Membership pack 2016
for Northamptonshire County Council
Welcome to the Local Government Association 2016/17

I would like to once again welcome you as members of the Local Government Association.

This report sets out some of our activities over the last year and highlights the successes that we have achieved on your behalf. Of course, we can’t highlight everything and much of what we do is behind the scenes helping to shape and improve proposals which could impact on local government but 2015 has seen a number of important wins for local government.

Most recently, during discussions with Government on the final Financial Settlement, we have been working hard on behalf of all councils - both publicly and privately – to highlight the financial challenges they face over the next few years. As a result of that work, the Government listened to our fundamental call for new money to be found for councils most adversely affected by the change in distribution of revenue support grant (RSG) without any effect on the grant position of other councils, when compared with the provisional settlement. This has provided £300 million of funding to authorities affected by the distribution change, and an additional £25.1 million to ensure that no council will move into a negative grant funding position within the next three years. Persuading Government to allow all eligible shire district councils to raise their Band D council tax by a maximum of 2% or £5 will also help some councils mitigate some of the additional funding pressures they face in 2016/17 and beyond.

Our campaigning work ahead of and after the General Election has resulted in some significant changes in Government thinking and most important of all, a seismic change in the devolution of powers to the most local level. Who would have thought even two years’ ago that devolution would be on the agenda and starting to be delivered in local areas?

On issues such as devolution, fiscal autonomy, retention of business rates, protection of reserves, flexibility on use of assets and integration of health and social care, I and my colleagues have been fighting for councils and making the case for change. On many of these important issues the Government has listened to our arguments.

The recent announcement on business rates retention, something we have long argued for alongside other fiscal devolution measures, is a notable achievement which will help local government be in control of our own destiny.

We have also seen further progress in relation to devolution deals and the establishment of combined authorities. We have supported areas in putting together their devolution proposals and we will continue to argue that both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas should benefit from the devolution of powers.

As a result of our lobbying, the Government has recognised the pressures on adult social care. The extra money announced for the Better Care Fund, alongside greater flexibility to raise council tax to fund social care, will go some way to help councils deal with the very difficult financial challenges in this area.

However, we recognise that significant financial challenges remain. There is much to do in the coming year to ensure the things we have fought so hard for are delivered and implemented in ways which support not hinder councils. We will continue to ensure that the views of all councils are heard and understood in order to deliver sustainable financing of local government services.

Our lobbying and influencing work is an important part of our membership offer but is only a fraction of what you receive. Our political support for councils and councillors, political leadership offer, national pay negotiations, sector-led improvement work and our extensive free and subsidised annual conference and events programme all form part of our overall package of support we are able to provide to your council, elected members and staff.

I have always believed that together we are stronger as a sector and I, working with my political colleagues and our officers will do everything I can to ensure we continue to do all we can for local government on issues such as funding, housing, devolution, business rates and health and social care.

I look forward to working with you over the coming year to secure the best possible deal for local government and the communities that we represent.

Lord Porter of Spalding, Chairman
We are committed to offering the best value for money to our member councils. Over the past five years, we have reduced our total subscription income by 30 per cent. Alongside the 2.5 per cent early payment discount for payment by 1 June, a further 2.5 per cent loyalty discount is once again available to member councils not on notice to withdraw.

Northamptonshire County Council's subscription for 2016/17 is £64,577 - a reduction of 33 per cent since 2009.

Political support for councillors
As a cross-party, politically-led organisation, we have 4 political groups which work with councillors across the country. The political groups:
- work closely with, and where appropriate, challenge government, shadow teams and party administrations
- help shape our campaigns, policy, media and public affairs work
- offer political advice, guidance and support to individual councillors and to political groups in councils
- run briefings and events for councillors around the country, often with senior government figures
- attend and run sessions for councillors at the Autumn and Spring party conferences
- maintain a watching brief over council performance and co-ordinate political involvement where necessary
- allocate councillors to our peer challenge programme
- coordinate appointments to the our boards, panels, commissions and to a range of outside bodies
How the LGA has worked on behalf of Northamptonshire County Council in 2015

Despite the current financial challenges, over the past year we secured a number of wins and additional funding on your behalf, including:

- A commitment to move to full collective retention of business rates by 2020
- Permanent continuation of the new homes bonus
- Protected councils from Government proposals to force councils to use reserves
- **An extra £1.5 billion** for adult social care through the Better Care Fund
- **Flexibility to raise council tax by 2 per cent** above the referendum threshold to help fund adult social care
- **Extra funding for early years provision and additional capital funding of £50 million**
- Continuation of the Housing Benefit administration subsidy for 2015/16
- A greater level of certainty for funding of highways maintenance than in previous years with 80 per cent (**£4.8 billion**) 
- **An extra £20 million** for free school meals - £10 million capital funding for kitchens and £10 million for the provision of free school meals in small schools (£2,300 for each school with fewer than 150 pupils)
- **An extra £74 million** (in addition to the December 2014 provisional settlement) for upper-tier authorities to support local welfare and social care. For Northamptonshire County Council this means an additional £696,000
- **£37 million of winter pressures funding**, of which your council received £520,000
- **Securing new burdens funding** for Lead Local Flood Authorities, including £81,605 for your council in 2015/16
- **£42 million of new burdens funding, of which your council received £9,128** as a result of LGA collective action on property searches. We are currently seeking to secure a further tranche of New Burdens funding to cover further legal and associated costs - potentially worth £12,830 to your council
- Following consultation with councils, **reaching agreement with trade unions** on a 2.2 per cent pay deal, which provided financial certainty on pay bill costs until April 2016
- **Additional funding of £25 million** to contribute towards the unfunded new burden imposed on councils by Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards
- **£2.1 million** to establish a joint centre with Barnardo’s to improve the social work response to female genital mutilation
- Working with the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), **secured £1 million** for more than 20 public notice pilots, which if implemented, will save councils significant sums of money
- Limiting an increase in the standard and lower rates of Landfill tax, in line with the Retail Price Index, rounded to the nearest 5 pence, from April 2016, **freezing the tax in real terms**
- The Municipal Bonds Agency was launched to raise and lend capital at rates below the PWLB certainty rate, giving councils the opportunity to borrow money more cheaply. A conservative estimate, if half the outstanding debt from the PWLB were to be transferred over time to the Agency, would save borrowers between **£1.2 billion and £1.45 billion over 30 years**
In the Final Local Government Settlement, we secured:

- £150 million in both 2016/17 and 2017/18 for councils most adversely affected by the change in distribution of revenue support grant (RSG)
- £2.3 million in 17/18 and £22.8 million in 18/19 to remove the adjustments to tariffs and top-ups to reflect negative RSG changes so that all Shire Districts have the flexibility to raise council tax by the maximum of £5 or 2 per cent – an additional £39.2 million in council tax in 2019/20 if all Shire Districts use this flexibility every year of the four year period.

We have also lobbied and worked to support councils on a wide range of other issues including:

**Council finances**

- Highlight the importance of integrating public spending at a local level. As a result, the Government announced in Budget 2015 that they will explore the cost-effectiveness of options to integrate spending around some of the most vulnerable groups of people, including health and social care, health and employment support, housing, support to individuals struggling with homelessness, addiction and mental health issues.
- The Government **committed to review the Bellwin Scheme** and amending it to reduce the threshold
- **Ensuring that the Deferred Payments Agreements scheme runs on a cost-neutral basis**, where councils will be able to charge interest on the deferred fees to cover the cost of lending

**Health and social care**

- Giving councils **discretion to refuse a request for a deferred payment agreement** under the Care Act where they are unable to secure a first legal charge on a person’s property
- **Helping to secure EU recognition that publicly-funded health and social care services will not be affected by the EU-US trade deal (TTIP) currently under negotiation**

- In response to concerns about the affordability of the Care Act in 2015/16 the Department of Health **committing to monitoring the costs of the Act next year**
- **Ensured councils are recognised as primary partners** alongside the DWP in the delivery of Local Support Services for Universal Credit

**Children and young people**
• A Judicial Review that confirms council flexibility to choose in-house placements for looked after children without the need for lengthy consultation

• Working with the Adoption Leadership Board, we helped increase the number of children adopted by 15 per cent and the number of approved adopters by 34 per cent over the past year

• Influencing government proposals to allow councils to delegate children’s social care functions to third party providers, with the introduction of a specific restriction on profit-making companies delivering these services

• Won the argument to restrict the number of transfers to the new Education Health and Care (EHC) plans, saving councils significant additional work

• Replacing the Single Inspection Framework with a more proportionate and less resource intensive multi-agency inspection from April 2017

• In response to concerns raised about the funding for childcare raised during the passage of the Childcare Bill, the Government announced that it will invest over £1 billion more a year by 2019-20 in free childcare places for two, three and four-year-olds. To enable the doubling of free childcare for three and four-year-olds with working parents, the Government said it will also invest at least £50 million of capital funding to create additional places in nurseries and over £300 million to increase the average hourly rate for provider

Growth, Planning and Infrastructure

• The Infrastructure Act now includes a legal obligation for Highways England, to produce route strategies on which to base future investment plans, to consult councils on their roads development programme

• Ensuring planning permission is now required for all new betting shops, helping councils to manage the proliferation of betting shops on high streets, which can hinder local growth and regeneration

• Raising the issue of how the compulsory purchase order process could be improved and as a result, the Government launched a consultation to look at ways to make it clearer, faster and fairer

• Securing changes to the proposed delivery of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) which means that no council is required to adopt and maintain a SuDS

• Securing a requirement in the draft licence of the new strategic highways company (that will replace the Highways Agency) to consult with councils on their investment plans and operation of their network
Crime, community safety, fire and licensing

- Securing councils’ **continued access to communications data** to track down organised gangs and rogue traders preying on the vulnerable
- **Putting licensing reform on the national agenda**, including the absurdity of issuing licences to businesses who owe councils thousands of pounds in unpaid business rates
- Securing council representation on the Home Office National Group on Sexual Violence
- DWP agreeing a **broader definition of fraud** that will be investigated by Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) significantly simplifying arrangements for councils
- Successfully lobbied for Sunday trading laws to be devolved to councils
- Government announcing its intention to create (and subsequently consult on) a **separate planning use class for betting and payday loans shops**, following our lobbying on concerns about betting shop clustering
- To help support trading standards and fraud work, developed and agreed a memorandum of understanding with HMRC, to facilitate data sharing between councils and central government, allowing councils to opt in to the framework will be able to access HMRC data for the purpose of undertaking criminal investigations
- Successfully pressed for the introduction of mandatory smoke alarms in rented properties, potentially reducing the costs to fire and rescue authorities, saving lives and wider community impacts

Culture and Sport

- Following our public lobbying, the Premier League will now at least double their investment in community football and facilities

**RECOVERING ICELANDIC INVESTMENT**

Last year we helped recover a further £5 million for councils, bringing the total amount of money we’ve retrieved for councils with money deposited with the failed Icelandic Banks to **£1.05 billion**.
Working for your council

On your behalf, we:

- lobby on your behalf to influence financial and policy decisions which affect your council
- press for greater powers to be devolved from Whitehall to local government
- influence emerging government thinking, ensure your views are represented and raise issues on your behalf with ministers, shadow ministers and officials
- speak with one voice through local, regional and national media, helping to promote the things that you are doing well and defend local government’s reputation, significantly increasing the number of positive stories about local government
- support councils to drive innovation and improvement, and share best practice to help them be more efficient and effective, delivering millions of pounds of savings and improving services
- in our role as national employer, on your behalf, negotiate fair pay and pensions, providing considerable advice on workforce issues to individual and groups of councils

We are constantly listening to what you tell us, striving to improve our membership offer and the services we provide to councils. Our most recent survey shows that 77 per cent of our members say we effectively represent their views to government and 71 per cent say we are influential in shaping the agenda for local government.

We have continued to work closely with councils and in the last year, our Chairman, Chief Executive and other members of our senior team made nearly 600 visits to councils in England and Wales. In addition, we held more than 100 events, most of which were free for member councils – and half of them held in the regions.

You have told us that lobbying on your behalf and defending the reputation of local government in the media are two of your top priorities. In the last year, we produced nearly 30,681 media mentions, many of which were national – that’s 84 a day. We secured numerous opportunities in Parliament to press for changes in current legislation affecting local government, amendments to proposed legislation, to raise issues and concerns on your behalf and to ensure councils receive praise for the work they do.

Our improvement work has been widely used by councils helping to share innovation and best practice across local government. In the last year, more than 110 councils received a peer challenge. This approach, helping to co-ordinate improvement work on behalf of councils, has helped them to deliver millions of pounds of savings.

The political support offered through our 4 group offices supports councillors both personally and professionally with highly regarded leadership development programmes.
We work closely with parliamentarians to ensure that the concerns of our members are represented in national political debates. In 2015 we were quoted 845 times in parliamentary debates, Select Committees and parliamentary questions. We provided written and oral evidence to more than 40 Select Committee and All-Party Parliamentary Group inquiries, and supported a number of councillors and officials when they provided evidence to inquiries on behalf of local government.

Influencing legislation remains central to our public affairs offer in Westminster and Brussels. We do this by meeting with Ministers and senior government officials, seeking amendments to legislation and making representations to parliamentary committees. In the last year we influenced the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, the Education and Adoption Bill, the Childcare Bill, the Immigration Bill and the Psychoactive Substance Bill currently being passed by Parliament.

Our parliamentary ‘wins’ for local government include:

- Securing a duty in the **Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill** for the Government to report annually to Parliament on the progress of devolution for all areas (city regions, smaller towns and cities, and rural and coastal communities) in England and Wales. Annual reports will provide an opportunity to benchmark and celebrate the ongoing progress, beyond the restricted oversight through the affirmative process for the relevant orders.

- Working with the parliamentarians and government officials to amend the **Education and Adoption Bill** to ensure that academy schools will in the future be subject to intervention powers if they are deemed to be ‘coasting’ under the new definition in the Bill.

- Securing the introduction through the **Psychoactive Substances Bill** of a ban on the distribution, sale and supply of new psychoactive substances in the UK. This legislation will help councils trading standards teams protect the public from the potentially devastating consequences of legal highs.

- Securing additional funding for early years childcare through our work on the **Childcare Bill**. We are also working with the Government to agree a locally led approach to the provision of this service.

- Securing an amendment in the **Immigration Bill** which means local authorities no longer have to pay higher education tuition fees for care leavers as a result of their immigration status. We will be working with Government to ensure that any residence criteria set out in the Bill’s regulations are sufficiently broad to allow this group of care leavers to pursue their studies.
Party conferences

Over the past year the LGA has run a number of high profile campaigns including DevoNext, Show Us You Care and Future Funding and their impact can already be seen with positive announcements on devolution and business rates.

Our devolution campaign, DevoNext, formed the basis of our party conference engagement. During party conferences, we hosted debates and evening receptions with high profile speakers at each, including representatives from think tanks, civic leaders, and ministers or shadow ministers.

The LGA Chairman, Group Leaders and LGA councillors, all fully briefed by the LGA, also spoke on behalf of local government at 75 events and debates and roundtables organised by more than 40 stakeholders from the public, private and charitable sectors. This included speaking at events on devolution, housing, enterprise and growth, skills, social investment, health and social care, transport, licensing, public health, and young people and children services.

General election 2015

In advance of last year’s General Election, the LGA worked closely with the main political parties to set out our policy recommendations in order to secure positive commitments for local government. These included:

- A commitment from 5 of the political parties (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats, UKIP and Greens) to build more homes
- A commitment from 5 of the political parties (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats, UKIP and Greens) to devolve a range of economic powers to local areas
- A commitment from the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats to integrate health and social care funding
- A commitment from the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats to reform business rates
- A commitment from the Conservative Party to review how central government can further reduce ring-fencing and Whitehall burdens to give councils more flexibility to support local services
- A commitment from the Labour Party to create multi-year budgets so that local authorities can plan ahead
- A commitment from the Liberal Democrats and UKIP either devolve full control of Right to Buy or reinvest 100 per cent of Right to Buy sales back into community housing
- A commitment from Labour and the Greens to give councils more freedom over housing benefits and rent reductions
The national voice of local government – councils in the media

One of the activities councils tell us is most important to them as members of the LGA is our media work. As the national voice of local government we are uniquely placed to provide a strong voice for councils as the national press office for local government – a 24/7, 365 days a year service committed to protecting and promoting the interests of councils. We promote the work you are doing in the national, regional and specialist press – and stand up for councils by rebutting negative stories.

In 2015, we achieved 1,520 episodes of media coverage in national newspapers, broadcast and online articles, an increase on the previous year.

Our team of spokespeople from councils up and down the country were interviewed 443 times, across all broadcast channels - 163 times on UK national TV and radio stations.

We provide a free news headlines service to all member councils, saving you thousands of pounds and our weekly email to all council communications teams – Commsnet – is widely read and shares best practice and other resources.

Practical support for councils

There is a range of support available to your council. A regionally-based Principal Adviser, acts as your first point of contact with the LGA, advising on the support and services available. Your Principal Adviser will be in regular contact and undertakes numerous visits to councils over the course of the year. Mark Edgell is your Local Authority Principal Adviser and can be contacted on mark.edgell@local.gov.uk and 07747 636 910.

In addition, you can access:

- support from specialist advisers across a range of policy areas from housing to health and social care, children to communications
- on-the-day briefings covering all major government announcements – including the Queen’s Speech, the Budget and major legislation which may affect your council
- free legal advice and opinions, on some complex issues, commissioned by the LGA. Legal opinions can cost individual councils tens of thousands of pounds
- free access to advice on pay, pensions and employment
- discounts on Microsoft and Adobe software licences through participating resellers
Conferences and events

Councillors and officers from our member councils have access to more than 100 free or discounted events, from small seminars to large residential conferences. 73 per cent of our events this year were free to attend for our members and half were held in the regions.

Our member authorities receive a 42 per cent discount on one-day events and a 23 per cent discount on residential events, including our annual conference – the flagship event for local government.

We also arrange roundtables, briefings, seminars and receptions at the main party conferences, and an annual conference for Independent and smaller party councillors.

19 member(s) and 32 officer(s) from Northamptonshire County Council attended events in 2015.
Improvement, innovation and development

The current financial challenges mean that finding new and innovative ways to improve effectiveness, increase efficiency and reduce costs is more important than ever. The LGA facilitates sharing of ideas and best practice, helping councils build capacity to support one another. In the last 12 months 110 councils received a peer challenge. This approach, helping to co-ordinate improvement work on behalf of councils, has helped them to deliver millions of pounds of savings.

Councils have access to:

- one free corporate peer challenge every three years
- themed peer challenges by arrangement, including, finance, communications, adults and children’s safeguarding, health and wellbeing, planning, and fire. Northamptonshire County Council has received a free Fire peer challenge in 2014
- a revised and extended financial support offer. To recognise the increasing importance of financial issues and responding to your suggestions, we have extended peer support on finance and added to the financial diagnostic tools made available to all councils, such as the ‘spider charts’. These are available online at LG Inform at www.local.gov.uk/lginform
- bespoke peer support such as up to five days ‘change of control’ support for new leaders/cabinet members and tailored peer mentoring support for individual councillors from experienced councillors with relevant expertise. Northamptonshire County Council has received direct improvement support
- productivity support to help councils increase financial sustainability under three broad themes – Transforming Services, Smarter Sourcing and Generating Income. Through our projects and programmes we have worked directly with more than 170 councils during 2015, providing support, learning lessons and publishing case studies, valued by all authorities. Northamptonshire County Council has received support through our financial sustainability and resilience programmes
- LG Inform – a free on-line benchmarking service that allows anyone in a council or fire and rescue service to compare their performance with other similar authorities and presents the information in report form. We also provide free ward reports from LG Inform Plus, our premium data and information management service. The LGA provides free advanced LG Inform/LG Inform Plus training for local authority staff. This year we provided 2 training day(s) to your staff
- communications support – increasingly, authorities are requesting communications support as part of our sector-led improvement offer – ranging from crisis communications assistance to media relations advice. Fifty councils received support from our communications team last year. We are uniquely placed to offer support, advice, training and access to best practice
In addition, this year we have launched our support for devolution deals, helping all interested councils to secure the benefits of devolution for their residents. We put together support based on what individual areas find most helpful. As a guide, we can offer:

- Brokering and advice from member and officer peers with experience of setting up new governance arrangements and/or negotiating deals
- Access to technical advice to help with developing business cases and financial modelling to support proposals
- Strategic advice for negotiations with Government departments; including up to date assessments of the national picture on devolution and dry run rehearsals for Ministerial meetings
- Support to develop devolution communications
- Expert support from the Centre for Public Scrutiny to develop governance arrangements

We are also establishing a devolution network – a cohort of officers from councils who have negotiated or are negotiating deals, who value meeting up when appropriate to share experiences and learning on devolution. The network will cover a range of issues from the tactics of negotiating through to organising the programme, to the governance issues that arise in a Combined Authority. For more information contact localism@local.gov.uk

For more information on the LGA support offer, and details on our publications, recent devolution deals, forming a combined authority and a range of other tools and resources visit: www.local.gov.uk/devolution
Leadership programmes

We offer a range of free or subsidised programmes, courses and materials to support councillors, groups of councillors and officers in their various leadership roles

Leading Edge
A unique opportunity for leaders to work with chief executives on key leadership challenges

Leadership Academy
Three two-day residential modules delivered in a cross-party setting for councillors in leadership positions to learn more about the latest in political leadership. 1 councillor(s) from your council attended Leadership Academy in 2015/16

Leadership Essentials
Themed programmes and workshops for councillors in leadership positions to share experiences with others who face similar challenges. 2 councillor(s) from your council attended Leadership Essentials programme in 2015/16

Next Generation
A prestigious leadership development programme for ambitious councillors delivered in a party political group setting – free to nominated members

Change of Control
Five days free consultancy support to new political administrations, to enable them to ‘hit the ground running’ following a change of control

Leaders’ Programme
The Leaders’ Programme is a new modular leadership development programme designed around the needs of Leaders

Focus On Leadership
Development programmes for councillors with potential or aspirations to move into leadership positions

Community Leadership
Free support for councillors in their community leadership role including in-house training programmes, workbooks and E-Learning modules

The Councillors’ Guide
A comprehensive guide to support new councillors to be as effective as possible in their new role

National Graduate Development Programme
Recruits high calibre graduates into local government on a two year programme

Developing the Future Workforce
Support to councils on strategic workforce issues arising from public service transformation

Local Government Challenge
Aspiring top managers compete for the £10,000 Bruce-Lockhart scholarship in a six month long competition hosted by councils across the country
Access to free facilities

Local Government House, in the heart of Westminster, is a resource for all of our members to use. Fully accessible, with a range of bookable meeting rooms and a conference centre on the ground floor, the following facilities are available to all of our member councils:

- free use of the Open Council coffee lounge and Members’ Terrace Lounge for small, informal meetings. The Members’ Terrace Lounge has direct access to a roof terrace with views across Westminster
- access to a range of bookable meeting rooms – from quiet rooms for 2-3 people to the Westminster Suite which can seat up to 100 people. Any member council or group of member councils can book up to five rooms a year, free-of-charge and subject to availability.

Please note: Due to planned refurbishment work to improve facilities at Local Government House, which will take place from August 2016 to Summer 2017, access to the above facilities, which are normally made available to all our members to use, will be limited during this period. Please contact us at venue@local.gov.uk to find out what is available.

Getting involved

The LGA General Assembly acts as the ‘Parliament for local government’. It meets annually every summer before our Annual Conference to elect office holders, hear from our Chairman and to debate matters of importance to local government. Every member council is allocated a number of voting places. You can also get involved in the work of the LGA through:

- appointment to one of our boards, committees or task groups, which together cover every area of local government
- coming along to one of our Councillor Forum meetings to hear speakers and discuss current issues for local government
- joining one of our many special interest groups - such as the County Councils' Network (CCN), District Councils' Network (DCN), the Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities (SIGOMA), Rural Services Network and the Strategic Aviation SIG (SASIG). They cover a wide range of topics – from coastal authorities and small rural authorities to councils with ALMOs and with shared chief executives

For further information please contact your Political Group Office or our Member Services Team at memberservices@local.gov.uk