing, and the contribution they make to economic prosperity. Only a few weeks after conference, the Oxfordshire housing deal signalled the winds are moving in this direction.

Counties need to have a greater reach into strategic planning, particularly over wider geographies, and we need to influence the ongoing review of developer-led contributions to infrastructure. The gap in infrastructure funding is getting bigger as the Government rightly drives housing growth.

In my own county, there will be a projected infrastructure funding gap of £2 billion by 2031. We need to maximise these contributions to ensure we have the resources to build sustainable communities and the services they rely on.

This was my third and last conference as CCN Chairman. Despite the challenges we face, I look forward to the year ahead with a good deal of optimism. Counties are now being listened to and will work with the Government to find the answers.



**i** For more information about the County Councils Network, please visit [www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk](http://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk)

### Positive news on business rates retention

*“Councils will have the ability to increase council tax by an additional 1 per cent without a local referendum”*

Colleagues and council staff will no doubt have been busy over the past few weeks unpicking the details of the provisional local government finance settlement, while ensuring that our communities are safe over the Christmas period.

The provisional settlement comes in the third year of the four-year deal, and offers a greater degree of stability and flexibility for local government.

Councils will have the ability to increase council tax by an additional 1 per cent without a local referendum, taking into account inflation, and without placing onerous costs on residents.

This is in line with LGA calls to abolish the council tax referendum limit so that

democratically accountable authorities can make appropriate decisions based on local need and pressure for services.

Those councils confronted with negative revenue support grant in 2019/20 will have been pleased, too, that their concerns have been heard by our Secretary of State, Sajid Javid. A formal consultation is planned for the spring in recognition of the challenges these councils face.

It was also good to hear that, following feedback from the sector, plans for changes to the New Homes Bonus will be dropped and the baseline will be maintained at 0.4 per cent.

Further progress on business rates retention is positive news, as is the opening of the technical consultation on potential approaches



Cllr David Simmonds CBE  
is Leader of the LGA's  
Conservative Group

to measuring the relative needs of local authorities – the next step in the fair funding review process.

New 100 per cent retention pilots were confirmed, with these taking place in different types of authority across the country. I look forward to continuing our close work with the Department for Communities and Local Government on this and more in the New Year.

Lastly, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy New Year. I know that this can be a busy time for councils, from battling adverse weather conditions to collecting festive refuse, and I hope that friends and colleagues were still able to enjoy a restful Christmas period.

### chairman's comment

### Time to address funding gaps



Lord Porter  
is Chairman of the LGA

Only some of the much-needed new money for councils was included in the provisional local government finance settlement, announced just before Christmas.

So we are still pushing the Government to provide more new funding for all councils – as we have done in previous years – in the final settlement, due out next month.

This is the only way to help plug the growing funding gaps facing our local services.

The settlement does allow councils to increase their core council tax by an additional 1 per cent in the next financial

year, without a local referendum. This is a flexibility that will give you the option to offset some of the financial pressures you face in the next year.

We continue to call for the referendum limit to be abolished so that councils and your communities can decide how your under-pressure services are paid for. We also remain clear that this is not a sustainable solution to tackling the £5.8 billion funding gap facing local government by the end of the decade.

There was some progress on other financial and funding issues. The provisional settlement included a formal consultation on a review of relative needs and resources, with the aim of implementing a new system in 2020/21.

The Government is also aiming for councils to retain 75 per cent of business rates from

2020/21. We want to see all of that extra income go towards meeting the funding gap. No council should see its funding reduce as a result of a new distribution system. Finally, the Government accepted our calls to avoid further changes to the New Homes Bonus.

We continue to call for the funding issues facing council services to be addressed. Many are at a tipping point, and pressures are particularly acute in children's services, adult social care and our work to tackle homelessness.

I hope you all had a restful and peaceful festive break, and I look forward to working with you during what promises to be another busy and challenging year for local government.

*“This is not a sustainable solution to tackling the £5.8 billion funding gap facing local government by 2020”*



Cllr Nick Forbes  
is Leader of the LGA's  
Labour Group

## No new money for services at breaking point

*“At some point there will be a catastrophic failure in a council stretched too thin by cuts”*

There's nothing quite as deflating as opening up a beautifully wrapped Christmas present, only to find it contains an empty box.

As suspected, Communities Secretary Sajid Javid spent the festive season attaching ribbons and bows to a very empty local government finance settlement. There was virtually no new money whatsoever, despite huge pressures on adult and children's social care, the extra cost of the higher National Minimum Wage, and universal services struggling to survive.

There was a sign that the Department for Communities and Local Government's previous position of 'crisis, what crisis?' may be running out of steam. Mr Javid did publicly acknowledge the widespread and serious warnings from both local government and the voluntary sector about the looming crisis in children's social care. The surprise is that, despite saying he heard the warnings, he then chose to do nothing about it.

Time is now running out for the Communities Secretary to take decisive action to stop this, by standing up to the Treasury and finding councils the resources they need.

At some point, the LGA's predictions of children's services departments being at 'breaking point' will come true, and there will be a catastrophic failure in a council stretched too thin by cuts.

Without immediate action to match his apparent acceptance of this problem, Sajid Javid may find himself at the centre of a perfect storm in 2018.



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

## Finance settlement fails to deliver

*“The Secretary of State seems to have been playing a very good Scrooge”*

The Government always plays the game of 'waiting until just before the Christmas break' to release the local government finance settlement, and this year was no exception.

There was nothing extra in the settlement for key services such as social care and children's services.

It felt a bit like getting a wrapped-up empty box for Christmas.

We all know that local government faces a funding gap of £5.8 billion by 2020.

A small amount of extra flexibility for local authorities in setting council tax levels will not go nearly far enough to fill that gap.

Liberal Democrats are also very clear that the Government should replace council tax with a fair local tax based on ability to pay, so that future rises do not hit those least able to afford it.

Was the Secretary of State auditioning for a role in 'A Christmas Carol'? He seems to have been playing a very good Scrooge.

And as we all know, raising council tax brings in different amounts of money in different parts of the country, unrelated to need.

In particular, the Government needs to work with local government and the other political parties to come up with a long-term approach to social care funding.

It should not be down to council tax alone to fill the gap – that is not a sustainable long-term solution.



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

## Missed chance to invest in our children's future

*“We have done all we can. Now the Government needs to give councils the resources required”*

Huge public support is demonstrated for the BBC's Children in Need appeal, yet we leave our fundamental children's services short of £2 billion by 2020, as demand for services has surged.

There are currently more than 72,000 children in care; councils start 500 new investigations every day.

The cost of getting it wrong is enormous. Lambeth Council has set up a £100 million fund to compensate children who suffered historical abuse.

High-profile cases of abuse have sharpened our risk assessments, but research shows about a third of councils have overspent on children's services. We have had to reduce and remove grants to the voluntary sector and taken £650 million out of early years funding since 2010, reducing investment in those formative years.

To make ends meet, councils have increased borrowing, used up reserves, sold assets, increased charges, cut services, and entered business enterprises to help raise funds for services.

We have done all we can. Now the Government needs to retain less of our income tax and give councils the resources required.

The £15 million more than planned for rural councils, announced in the provisional local government finance settlement, will be welcomed by those that benefit from it. But what a shame the Government has missed yet another opportunity to provide the investment needed for our future.



For more information about the LGA's political groups,  
see [www.local.gov.uk](http://www.local.gov.uk)

# Getting people active



**Chris Perks**  
is Executive Director,  
Local Delivery,  
at Sport England

**We want to learn how to make it easier for people everywhere to benefit from being physically active and, thus, to improve their lives and enrich their communities.**

With 40 per cent of adults not doing enough exercise, the challenge of getting more people active is complex. There is no blueprint, but the benefits to society would be substantial.

Local government, as the most significant investor in community sport, knows this

*“Local government is the most significant investor in community sport”*

challenge well and how it is magnified when considering the tough local environment.

The reasons why people are inactive are wide ranging. I think this quote from Cheryl Dixon, a volunteer and mum-of-two from Middlesbrough, sums the challenge up well: “I volunteer seven days a week in the community hub,” she says. “We provide a safe space for mental health services to come in and deliver workshops but, ultimately, local families and children still don’t have access to activities because they don’t have any disposable income.

“We’ve still got the same system we’ve had for the last 15 to 20 years but now the system doesn’t fit society. If we’re going to make an impact and a sustainable future for the children, we’ve got to look at the problem from every angle.”

It requires everyone to play their part. We’ve announced a £100 million investment in 12 pilot places to work with us to trailblaze a bold new approach to building healthier, more active communities.

By bringing together the layers of a community – from schools to social enterprises, commissioners of services to parenting groups,



park operators to GPs – we want to encourage faster, more effective and long-lasting change to address the stubborn inequalities preventing people from participating. The local pilots will listen to what communities need and empower community leaders to create solutions.

We’ll learn what works and what doesn’t and will share learning every step of the way to inform future plans across the country, and to help you and your communities be more active and healthy.



For more information, please visit [www.sportengland.org](http://www.sportengland.org)



## LGA Annual Culture, Tourism and Sport Conference

Wednesday 7 – Thursday 8 March 2018, Hull

No one can have missed the enormous success achieved by Hull as UK City of Culture 2017, and we are delighted to take this flagship conference there in March. Delegates will be able to see and hear first-hand about how Hull has used culture to involve nine out of 10 residents in community experiences, attract more than £3.3 billion in investment and achieve the country’s fastest reduction in Jobseeker’s Allowance claimants.

Newly confirmed speakers:

- **John Glen MP**, Minister for the Arts, Tourism and Heritage, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
- **Ros Kerslake OBE**, Chief Executive, Heritage Lottery Fund
- **Rt Hon the Lord Howarth of Newport CBE**
- **Rosie Millard**, Deputy CEO, Creative Industries Federation

To book your place visit: [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)



# Developing a love of sport



**Lydia Greenway**  
is a former England women's cricketer and founder of Cricket for Girls

## **I was one of the lucky ones when it came to sport – I was born into a sporty family.**

When I was two, I was playing catch with sponge balls, and when I turned nine I was bought my first cricket bat. My family absolutely loved sport, and when people are passionate about something, it is hard not to catch their bug!

In the summer, we would virtually live at our local cricket club, watching my dad play, trying to copy him in the nets, while switching from one sport to another within a matter of moments – literally dropping the cricket bat and ball out of our hands to run off and play a game of football.

I have no doubt that these early opportunities played a vital role in me going on to play cricket for my country. It allowed me to express myself and, with my brother and sister, develop a healthy competitiveness, perhaps more so with my brother with whom I was very competitive (yes there were tears!).

Some of my fondest memories are of these times, being with friends and family, learning the way of life through sport.

I went on to play all sports at primary and secondary school and, eventually, I started to excel in various games, including cricket. My secondary school put me forward for a sports scholarship prize when I was 14, and I was awarded £150 during a presentation evening at my local council, attended by rowing's Olympic gold medallist James Cracknell.

The money allowed me to buy some brilliant equipment and also took the financial burden off my parents. This sort of award from government can be life changing – and not just from a financial point of view. It also gave me belief; someone – or, in this case, the local council – had acknowledged my potential, which, at that point was just that: potential.

In the same year, I was awarded free gym membership at the local leisure centre. I can genuinely say this was a pivotal time in my cricketing career. This membership helped me to fulfil all of my physical training needs, which had a direct impact on my progression. It allowed me to be the fittest in the team, as well as help me stand out in other trials at national level. If I wasn't going to make it, it wouldn't be because of a lack of support.

*“Awards can be life changing – it gave me belief because the local council acknowledged my potential”*

Thirteen years, five Ashes wins, two World Cups and 225 England caps later, I have now retired from international cricket, and am investing all my time in ensuring there are more opportunities for girls to play cricket.

Having launched in January this year, 'Cricket for Girls' aims to work with schools, clubs and counties across the country to help develop girls' cricket. Most importantly though, this will be achieved by employing an all-female coaching team, to ensure young girls have genuine access to female role models – something I never had but would have loved.



For more information about Cricket for Girls, please visit [www.cricketforgirls.com](http://www.cricketforgirls.com)



## Annual public health conference and exhibition

### Narrowing the health inequalities gap

London, 1 March 2018

Public health teams and their partners are striving to help people live healthy lives for longer with less dependence on acute health and care services. Councils continue to tackle persistent problems such as mental illness, children's health, alcohol and drug abuse, poverty and loneliness in old age. Join us at our most popular health conference to explore how serious health inequalities that still exist within our local communities are being addressed.

Confirmed speakers:

**Steve Brine MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health and Primary Care

**Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson**, ukactive

**Lord John Bird MBE**, The Big Issue

**Alison Garnham**, Child Poverty Action Group

To book your place visit [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)



## LGA Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition

13-14 March 2018, Hilton Hotel  
Newcastle Gateshead

The LGA's Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition is a key event for senior fire officers and members of fire and rescue authorities. The terrible fire at Grenfell Tower has raised new questions about fire safety and the inspection and enforcement role of fire services. This is against a backdrop of continuing fire reform with implications for collaboration, recruitment, procurement, culture and standards, and the appointment of a new inspectorate.

Join us to discuss these changes, look at good practice and examine how we can develop this further.

To book your place visit: [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)



# councillor

## Accountability matters

**Focusing on member and officer values and behaviours has been a key part of the improvement process at Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, following the child sexual exploitation scandal in the town.**

Cllr Chris Read, Leader of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, speaking at the Centre for Public Scrutiny's (CfPS) annual national conference last month, said the council had been at "ground zero" after publication of Professor Alexis Jay's "damning" report in August 2014.

The report concluded that at least 1,400 children had been abused by Asian men between 1997 and 2013, and highlighted "blatant" failures by the council and local police. Louise Casey, then Director General, Troubled Families, was sent in to carry out a governance review and government intervention followed, with commissioners taking control of the council and its services in 2015. After improvements, the Government returned all functions bar children's social care to the council's democratic control last September.

"Find me a council leader who welcomes losing executive powers," said Cllr Read, who became leader in March 2015. "But what the intervention did do was force us to confront what was wrong and to give us the opportunity to put it right.

"We weren't in the midst of business as usual – we were at ground zero. So we were able to say: how do we want the council to work; how do we want to make decisions; how are we going to monitor that we are doing what we said we were going to do; and what kind of place do we want it to be?"

He highlighted some of the issues facing the council at the time, including a bullying culture, inertia, and lack of leadership. The organisation was "insular and isolated" – there were no external checks.



*"You can't be accountable without being transparent"*

The council embarked on a review of its governance, touring councils across the country and looking at different models, including committee systems and directly elected mayors, before settling on a leader and cabinet model.

"We thought it was important that... there was a person with whom the buck stopped, and we didn't want to steer away from that," Cllr Read told conference delegates.

But, at the same time, the council had "an executive from a distance", had a scrutiny system that looked "perfectly adequate" on paper but didn't work, and had been criticised for being a "one-party state".

So a series of other governance and management changes was introduced, to improve decision making, accountability and transparency. This includes a system of pre-decision scrutiny; increased consultation, engagement and involvement with opposition members (the leader of the opposition is

vice-chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board); and a forward planning system that means councillors and members of the public can see what key decisions are due to be made up to three months in advance.

Every member has access to all reports and papers, including restricted items, and written protocols – setting out expectations around values and behaviours – help govern relationships between members and officers.

"What we wanted to do was ensure there was challenge in the right way at every step," said Cllr Read.

"We wanted to make sure those decisions were transparent. You can't be accountable without being transparent."

Speaking at the same CfPS conference, Dame Louise Casey praised the work of Cllr Read, Rotherham's Chief Executive, Sharon Kemp, and their councillor and officer colleagues, saying the improvements at Rotherham were "extraordinary".

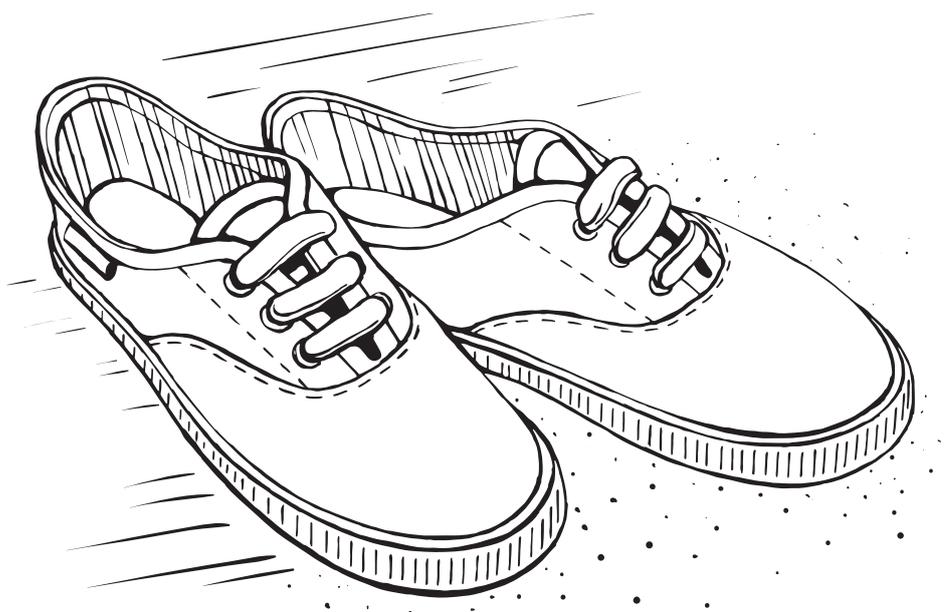
"It's really interesting that we write about failure. I would love it if someone asked me to go back into Rotherham and talk about how we recover," she told delegates.



For more information about Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, please visit [www.rotherham.gov.uk](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk). To find out more about the work of the Centre for Public Scrutiny, visit [www.cfps.org.uk](http://www.cfps.org.uk)

# parliament

## Funding for children's services



**Helping children get a good start in life is one of the most important roles councils play. But increasing demand for these services and insufficient funding are making it more difficult for local government to help some of our most vulnerable residents.**

At last October's National Children and Adult Services conference, the LGA launched Bright Futures, a campaign that highlights the £2 billion funding gap facing children's services by 2020 (see [www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures](http://www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures)).

In Parliament we've been raising our concerns and setting out our plan for reform. We've briefed ahead of parliamentary debates, worked with parliamentarians to table questions, and given evidence to parliamentary committees to raise our key points.

The Chair of our Children and Young People Board, Cllr Richard Watts, gave evidence to the Children All-Party Parliamentary Group and the Social Work All-Party Parliamentary Group. Cllr Watts spoke about social mobility and the impact the £2 billion funding gap for children's services is having on early intervention.

*“Increasing demand and insufficient funding are making it difficult to help our most vulnerable residents”*

In the House of Lords, our Chairman, Lord Porter, has asked a range of parliamentary questions on the topic.

We've seen our concerns raised and discussed across Parliament, which is helping councils make the case for change. Jeremy Corbyn MP, Leader of the Opposition, responded to the Budget statement by highlighting that more children are being taken into care and “councils are labouring with a £2 billion shortfall in the cost of dealing with vulnerable children”.

The issue has been taken up as part of the discussion around the Finance Bill, the legislation passed each year to take forward

the measures in the Government's Budget. In the Second Reading parliamentary debate, Peter Dowd MP, Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, noted our concerns, saying that “there is a developing and significant funding crisis in children's services, which face a £2 billion funding gap by 2020”.

He continued: “This is demonstrated by the fact that last year, 72,000 children were taken into care, while the number of serious child protection cases has doubled in the past seven years, with 500 new cases initiated each day.”

Children's services also featured in last month's parliamentary questions for the Department for Communities and Local Government. Pressed on the issue of funding, Communities and Local Government Secretary Sajid Javid MP said MPs were “right to highlight the pressure on children's services in many local authorities up and down the country, and that is why we are listening carefully to what local authorities have to say and working with the Secretary of State for Education to ensure that adequate resources are provided. Many local authorities are doing very well, but some are experiencing challenges.”

Through our parliamentary engagement and work with the Government, we are seeking to find solutions that work for all councils. While we were disappointed that the Government did nothing in the Autumn Budget to address the funding gap facing children's services, we have redoubled our campaign activity with our attention fixed on the local government finance settlement.

The final settlement is expected next month. It is an opportunity for the Government to address the problem by giving councils new money to support our most vulnerable children and families.



For more information, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/parliament](http://www.local.gov.uk/parliament) and [www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures](http://www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures)

## local by-elections

### Barnsley, Rockingham

LAB HELD  
47.3% over Con      Turnout 16.7%

### Cotswold, Grumbolds Ash with Avening

CON HELD  
43.8% over Lib Dem      Turnout 31.5%

### Dover, St Margaret's-at-Cliffe

CON HELD  
41% over Lab      Turnout 30.9%

### Enfield, Enfield Highway

LAB HELD  
43.1% over Con      Turnout 22%

### Exeter, Newtown and St Leonard's

LAB HELD  
27.8% over Con      Turnout 26.7%

### Gosport, Bridgemary North

LIB DEM GAIN FROM LAB  
35% over Lab      Turnout 32%

### Herefordshire, Bishop's Frome and Cradley

GREEN GAIN FROM CON  
16.5% over Con      Turnout 39.6%

### Leicester, Eyres Monsell

LAB HELD  
22.6% over Lib Dem      Turnout 12.5%

### Maidstone, North

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON  
25.4% over Con      Turnout 23.5%

### Neath Port Talbot, Bryncoch South

PC HELD  
20.6% over Lab      Turnout 24%

### Newcastle-under-Lyme, Bradwell

LAB HELD  
4.6% over Con      Turnout 16.6%

### Newcastle-under-Lyme, Newchapel

CON GAIN FROM LAB  
3.8% over Lab      Turnout 18.4%

### North Devon, Newport

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON  
1.7% over Con      Turnout 36.3%

### Salford, Langworthy

LAB HELD  
40.3% over Con      Turnout 11.8%

### Stockton-on-Tees, Parkfield and Oxbridge

LAB HELD  
23.9% over Con      Turnout 24.3%

### Stroud, Chalford

CON HELD  
19.9% over Lab      Turnout 32.5%

### Tandridge, Westway

LIB DEM HELD  
27.1% over Con      Turnout 28%

# elections

## Electoral review of 2017

**Last year ended as it began, with signs of Liberal Democrat stirrings in the electoral undergrowth.**

In January and February 2017, the party registered eight net gains in local by-elections; in November and December they upped that to nine. In several cases, as recently in both Torrington and Waverley, those victories came from a standing start with activists doubtless pounding the streets to make up for not having contested the seats at the previous contest.

In truth, though, the Liberal Democrats remain bit-part players after a year that saw traditional two-party politics become more entrenched than at any time for nearly 50 years.

Up to the General Election, it was the Conservatives who were in the ascendancy



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locally. In 156 by-elections before polling day, they gained a net six extra councillors, and saw their share of the vote in all contests rise by an average of six percentage points. Labour, by contrast, was losing both seats (minus 12) and share of the vote.

Do not forget either the scale of the Conservative victory in the May local elections, held midway through the national campaign. They took a greater share of the vote in the 27 English counties than at any election since 1977 – when they were in opposition to a beleaguered Labour government under James Callaghan – and won overall control of all but three.

In the 176 by-elections since the General Election, however, the tables have turned. Although the Conservatives are still recording a small average increase in their vote share, they have lost a third of the 85 seats they were defending. And it is Labour's vote share which is up (by six points) as it records net seat gains (plus 10) rather than losses.

This time last year no-one could have predicted how 2017 would turn out. The electorate has become more volatile, and age and education, rather than class, appear now to be better determinants of how someone will vote.

The two main parties do currently dominate polls and elections alike, but that reflects 'real politik' as much as enthusiasm for the leaders, performance and policies of either.

The May 2018 council contests will give important clues about whether local factors and campaigning can still trump the national trend.

### Torbay, Watcombe

LIB DEM HELD  
26.3% over Con      Turnout 22.3%

### Torrington, Torrington

LIB DEM GAIN FROM UKIP  
44.7% over Ind      Turnout 26.6%

### Torrington, Westward Ho!

IND GAIN FROM CON  
28.3% over Con      Turnout 35.4%

### Wakefield, Wakefield West

LAB HELD  
8.2% over Con      Turnout 22%

### Waverley, Godalming Central and Ockford

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON  
5.9% over Con      Turnout 20.3%

### Welwyn Hatfield, Handside

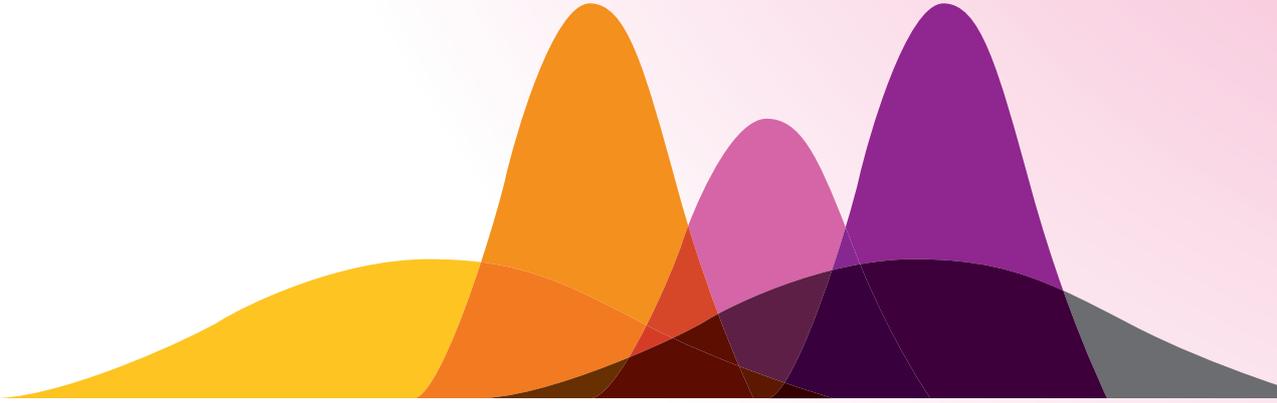
LIB DEM HELD  
19.6% over Con      Turnout 38.5%

### Wigan, Shevington with Lower Ground

LAB HELD  
12.1% over Ind      Turnout 18.7%



For more information on recent local by-elections, please visit [www.localgov.uk/first](http://www.localgov.uk/first)



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