

Daring to be different



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Introduction

The Independent Group is the most diverse group of councillors and the most representative of the public. We are in touch with and committed to our communities, and that is what gets us elected. Therein lies our strength and the reason we have such a powerful contribution to make. We dare to be different and work together to be most effective.

Our Independent Group's voices are much needed – listening, considering carefully and speaking up for our communities, our councils and our country. The Local Government Association (LGA) forms the vehicle for you to achieve more with your residents, getting national support and negotiating with government.

The success of our work in supporting Independent Group members, helping raise skills, profile, and reputation is demonstrated in remarkable year-on-year election success, for all of our groups.





Marianne Overton MBE

Leader of the LGA Independent Group

Vice Chairman of the Local Government Association
Lincolnshire County Council
and North Kesteven District Council

Key role for Independent Group members

I would like to say a huge thank you to all who have contributed so much to the success of the LGA Independent Group over the past 12 months. I am deeply impressed and humbled to see some of your weighty achievements collated here in our annual report. It is clear that we are working effectively across the LGA Boards, within our regions and through our Peers and European representatives to make a positive impact to the lives of local people. Together the Independent Group has created a powerful force for the benefit of our members and the communities that we serve. Thank you.

Congratulations on your success in the recent elections, well done indeed. As it turned out, your win was against an unexpected blue tide, fuelled by fear, I suspect. Sadly, coincidence with general elections encourages the media to focus on which MP might run the country, rather than anyone on their ballot paper. Our group did exceptionally well, holding our own, keeping our 10 per cent vote share at the LGA and becoming the third largest group. Congratulations to our new Independent Mayor of Mansfield, Kate Allsop, the only directly elected Mayor to follow another, now in a fourth term of Independent Mayors.

Our Independent Group has been at the forefront of changing British politics. More of our member voices are heard far and wide, because they make sense and contribute positively to the debates. Skilled and well-informed, our group has grown in voice and numbers.

Over the past four years, we have seen an increasing number of councils led by Independent Group members and an increasing number in 'no overall control' where many more Independent members take critical roles, in administration or in a counterbalancing opposition. We dare to be different, and working together we are most effective.

Much more is needed. Local government is about delivering services in a fair and democratically accountable way, but also about leading successful, cohesive communities, working closely with local people. That requires close connection to the communities and a willingness to focus on local needs and aspirations. In this new political landscape, we need a different, more collaborative kind of leadership, and that is where our members are uniquely placed.

As funding is further reduced and radical changes proposed, councils are seeking ever more innovative ways of delivering basic services and keeping our communities on side. Our group members will be important voices and drivers for the best outcomes in the interests of residents.

We have listened to each other at conferences, meetings and the media. Thank you for your contributions, included at every turn and especially in the document 'Investing in our nation's future', now promoted widely by the LGA. We fought for a return to a less centralised system of government, both financially and legally, with a greater devolution of power and money. This is gaining momentum.

Successes to date

Members skilled and well informed Two special initiatives this year included the Next Generation programme, a series of leadership training events at Warwick University and the Aspiring Politicians programme for people with disabilities considering election. Thanks to Vanessa Chagas for spotting the idea, developing the programme and bringing it into the LGA. Members also said they found our monthly development days very useful, open to all our members, covering diverse topics from the Trans-Atlantic Trade Agreements to tackling the electoral commission's performance and better scrutiny.

A credible and effective voice To raise our effectiveness at the LGA, we are increasing the information through conferences, briefings and newsletters, offering monthly training, regional events and increasing the number of accredited peers. The result? Well informed and skilled, our members have played increasingly useful roles in our communities and councils. We have worked with and attracted others, building bigger teams.

Raising our profile Our members have responded brilliantly with commitment and increasing talent and success. More members than ever before are attending and speaking up at conferences, parliamentary briefings and select committees, in the press and through the LGA, bringing a sound common sense approach. We are in touch with their communities and representing them well. We lobbied the BBC political policy advisor to improve guidelines to give better coverage to Independent Group members. It may be co-incidence but a short time later, the Greens and Plaid Cymru were invited into the main debates, alongside UKIP.

Election success, the acid test We have four years of steady growth in numbers with substantial success at elections for all our group members, whilst the two parties in power fell dramatically. This May, we held our own, despite coinciding with the general elections and became the third largest group, overtaking the Lib Dems. The three “big” parties lost control in councils across the country, often giving the Independent group members a key role. Councils in Independent Group member leadership continue to demonstrate successful, fair and accountable local governance, driven by the needs of their communities.

In the future we will continue our commitment to:

- Increase the **influence** of our members in the decision-making process in councils across England and Wales and in national government.
- **Showcase** our work at conferences and work with the media to demonstrate the talent and successes of our members to enhance our reputation.
- Keep ourselves **skilled and well informed** ensuring that our direction is in tune with what our residents and councillors require.
- **Improve recruitment and retention.** We have developed two new projects, our own ‘Next Generation’ skills programme and we captured the grants for people with disabilities standing for election. Our training and support is highly valued. Encourage networks to seek and support a range of good candidates, both men and women to enhance our reputation in government.

- Speak, vote and more importantly think about what our **residents** need and set about achieving it through work at local and national levels.
- Push for a proper share of **funding** for local government and real local power, without the strings that currently undermine it. At the same time we need to adjust to cope with less.
- **Take a lead** in shaping local government, drawing on the ideas and discussions of the membership. We have gained Public Health and Better Care with appropriate funding; can we also bring yet more services under the umbrella of local democracy?

Thanks

Thanks to my Deputy Peter Reeve, to our Treasurer Bob Dutton and to the Independent Executive Committee, whose excellent attendance and contributions helped drive a very successful year.

Our regional Chairmen have once again supported councillors in their areas and worked with us to deliver a number of successful conferences around the country, each of which were tailored to local needs and aspirations.

Thank you to Mike Haines, our National Lead Peer and our regional peers, Apu Bagchi, Graham Brown and Colin Mann for their excellent service and commitment to supporting our members.

Thank you to Councillor Hugh Evans, Leader of the Independent Group and Councillor Dyfed Edwards, Leader of Plaid Cymru of the Welsh Local Government Association. I had the pleasure of attending the Welsh conference recently.

Our thanks to the Independent Group nominated LGA Vice-Presidents, who have joined us at various events and spoken on our behalf within Parliament.

Thank you to the members of the Independent Group from right across England and Wales who represent us on the Programme Boards and Special Interest Groups.

In our group office, we owe a huge debt of gratitude to Maggie Sullivan and her successor, Carl Cheevers, Vanessa Chagas and Noleen Rosen, for their brilliant work for the Group.

Our annual report taken together, makes impressive reading. Our Independent conferences, regional events and regular development days have been the fertile ground for developing consensus for me and our lead members to take forward on your behalf, making sure that our voices are properly heard.

The Independent Group at the Local Government Association extends a warm welcome to all Independent Group members. Since your council is in membership of the LGA, you have the facilities and our small staff team to support your work as a councillor and a route to directly influence national government, helping them keep their feet on the ground as they make laws that affect our residents.

I have travelled widely around the country in this past year to listen, represent your views and do my best to support and inspire our Independent Group councillors. Thank you for the warm welcome. Thanks to each of you, members of the 2,340 strong team of Independent Group councillors who have given your talent, skills and time to local government and to our residents. This work matters to

each one of the millions of people our councils serve every day. We are seeing unprecedented changes in local government. The mettle and determination of our listening and effective councillors is needed now and increasingly in the future.

Good luck and best wishes in all that you do for our communities.

Feel free to contact me if you want to talk anything through or check out the website: www.independentvoice.org.uk or tel: 01400 273323



Group Budget Report 2014/15 and 2015/16

Councillor Bob Dutton OBE
Wrexham County Borough Council
Independent Group Treasurer

2014/15 Activity report

In the last financial year the Independent Group had a budget of £14,128 with the actual spend being £19,934. Due to a changing LGA policy on design and print charges, the Group were presented with additional costs that had not been forecast. This resulted in an overspend of £5,806.

Despite having a small budget to utilise, the Group has once again achieved a remarkable number of good outcomes during the year. The budget has helped to support several regional meetings, a Welsh Independent Group conference and the production of our annual report. It has also been used to support the excellent work of the Independent Group Executive members who have been busy raising the profile of the group.

2015/16 Budget

Our activity budget for 2015/16 has been set at £15,420 which is an increase on the previous year. This comes as a result of the growing proportionality of the Independent Group during 2014/15. This budget will again be used to support a wide range of activities including a commitment to deliver an Independent Group meeting in every region. The Group will once again have access to funding from the LGA's Next Generation programme. This equates to £20,665 this year.

We are also exploring sponsorship opportunities that will help the Group to put on more activities and expand its support offer to members. If you know of any suitable partners for us to approach then the Group office will be pleased to hear from you.

Some achievements from 2014/2015

A credible and effective voice from councillors who are skilled and informed

- Held a successful Annual Conference in November 2014; 110 people attended, including 20 plus students from De Montfort University.
- Organised five Regional conferences and a Welsh Conference.
- Provided monthly Information and Development seminars.
- Devised and delivered the first ever Group Next Generation programme which provided in depth training to a cohort of 13 councillors.
- Provided timely and effective advice to hundreds of members through our office and Regional Peers.

Raising our profile

- Supported individual council improvements.
- Lobbied the BBC and other broadcasters for fairer representation of Independents.
- Produced Group Press releases to help shape policy and public thinking.
- Supported and contributed to all our party conferences and the National Association of Local Councils.
- Played an active role in supporting the Women in Local Government Society (WLGS).

- Put forward Group Member Peers for over 20 sector-led improvement work opportunities, and secured fourteen.
- Held meetings with our Vice-Presidents within Parliament.
- Met with MP's and Peers who are UKIP, Independent, Green Party, and Plaid Cymru to raise appropriate issues as in our strategy and described in 100 days document.

Working to improve legislation and performance, leading cross party work

- Tackled the EU commissioner on the Trans-Atlantic Trade Agreement.
- Successfully lobbied in the House of Lords for amendments on the Taxi licensing.
- Held OFSTED to account and worked on guidance to improve child mental health.
- Produced a guide to improving life for people with dementia.
- Held the minister to account over broadband, applying pressure for the last 5 per cent coverage.
- Tackled the Infrastructure Bill, engagement of the Highways England, the Right to Buy and permitted development rights.
- Worked to get European Structural Investment Funds into local government.
- Finance Commission towards a system of local government finance that works.
- Creating ways for the LGA to create funds to run its services with less government support.

Election success

- Produced an election pack and supported hundreds of candidates through correspondence and phone calls and workshops.
- Created a training course and supported prospective candidates. Five individuals (three of which went on to stand for election) plus involvement of 10 Member Peers.
- Became the third largest political group with the majority Independent.



Children and Young People

Councillor Helen Powell
Lincolnshire County Council
Deputy Chair

Thank you for the nomination to the board and a chance to make a contribution to the important items discussed. I had the pleasure of attending as an Independent member along with Independent Councillor Paul Cullen from Richmondshire.

The Children's and Young People's Board (CYPB) had a busy time again this year with some challenging agenda items that required immediate effective solutions.

The CYPB has four main aims which are that:

- all children and young people should feel that they are cared for and that they are safe and secure
- all are healthy, happy and free from poverty all get a good education that allows them to fulfil their potential and achieve their ambitions
- all are well-prepared for adulthood and the world of work, making a positive contribution as active citizens.

Prominent agenda items kept all meetings lively, creative and very engaging to reach suitable effective solutions for recommendation to the relevant Ministers.

Two of the main items were Birmingham schools and the Rotherham Council CSE allegations. Both of these had robust debate, with positive actions put forward swiftly to the relevant Ministers.

Ofsted now have a new Chairman in Mr David Hoare, a very successful businessman, customer led with a very refreshing 'Mindset' who I believe will endeavour to improve and enhance where necessary the difficult role of Ofsted Inspectors. Mr Hoare attended one of our meetings and gave a great presentation of Hope. Over 22 years of Ofsted's inspections, massive school improvements have in the main taken place and all of the Best Practice bank of knowledge is beginning to be shared more widely to help schools attain more as a helping hand rather than a judgmental process of fear.

Other items discussed were:

- Early Years' provision from 0 to 5 years
- Education Passports enabling a child to reserve the right to a university option depending on grades, to be taken at a later stage, after possible working breaks
- Special Educational Needs for the Disabled (SEND) was discussed at an interesting Round Table meeting with Edward Timpson MP where 20 new Pathfinders enjoyed reporting back their positive comments, especially over more involvement for parents input.



Community Wellbeing

Councillor Gillian Ford
London Borough of Havering
Deputy Chair

All authorities face pressures in adult social care compounded further by Deprivation of Liberty (Dols). We have actively lobbied the Ministers and Director General for funding to support this and all other new additional burdens as a consequence of implementing the Care Act and the role out of the Better Care Fund.

All Party Parliamentary Group attendances include Housing and Care for Older People and an opportunity to question Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats on how they would support health and social care after the election.

Discussions and roundtables have taken place to consider the future of Health and Wellbeing Boards and how to support sector-led improvement. This included a meeting with NHS Commissioners to understand Clinical Commissioning Groups' concerns.

The LGA FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) Task and Finish group produced a guide for councillors and web resources, on eliminating the practice and a national programme in collaboration with Barnardo's, aimed at keeping women and girls safe from FGM.

The PM's Dementia Champion Group has continued to roll out initiatives including Dementia in the workplace. A Publicly Available Specification (PAS) on dementia has now been written and will be launched at the LGA Conference. An invitation to sit on the PHE Dementia Governance Board was given.

The CAMHS Taskforce was convened with multi-agency membership to revise the current service offer. The report has now been launched calling on greater school support, dedicated web support and the reconfiguration of the tier system.

0-5s Public Health transfers to local authorities in October. The chairing of three regional events, facilitated feedback to Ministers including, concerns on funding to support enhanced Health Visitor and School Nurse numbers.

The Second LGA and Public Health Conference was a great success and a joint meeting was held with the Children's Board to discuss crossover topics including 0-5s, and mental health.



Culture, Tourism and Sport

Councillor Ian Stephens
Isle of Wight Council
Chair

The Culture, Tourism and Sport (CTS) Board has been involved with many important issues this year and it is a tribute to the membership that they have played a full part in moving forward the priority issues for local government and the LGA's corporate priorities.

The local services within the remit of the Board continue to be under financial pressure and the Board has emphasised the significant contribution of culture, tourism and sport to cross cutting priorities, especially in respect of libraries. LGA members and the Minister for Culture and Digital Inclusion jointly set up a Task Force to support locally-led change, following the publication of William Sieghart's independent report on public libraries. The Task Force is chaired by Paul Blantern, Chief Executive of Northamptonshire County Council, and we have agreed quarterly updates will be presented to both government and LGA CTS Board. This will ensure that the Task Force is sector-led and allow input and scrutiny of progress on behalf of local authority members. The Task Force's priorities include the roll out of WiFi in libraries and a workforce skills audit to support library staff to enlarge the service offer. This will be essential if even more libraries are to become community hubs that also deal with social and public health issues.

BT will be required to continue to play a full part rolling out Superfast Broadband and the provision of a fibre backbone to connect main libraries. I am of the opinion that this should be rolled out further to reflect the needs of rural communities. Local government's wider transformation of public services depends upon digital connectivity to support new ways of working and accessing services – for example, telecare and accessing public health information.

I have held regular meetings with the Chairs of Arts Council England, English Heritage, Visit England and The National Archives. All have indicated there is a willingness to work with councils in a more joined-up way so that shared investment and support is directed towards local priorities. Grass roots sport is an area under much financial pressure, however we are seeking meetings with both the Football Association and Premier League Clubs and have undertaken a media and lobbying campaign to make the case for local areas to receive a fair share of the £8.5 billion from the sale of TV rights. The Board will also support local authorities to establish relationships with their local professional clubs.

The new Government has promised, through their manifesto, that funding for recreational activity is being made available directly to schools to allow for two hours per pupil per week. It is a priority to make sure that the delivery complements other local activity to achieve the most positive outcome. I am seeking a meeting with the new Sports Minister to gain support for more investment in grassroots sport and to work together to embed the Olympic legacy even further into the community, as well as supporting our most gifted and talented sportspeople.

The visitor economy is one of the country's fastest growing economic sectors and I have supported Visit Britain and Visit England through their Triennial Review. I was pleased the Review agreed that Visit England needs to be even more focused in growing the visitor economy and enabling the local offer to flourish. Visit England has launched a consultation, 'Refreshing our Growth Strategy for English Tourism', mid-way through its current strategy. We have made the case for how local authorities are supporting growth through tourism

and how the sector stands to benefit from devolution of growth, skills, and transport.

The Magna Carta 800 anniversary was celebrated in June and the CTS Board has represented local government on the national committee and promoted opportunities for councils to mark this occasion. The LGA, through Chairman David Sparks, has emphasised the opportunity to reinvigorate democracy throughout the country.

The formation of two entities from English Heritage means that the properties in the national portfolio become a charitable organisation, and Historic England will discharge the regulatory and planning functions. The main advantage is that charitable status gives English Heritage an opportunity for independent fund raising to assist in securing a sustainable future for our country's heritage, whilst Historic England will work with local authorities on conserving local heritage assets and supporting local planning.

The CTS Annual Conference was held in Durham and received very positive feedback from delegates. The building blocks are being put in place for 2016 when the conference will recognise the Board's broad remit and contribution to wider priorities such as growth, health and wellbeing.

The CTS Board members continue to provide practical support for councillors and none more so than the LGA Leadership Essentials programme for Culture and Sport Portfolio Members. Sharing expertise and good practice, allied with the networking opportunities are an important ingredient in passing the LGA message into the community through local authority lead Members. During the last year we have supported over 200 Portfolio Members to complete the Leadership Essentials programme.



Improvement and Innovation

Councillor Shirley Pannell
North Kesteven District Council
Deputy Chair

Although we had fewer board meetings, there were also Performance Support Panels to attend, and a lot of activity outside of meetings as well. Being lead Member on the board for Productivity was again extremely interesting, and led to me representing the LGA and our Independent Group on many occasions.

I took part in the LGA Warwick University Commissioning Academy, which a brilliant event, where I not only contributed, but learnt a lot as well. I spoke at the Income Generation event in Manchester, and also spoke and chaired the Inside Government local government commercialism forum in London.

I have been involved in putting together local government procurement guidance from the LGA, and put articles in the First magazine. I have had meetings with the LGA productivity team to discuss policy. Income Generation and commissioning are extremely topical and important, and it has been very gratifying to be an integral part of the LGA work connected with these topics over the past year.

I have been privileged to be part of the 'Access to elected office for disabled people' project as a peer mentor. I mentored Christina Charles, who has recently stood in a Greenwich by-election. Although she did not win on this occasion, Christina put together a very good campaign, with short notice, and I am sure she will become a councillor in the future, and I am very proud of her. Christina visited my council area and I visited her ward to see the challenges she faced. We have become friends through the process, and will keep in touch. It was inspirational to be part of this programme, and to see people with disabilities be so determined to overcome obstacles to stand for election.



Economy, Environment, Housing and Transport (EEHT)

Councillor John Northcott
Mole Valley District Council
Deputy Chair

The board was formed by the merger of two previous boards, Economy and Transport (ET) and Environment and Housing (EH), the latter also including planning. It meets four times a year. The Independent Group holds two seats and I would like to thank Councillor Julian German for his considerable input into the work of the Board.

The Board inherited a considerable programme of planned work from its predecessors and in addition had to ensure that resources were available in new consultations from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and other government departments. Much of the initial meeting was spent prioritising the work programme, bearing in mind also the need to develop positions on which to base representations to the incoming Government.

There is an ongoing programme to maintain pressure on Whitehall to resolve inadequacies in the current growth deals, in particular to reduce the number of ring-fenced budgets in line with the Heseltine single pot approach, to increase the central growth related funding streams into the local growth fund and to ensure that future deals genuinely reflect local priorities.

In February the Infrastructure Bill became an act. Following extensive LGA lobbying, it now includes the requirement for Highways England – the successor to the Highways Agency – to produce route strategies on which to base future investment plans. Statutory guidance will set out how the new company will have to consult and work with councils.

Sir Michael Lyons addressed the Board at its December meeting following the publication of his Housing Review, to which the EH board had made representations last year. His report supported the

LGA's proposals for a reform of the Right to Buy, locally set planning fees, broader compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers, and wider powers to incentivise the development of sites that had received planning permission for development.

Representations were made in response to several aspects of the Government's July consultation on increasing the supply of Brownfield land for development, particularly the introduction of a new permitted development rights scheme for office-to-dwelling conversions when the present scheme expires in May 2016. So far the Government has put off taking a decision.

During the year the Government issued a statutory order that exempted developments of 10 or less dwellings (five in rural areas) from Section 106 contributions. The LGA is lobbying for the reversal of the exemptions and the Board has commissioned a survey on the impact they are having.

On the environment front, the Board has lobbied EU officials on their proposals for the 2020 recycling targets, and is briefing Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) on possible initiatives aimed at meeting them.

I chair a task and finish group looking at ways councils can develop renewable and low carbon energy schemes to secure revenue and community benefits, in conjunction with the Innovation and Improvement Board. It is intended that a report examining the potential will be used to engage with Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) ministers. I also represent the Group on the board of the Planning Advisory Service (PAS).

Councillor Julian German is a member of two task and finish groups. The Active Travel Group is looking at the current issues facing councils in promoting active travel (cycling and walking) and community transport, to identify future lobbying requirements. The Buses and Community Transport Group is looking at how councils are responding to the financial pressures on local buses. Finally Councillor Linda van den Hende is a member of the Apprenticeships Group charged with making recommendations for advancing the Board's activity on the future of apprenticeships, particularly for young people.



Resources Board

Councillor Clarence Barrett
London Borough of Havering
Deputy Chair

The remit of the Resources Board covers a wide range of LGA priorities, including local government finance, welfare reform, european funding and workforce issues.

As Deputy Chair, my particular responsibility was linked to the setting up of the Municipal Bonds Agency. The aim of the body is to reduce councils' capital costs over the long term through inter authority lending, raising money on the capital markets and lending on at a lower rate than the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB). I am pleased to report that the Agency was successfully launched as an independent entity earlier this year with the first bonds now in progress. With over 60 councils participating, it not only offers preferential borrowing rates but is also attractive as an investment vehicle.

Local government funding was a constant theme throughout the year. In response to the settlement announcement, LGA lobbying achieved additional funding of £74 million in respect of welfare and social care. On the longer term issue of local government finance, an Independent Commission report entitled 'Financing English Devolution' was published in February which set out a 10 year programme for financing English devolution. This included local control over council tax, retention of business rates and place based budgets covering all local public services. Progress on this important issue took a step forward recently when Greater Manchester obtained an agreement from central government to devolve a £6 billion package of health and social care resources to the region's councils and health groups.

Universal credit as part of welfare reform has also featured heavily in our work programme. The LGA have been working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to secure greater long-term certainty over the Housing Administration Subsidy. In addition, and in line with the devolution agenda, an LGA report focusing on the challenges of a centralised approach to welfare, employment and skills set out the need for a more localised system.

The next round of European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF), some £5.3 billion, has been the focus of our 39 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas. While a greater devolvement of spending decisions from central government was envisaged, there was disappointment that an 'advisory' role for local partners is the preferred option by Ministers. The LGA continue to press for a reversal of this position.

Turning to workforce issues, my colleague and fellow Board Member, Councillor Linda Van den Hende, has been particularly active in this area.

It has been another busy year for pay negotiations covering the full range of NJC/JNC arrangements. The pay award for local government was agreed at 2.2 per cent, but with significant bottom loading for the lower SCPs. The deal covers the period to March 2016, which means it is the only public sector agreement for this extensive period and provides a degree of certainty for local authority budgets. UNISON has now sought a re-negotiation of the deal which has been rejected by the Employers Side. Both sides agreed that we should consider the future work of the National Joint Council and this is under discussion.

Chief executives and chief officers agreed on a similar increase, although those already earning £99,999 were excluded. The chief executives' representatives did seek arbitration on this, but this was rejected by the employers side. The Fire and Rescue Service pay negotiations were also successfully concluded at 1 per cent. DCLG has initiated a review of conditions of service for Fire and Rescue in England only, but no publication date has been agreed.

The National Employers Organisation for School Teachers has responded to the relevant Pay Review Body regarding pay conditions from September 2015. This has been the first year of the revised process for teachers pay awards based on performance.

Elsewhere, a guide for Members on the recruitment and retention of qualified Social Workers has been published with Independent Group input. The Independent Group also took the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on possible changes to the Working Time Directive to the European Commission, as well as a task and finish group on Apprenticeships.



Safer and Stronger Communities

Councillor Philip C Evans
Conwy County Borough Council
Deputy Chair

This was my third year as a Deputy Chair and I attended all four Board meetings and all of the Lead members' meetings. This is a large Board – 18 members – and it has been interesting to work with a broad cross-section of councillors from a wide geographical area.

The main work of the SSCB is commenting on and trying to influence legislation as it passes through its various stages. It has been rewarding to see we have had positive outcomes in many instances all of which will be of benefit to local government. We successfully lobbied against a relaxation of certain taxi provisions which would have had serious implications for community safety. We considered the Counter-Terrorism Bill in some detail. We supported the work of the LGA's Betting Commission and its involvement of the top five betting shop companies; lobbying on amendments and additions to the Gambling Act 2005 will continue.

During the year we welcomed Joe Tuke, Director of the Troubled Families Team at DCLG who gave a presentation on the work done through their programme in turning around the lives of families and preventing offending and anti-social behaviour. We were joined by Mr John Barradell OBE, Town Clerk and Chief Executive of the City of London, following his appointment as SOLACE's lead spokesperson on civil resilience and community safety issues and explored ways we can work together across these issues.

I acted as a panel member for a politicians' 'Question Time' session chaired by Cathy Newman of Channel 4 News at the Trading Standards Institute's 'Year Ahead' event at Stratford-upon-Avon. I deputised for the LGA Licensing Champion at licensing events in London and Manchester in delivering the key LGA message on

Hackney Carriage/Private Hire licensing in the wake of the Casey Report on Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham. At these events I had the pleasure of formally launching the LGA's 'Councillors' Handbook on Taxi and Private Hire Licensing'. In the current year, councillors' guides have also been issued on FGM and anti-social behaviour.

I have been greatly encouraged in my role by the Group Officers whose advice and guidance is much appreciated. I am also very grateful to Maggie and her colleagues in the Group Office for their help and support at all times. My colleague, Councillor Colin Mann, has been key in ensuring the Independent Group has a strong presence on the board and my thanks are due to him for his constructive contributions and ready advice.



People and Places

Councillor John Pollard
Cornwall Council
Deputy Chair

I have enjoyed representing the Independent Group on this important Board. I joined two other representatives, Cllr Diane James (Waverly Borough Council) and Cllr Angela Lawrence (Vale of the White Horse District Council).

The Board represents the non-metropolitan areas and it is always beneficial to share experiences, views and rub shoulders with colleagues from the other end of the country! The work of the Board has focussed on four main areas:

- planning and infrastructure to support growth
- employment and skills
- housing
- public service transformation.

I acted as lead member for Planning and Infrastructure to Support Growth – including broadband. The latter provided much entertaining debate with the issues concerning getting spread to the last 5 per cent the hottest topic. We did apply pressure upon government and BT and although there are solutions and commitment; full coverage remains a challenge for some.

The key tasks were:

- Continuing to try to secure value for money for councils by providing practical support through local partnerships.
- Opening up a dialogue with OFCOM on the regulatory framework for the telecommunications market.
- Pressing ministers to ensure proper competition for contracts for the final 5 per cent coverage.

- Promoting councils as proponents of broadband rollout and usage. Inform the Government's work on post 2015 digital infrastructure.

An important focus of endeavour was the Independent Commission on Growth and Public Service Reform in Non-metropolitan Areas.

The Peace Commission (Chair, Sir John Peace) was an important commission and the Board had valuable access to Sir John himself and his fellow commissioners as well as Rt Hon Greg Clarke MP. The final recommendation of the Commission: www.local.gov.uk/non-met-commission

The Board Also engaged with the Independent Commission on Local Government Finance chaired by Darra Singh. The Commission was set up because local government finance urgently needs reform and its vision is for a finance system that:

- promotes self-reliance and self-sufficiency
- encourages entrepreneurialism and innovation
- promotes local decision-making on service delivery
- is transparent in how it works and in the division of responsibilities between central and local government
- maintains support for the most vulnerable.

www.localfinancecommission.org/documents/iclcf-final-report

One Place One Budget

The People and Places Board also commissioned RAND Europe to prepare nine case studies of local authorities in England (UK) where LGA knew a pooled approach was being used for service delivery. The objective was to describe the development of different initiatives and to comment on what appeared to be the enablers and barriers to progress. The specific initiatives implemented by local authorities using a pooled approach covered different services including health and social care, skills and vocational training, regeneration, economic growth, troubled families and the management of public assets.

RAND Europe gathered evidence from a number of sources. Based on this evidence from the nine initiatives LGA asked RAND Europe to make recommendations for what a ‘public sector reform deal’ – a series of ‘asks’ of government and ‘offers’ from places – might look like.

www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1017.html

It is important that Cornwall keeps a close contact with events at the LGA and sitting on this Board has provided a great opportunity to learn as well as contribute.



City Regions

Mayor George Ferguson

Bristol City Council

Deputy Chair

In its first full year, the City Regions Board has focused on its three key priorities:

1. devolution and public service reform
2. skills, employment and welfare and
3. trade and investment.

Following the Scottish Referendum and other key announcements in 2014 the momentum has continued to grow on the devolution agenda and it has been a key focus for the City Regions Board. In February 2015, the LGA in collaboration with Core Cities launched the Modern Charter for Local Freedom, calling on parties to set local government free through devolving powers and responsibilities, to engage with our local citizens to drive prosperity, increase equality and strengthen democracy.

Taking into account the then Cities Minister, Greg Clark's advice about building the evidence base for devolution when he met with the Board last year, the LGA have part sponsored or established three independent commissions; the RSA City Growth Commission, LGA and CIPFA Finance Commission on Local Government Finance and the Non-Metropolitan Commission.

The RSA City Growth Commission considered what is needed to enable our city regions to thrive; driving economic growth, creating jobs and enabling city regions to become fiscally more sustainable. It examined what political powers and governance arrangements are needed to deliver this, as well as how integrated public service reform can improve outcomes for local people and the economy.

The LGA and CIPFA Finance Commission on Local Government Finance set out plans for a 10 year programme of devolution that would see more than £200 billion in annual public expenditure being controlled by groupings of local authorities. The proposals balance the desire for incentives for growth with the continuing need for equalisation within the finance system.

The Non-Metropolitan Commission outlined recommendations to shape the way economic growth and public service transformation are supported in the future, recognising the importance of non-metropolitan areas for economic productivity too.

George Osborne announced in his inaugural speech as the reappointed Chancellor that “This is a revolution in the way we govern England”, presenting an opportunity for local government at all levels, with city regions leading the charge to achieve better outcomes for local people. The City Regions Board will ensure we can further capitalise on this opportunity with government and in particular the forthcoming Devolution Bill.

The additional excellent work on skills, employment and welfare reform through commissioned reports by CESI and NIESER have brought together recommendations to government around devolved and reformed commissioning of employment, skills, and welfare support. Overall this framework will enable local authorities and their partners to take a strong lead for employment and skills – a great opportunity to pull resources together for improved impact on priority individuals and communities.

Work has also continued on Trade and Investment, looking into the past and future trends and the potential role of England’s city-

regions. The research and members feedback has been used to inform discussions with UKTI and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to particularly push for bespoke arrangements with city regions to form part of the next Government's strategy for attracting inward investment.



UK Delegation to the Committee of the Regions

Councillor Andrew Cooper
Kirklees Council
Deputy Chair

I have just begun a five year appointment to the EU Committee of the Regions as one of the UK's 24 representatives selected from councils and devolved governments across the UK. The EU body has 353 members representing local governments from across the member states of the European Union. The role of the Committee of the Regions is to provide input on the impact of EU policies at the local level. I am the first Green Party councillor from the UK to be appointed to the Committee of the Regions. It is an exciting challenge and I'm keen to learn more about how we can get as much benefit out of the EU as possible and make a difference to EU policies.

I have had my first meeting as Coordinator of the European Alliance on the European Committee of the Regions ENVE Commission. The ENVE Commission covers Environment, Climate Change and Energy, so is right up my street. I was finding my feet and working my way round the procedures.

What matters in the Committee of the Regions are 'Opinions'. These are not your 'common or garden' opinions spouted by some guy in the pub. These are the representative opinions of the EU body representing Local and Regional Government and therefore have some significance. I'm still finding my feet but have a few ideas about 'opinions' I may want to pursue later.

As our Group's Coordinator I have however been able to support other member's opinions. One I supported was that of Plaid Cymru Assembly Member Rhodri Glyn Thomas on Ocean Energy where he is looking to develop a common approach to wind and tidal power across the EU and one that benefits local authorities and the communities they serve. This is developing technology and policy

area that needs careful development and thought. So exactly the area that the Committee of the Regions needs to be working on.

Star guest at my first ENVE meeting was EU Commissioner Karmenu Vella who is working on the EU Energy Union and broader Environment policies. I asked about waste policy and pressed him on what he meant by ‘ambitious’ targets to reduce and recycle waste. The suspicion is that he is trying to actually dampen ambition and perhaps take more account of business interests than environmental ones. The other issue I raised with him was what action could be taken by the EU to tackle the UK and our abysmal record on renewable energy. Shamefully we look set to fail to achieve our diminished target. The EU average target is 20 per cent of energy from renewable sources by 2020. The UK target is just 15 per cent but even that is looking unattainable. They can slap a dirty great fine on the UK but the alternative in the meantime is to seek support from the EU under the ‘infringements tool’. I will make it my business to find out more about this.

I will be writing about my work on the Committee of the Regions on my blog www.greeningkirklees.blogspot.co.uk and be posting on twitter at: @clrandrewcooper



Commercial Advisory Board

Jim Thornton

Former Councillor, East Herts District Council

The Commercial Advisory Board is chaired by Mayor Sir Steve Bullock, the Labour Mayor of Lewisham, and comprises Councillor Melvyn Caplan (Conservative, Westminster City Council), Councillor David Neighbour (Liberal Democrat, Hart District Council), and myself, an Independent on East Herts Council.

The Board is tasked with trying to find more income for the LGA by developing attractive services for local authorities. After considering a range of options, the Board has identified three projects to take forward to within the LGA Commercial Strategy. The three projects deal with Social Housing, Supply Chain Savings and a first step for Local Government Information. A Head of Commercial Development, Nick Duncan, has been recruited to take these projects forward, and the Board meets regularly to monitor progress and suggest ideas and initiatives that could be considered.

Various other proposals have been considered, but these three are considered to be the ones most likely to generate the returns that the LGA will need. The meetings are stimulating and productive, and while the challenges are great, I hope very much that the projects will over the next two or three years meet the objectives that the Board has been set.



The Local Authority Mutual Investment Trust (LAMIT)

Councillor Roger Dennison
Lancaster City Council

This has approximately four to five meetings per year at CCLA, 85 Queen Victoria Street, London, EC4 4ET

This year has seen a changeover in auditing to Price Waterhouse Cooper and some outsourcing of services including IT and banking services. This should lead to a more streamlined and cost effective service to the local authority's served by LAMIT.

The amounts invested have risen considerably this year despite difficult financial circumstances which is gratifying.

The property subcommittee on which I also serve has produced above industry standard returns on investments. For the future there are considerable changes to financial regulations proposed by the EU. We hope to work together with the LGA to ensure local authority investment opportunities are not adversely affected by any proposed changes in future rules and regulations.

It has been my privilege to serve in this capacity for the past two years.



Fire Service Management Committee

Councillor Philip Howson
East Sussex Fire and Rescue
Chairman

The fire service management committee has welcomed the introduction of the Primary Authority for fire safety. Businesses and fire and rescue services will benefit from clearer and more consistent enforcement of fire safety regulations and clearer advice on how to comply with the law.

The Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP) was a two year programme that aimed to improve the ways in which police, fire and ambulance services work together at major and complex incidents. In 2014, it was agreed by all stakeholders that a small central JESIP team should remain, that the 'P' in JESIP should now stand for 'Principles' (this relates to the five principles for joint working) and the work the programme team started, should be continued.

When police, fire and ambulance services respond together to incidents, along with other agencies, each organisation brings their own expertise. JESIP has recognised this and developed and published the JESIP joint doctrine – guidance designed to help clarify the roles and responsibilities of emergency services in the early stages of response to a multi-agency incident. It is scaleable and can be applied to any incident. A ministerial board will stay in place in order to maintain oversight. An interoperability board will manage the small team to facilitate the four work streams. This will consist of police, fire ambulance as well as specialist support staff.

Negotiations and meetings with qualified bidders are nearly complete on the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme. Now the focus moves to them to submit their best and final offers. We have been able to address issues with bidders such as how we enable users to buy emergency services network compatible devices and gain access to vehicle conversion capability should they need it.



Peer Mentoring

Mike Haines

Teignbridge District Council

Lead Regional Peer

The lead peer mentor team has been very active over the past year, although things went a bit quiet in the run up to the May elections (just as well for those of us standing this May!), and the period after the election was not quite the hectic time that might have been anticipated from the opinion polls. Unfortunately our colleague Apu was a casualty at the election, with the larger turnout of party voters for the General Election having an inevitable effect on the local elections.

The Independent Group ran its first 'Next Generation' programme for future leaders from our group (thanks to Vanessa for organising). This involved two, two-day weekend residential modules at Warwick Conference Centre attended by 15 councillors that had been nominated by leaders/colleagues at their councils.

We also took part in the 'Aspiring Disabled Local Politicians' programme, which I believe was enlightening to both the mentees and the mentors. The mentees that chose to stand for election in May acquitted themselves well, but with no new Independent Group members this time.

As a regional peer I have been involved in successful mediation between members in an Independent Group where legal action was otherwise likely to have been pursued by one member against others in the group, the solution that I was eventually able to offer came as a result of a conversation I had at our Group Conference at Local Government House (LGH) in early November.

I was contacted for advice in a situation where a councillor was facing a police investigation and had been subject to sanctions by their council's Standards Board. Eventually the police dropped their

investigation (in April, and the councillor was re-elected in May). The Group Office also put me in contact with a lone Independent on their council who was finding things difficult by virtue of not being part of a group, and hence not getting committee choices or other facilities. During my work I have found that tweeting has been the cause of some problems that have arisen for Members, and would urge everyone to think carefully before they put comments out there!

My role has also involved participating in training events for both members and officers at councils in the SW region, accompanied by the regional senior adviser. I have attended regional meetings with regional advisers and lead peers from the other political groups. There was a regional meeting in Bristol for members from Wessex, but unfortunately an equivalent meeting for the far south west did not happen, due to a combination of changing personnel, funding, and the ever looming elections. This is something that we are keen to redress early in the present municipal year.

At LGH there have been meetings with my Independent Group lead peer colleagues and with Marianne, as well as update briefings with Maggie and now with Carl. Noleen has kept me updated with appointments of our peers for mentoring and peer challenge. As reported by colleagues last year, I have to note that the amount of peer work coming to Independent Group peers is still less than we would like to see, furthermore the number of Independent Group controlled councils or those with no overall control fell at the recent election (29 NOC became CON administrations).



Peer Mentoring

Colin Mann

Caerphilly County Borough Council

Lead Regional Peer

The past twelve months have been very varied culminating with increased activity around the recent local elections which, of course, were complicated by the General Election on the same day. Holding local elections on the same day as Westminster does not normally help Independents and this seems to have been the case again this year.

Boundaries for peers were re-drawn during the year which means that I now cover London and the south east of England.

I responded to a large number of individual queries during the period. These were from 'Independent' Independents as well as from the range of various party groups within the LGA Independent Group. Obviously details must remain confidential.

The last regional event I was involved with was a well-attended meeting for London and south east members which I felt was a very worthwhile event. It is a matter of regret that financial restraints have prevented these meetings continuing at present.

I believe that the service we offer proved to be valuable to some of our members in the run-up to the recent elections. It is often a big challenge for members who have left political parties to stand as Independents to cope with the various issues facing them. For example getting the imprint wrong on literature can immediately invalidate a candidate even if successful at the election.

There were fewer issues directly affecting Independent members after the elections due to the number of councils changing from NOC to political party control.

I regularly attended and contributed to the Political Improvement events held at Local Government House. I feel that these sessions have been very useful to those attending but more members could benefit from them.

I was also pleased to be involved as a Mentor in the programme for Aspiring Politicians with Disabilities. I believe that this proved to be a very valuable scheme for both Mentors and Mentees. Many thanks to Vanessa for her valuable contribution to the programme.

In conclusion could I thank Maggie for her hard work and valuable contribution to the group, also to Vanessa and Noleen for their support. Lastly, a welcome to Carl and wish him well in covering the role vacated by Maggie.



Peer Mentoring

Councillor Graham Brown
Powys County Council
Regional Lead Peer

The first major event of the year in my role as Regional Lead Peer for the North West, West Midlands and Wales was being a part of the team which organised the first ever conference to be held in Wales for Independent councillors. There had previously been no forum for Independent councillors to get together and network in Wales and so this was very much a milestone event. It was very well attended and Marianne gave a welcome to all the delegates.

At the end of the conference the delegates proposed the formation of a Welsh Independent Councillors Association. The team who arranged the conference agreed to carry forward this proposal and we have met regularly over the last few months drafting up a constitution for the association and it is hoped this will be launched in the very near future.

Elsewhere in my region I have met a number of councillors and some Officers regarding a variety of issues. By the very nature of Peer work, details cannot be given without risk of revealing the individuals/councils involved but the issues of reports to Standards, isolation of Independent councillors and problems from the use of social media continue to dominate.

I would like to take this opportunity to urge all Independent councillors to consider more use of Peers. Sometimes a single phone-call to discuss a particular problem or question will be sufficient, other times continuing contact with a Peer is requested. Peer work can be with an individual or a group and the LGA has various offers of support available so please do not hesitate to use the Peer/Mentoring service.

In the lead up to the election I met with some who were considering standing as an Independent councillor and was also privileged to be a part of the Aspiring Disabled Local Politicians project which was an informative, as well as inspirational, programme. Following the election I have been involved with a number of councils where there has been a change in leadership.

As well as meeting with LGA Regional Officers and other Lead Peers in the areas I cover, the Independent Lead Peers regularly meet in Smith Square to discuss what is going on within our regions and nationally. Chaired by Marianne these meetings are very informative and a valuable input to our role. In closing I would like to thank Marianne, my fellow Lead Peers and the Group Officers for all their support during the past twelve months.

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L15-259 June 2015