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This guide, produced by the Local Government Association (LGA), is designed to provide you with the key information you need to know as a new councillor, and is a useful addition to the support and guidance you will receive from your own council. It explores some of the main issues and challenges facing local government today, and includes hints and tips from experienced councillors.

Whether you have a few hours to spare or just 10 minutes, you will find helpful information here about the areas in which you may become involved. You can find lots of further information on our website: www.local.gov.uk

Lord Porter of Spalding CBE
LGA Chairman

Councillor Nick Forbes
Labour Group Leader and LGA Senior Vice-Chairman

Councillor James Jamieson
Conservative Group Leader and LGA Vice-Chairman

Councillor Howard Sykes MBE
Liberal Democrat Group Leader and LGA Vice-Chairman

Councillor Marianne Overton MBE
Independent Group Leader and LGA Vice-Chairman

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From the Chairman

Congratulations on being elected as a new councillor from myself and everyone at the Local Government Association (LGA). I hope that you will find your time as an elected representative as rewarding as I have, and the LGA a useful resource. I like to think of us as a family and, like all families, we are here to help you as you take on the role of councillor.

I do hope that during your time as a councillor, you will gain a new perspective on the vital work that councils do in improving the lives of those in our communities. As I am sure you know, this has been a challenging time for councils, with less money and higher demand for our services. Despite this, it's still an exciting time to play your part in local government, as our regular polling shows that local councils and councillors are the most trusted to take decisions about their local areas. We are all working to ensure that in the next year the Spending Review provides us with the sustainable financial settlement we need so that local government can continue to deliver for our residents.

At its best, local government provides the strong and ambitious leadership that ensures the nation remains fit and well, economically resilient and continues to thrive. We achieve this through the 1,300 different statutory duties and responsibilities councils provide to residents, who hold us to account via the ballot box. These duties include caring for the elderly and disabled, building homes, keeping our green spaces pristine, repairing our roads, waste and recycling collection; the list goes on.

Through your work as councillors, you can make the lives of your residents better. And we are your voice, the local voice to national government, working hard to make your case so you can deliver the best possible public services. Secretaries of State and ministers, MPs and peers across Westminster and Whitehall, rely on us to present your views to them as they decide on the course of the ship of state. As a councillor you will be able to get involved in this work, to help shape the landscape of local government for the future.

The LGA is also a resource to help you carry out the role to the best of your ability. This guide outlines just some of the services that we provide. With over 400 councils in membership across England and Wales, the LGA provides a vast network to share best practice and help support you in your work.

I wish you the best of luck in your term in office.

Lord Porter of Spalding CBE
Chairman of the LGA

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Welcome to the Local Government Association

The national voice of local government

Twenty-one years ago, local government came together to create the LGA to support, promote and improve local government. We are politically led and cross-party, working with and on behalf of councils in England and Wales to give local government a strong, credible voice at national level.

Having one national voice gives local government the capacity to:

- pick up emerging government thinking and ensure that local government's views are heard at the heart of government
- think ahead to shape and develop the policies that councils need
- work with public, private, community and voluntary organisations to secure their support for local authorities' priorities and their understanding of our perspectives
- ensure that the right issues are raised with the right people at the right time, increasing their chance of resolution
- speak with one voice to the public through the national media
- take responsibility for driving innovation and improvement across local government.

As a councillor you will automatically have access to the full range of services that we provide.

Support for councils

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 the sharing of ideas and best practice, helping councils build capacity to support one another.

During 2018, 107 councils received a free 'peer challenge' to support them to improve, while 1,412 councillors and 3,145 officers attended one of our 100-plus free and subsidised

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Lynne Doherty, Conservative, West Berkshire Council

I studied history at Cardiff University before embarking on a sales and marketing career. Following the birth of my children, I joined the voluntary sector. I ran a family support charity for six years and it was this work that led me to stand for election in 2015.

As Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education, I am responsible for children's services to protect those in need, and for the provision of education to all. I am proud to have overseen the improvement journey following an 'inadequate' Ofsted rating, which resulted in a re-inspection finding of 'good'.

My advice for new councillors is:

- Don't be afraid to question: if it is running through your mind, it is most likely to be running through someone else's.
- Think 'so what?' on behalf of your residents – what do decisions actually mean to those you represent?
- Find a friend – find someone you trust to guide and support you in your early days as a councillor

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events. This approach, helping to coordinate improvement work on behalf of councils, has helped them to deliver millions of pounds of savings.

You can find out more about our support offer for councils on our website www.local.gov.uk/our-support

Campaigning on your behalf

Supporting and speaking out for councils is why we exist. Here are just some of the things we have done over the past year.

During another challenging year for local government, we continued to focus on those things that councils tell us are their top priorities – funding, adult social care, children's services (in particular special educational needs) and housing – securing high levels of media and parliamentary coverage and cross-party support for our campaigns.

Although it only scratches the surface, our work to get local government recognised in the Budget helped deliver over £1 billion in short-term funding for 2019/20. That included £650 million for adult and children's social care and £420 million to tackle potholes, repair roads and invest in bridges. We are now building a strong case for longer-term funding for local government ahead of this year's Spending Review through the #councilscan campaign.

For further information on the campaign www.local.gov.uk/spending-review-2019

The scrapping of the housing borrowing cap was a major achievement. Government has finally recognised that councils must be part of the solution to the chronic housing shortage, and that only an increase of all types of housing – including affordable housing and homes for social rent – will solve the housing crisis. We also secured an extra £215 million for homelessness support in 2019/20.

In the continued absence of the Government's social care Green Paper, we published our own, 'The lives we want to lead', widely recognised as leading the debate on how we fund and deliver social care in the future. We will use this, and our follow-up report and recommendations, to maintain pressure on government in the coming year.

Meanwhile, to support the excellent work councils are doing to prepare for Brexit, we secured a guarantee from government that EU-funded projects would continue to be funded by the Treasury to the end of 2020, even under a 'no deal' scenario. We continue to keep councils up-to-date with the latest issues as they emerge.

Other important wins for local government during the year have included securing:

- a further £100 million in 2018/19 of new money to repair local roads after winter damage
- an additional £250 million over 2018/19 and 2019/20 for schools' high needs funding
- an additional £100 million capital funding in 2019/20 for schools' special educational needs provision
- a power to increase the council tax premium on empty homes
- new powers to fine householders who dump rubbish illegally up to £400 and access to a £10 million fund to support innovation in waste and recycling

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- for councils with their own or housing association tower blocks – access to full funding for the removal and replacement of dangerous cladding plus financial support to carry out emergency remedial work on unsafe private sector buildings.

You can find out more about our campaigning work on our website www.local.gov.uk

The councillor's role

As a democratically elected local representative, you have a unique and privileged position – and the potential to make a real difference to people's lives. However, being a councillor is hard work. Every day you will be expected to balance the needs of your local area, your residents and voters, community groups, local businesses, your political party (if you belong to one) and the council. All will make legitimate demands on your time – on top of your personal commitments to family, friends and workplace.

As a councillor you will have many different roles to balance. As the locally elected representative, you will engage with residents and groups on a wide range of different issues and take on an important community leadership role. At the council, you will contribute to the development of polities and strategies, including budget setting, and you may be involved in scrutinising council decisions or taking decisions on planning or licensing applications.

Representing your local area

A councillor's primary role is to represent their ward or division and the people who live in it. Councillors provide a bridge between the community and the council. As well as being an advocate for your local residents and signposting them to the right people at the council, you will need to keep them informed about the issues that affect them.

In order to understand and represent local views and priorities, you need to build strong relationships and encourage local people to make their views known and engage with you and the council. Good communication and engagement is central to being an effective councillor.

As a local councillor, your residents will expect you to:

- respond to their queries and investigate their concerns (casework)
- communicate council decisions that affect them
- know your patch and be aware of any problems
- know and work with representatives of local organisations, interest groups and businesses
- represent their views at council meetings
- lead local campaigns on their behalf.

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Community leadership is at the heart of modern local government. Councils work in partnership with local communities and organisations – including the public, voluntary, community and private sectors – to develop a vision for their local area, working collaboratively to improve services and quality of life for citizens. Councillors have a lead role in this process.

Developing council policy

Councils need clear strategies and policies to enable them to achieve their vision for the area, make the best use of resources and deliver services that meet the needs of local communities. As a local councillor you will contribute to the development of these policies and strategies, bringing the views and priorities of your local area to the debate. How you do this will depend on the committees and forums you are appointed to. However, the council's policy framework must be signed off by full council, on which every councillor sits.

Planning and regulation

Councils are not just service providers, they also act as regulators. As a councillor you may be appointed to sit on the planning and regulatory committee, considering issues such as planning applications, licences for pubs and restaurants and ensuring that businesses comply with the law. In these roles, councillors are required to act independently and are not subject to the group/party whip. Most councils arrange special training for this.

Code of conduct and standards

As a councillor you will be required to adhere to your council's agreed code of conduct for elected members. Each council adopts its own code, but it must be based on the Committee on Standards in Public Life's seven principles of public life (see below).

These were developed by the Nolan Committee, which looked at how to improve ethical standards in public life, and are often referred to as the 'Nolan principles'. They apply to anyone who works as a public office holder. This includes all those elected or appointed to public office, nationally or locally, and everyone working in the civil service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, non-departmental public bodies and in the health, education and social care sectors. All public office holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources. The principles also apply to everyone in other sectors delivering public services.

All councils are required to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by councillors, but individual councillors must also take responsibility. For example, you must register any disclosable pecuniary (financial) interests for yourself, your spouse or a partner you live with, within 28 days of taking up office. It is a criminal offence if you fail, without reasonable excuse, to declare or register interests to the monitoring officer.

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SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

Holders of public office should uphold the following seven principles:

Selflessness
Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity
Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity
Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability
Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness
Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for doing so.

Honesty
Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership
Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

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An introduction to local government

Local government touches the lives of everybody, every day. Councils deal with everything from schools to care of older people, from roads to rubbish, libraries and local planning. Behind all of this is a web of legislation and bureaucracy that most people don't need to see. As a councillor, understanding how it works will help you to represent your local community.

What do councils do?

Councils work with local people and partners, such as local businesses and other organisations, to agree and deliver on local priorities. They provide a wide range of services either directly, in partnership with others or by commissioning them from a third party.

Since the Local Government Act 2000, councils have been responsible for the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their areas. The Localism Act 2011, along with more recent changes to the way that public health, welfare and the police are organised, have given councils and communities more influence over the way their local area is managed.

Councils provide more than 800 services to local communities. Most are mandatory, which means that by law the council must ensure they are delivered (although in most cases the exact nature of that delivery is for the council to determine). Some mandatory functions are tightly controlled by central government, resulting in a similar level of service across the country.

Other services are discretionary, so the council has discretion over the type and level of service it provides. They range from large economic regeneration projects right down to the removal of wasp nests. Councils are allowed to charge for discretionary services, provided it is not prohibited by other legislation and the council does not make a profit.

How is local government organised?

Successive reorganisations of local government have created a complex and often baffling array of arrangements which vary from area to area. Much of England has two tiers of local government – county councils and district councils – with responsibility for services split between the two. Other areas have a single unitary authority responsible for all local services. Recently, the emphasis on greater devolution of powers and funding has led to the creation of combined authorities.

Two-tier areas

- County councils provide services that cover the whole county such as education, waste disposal and adult social care.
- District councils (sometimes called borough or city councils) are smaller and provide local services such as refuse collection, environmental health and leisure facilities.

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Unitary areas

- Metropolitan councils were councils set up in 1974 covering large urban areas.
- London boroughs are unitary councils (although the Greater London Authority provides some services including fire, police, transport and strategic planning).
- Unitary authorities may cover a whole county, part of a county or a large town or city. For example, Cornwall Council, Nottingham City Council and Reading Borough Council are all unitary councils. Wales has unitary councils.

Combined authorities

- All councils in an area can come together and apply to central government to form a combined authority, with a directly elected mayor, in return for a greater devolution of powers from central government. Although each deal is unique, all have some common elements, including:
  - a single investment fund allowing central and local funding to be pooled for economic growth
  - a devolved adult skills budget and control over post-16 further education and the apprenticeship grant
  - involvement in UK trade and investment services
  - powers to pursue bus franchising, pooled and devolved local transport funding and 'smart ticketing' across local transport
  - powers over strategic planning, and to establish public land commissions to influence disposal of public assets.
- Elected mayors in combined authorities have varying powers, but all chair the combined authority cabinet, have their own mayoral spending plans (which can be rejected by the cabinet on a two-thirds majority) and sit on the local enterprise partnership (LEP). They can veto decisions which require unanimous approval of mayor and cabinet, and can take on the role of police and crime commissioner.
- The first six combined authority mayors (Greater Manchester, West Midlands, Liverpool City Region, Tees Valley, West of England and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough) were elected in May 2017. A new North of Tyne Combined Authority came into being in 2018.

Town, parish and community councils

In some areas, the most local tier of local government is a parish or town council (or community councils in Wales). They maintain local amenities such as recreational areas, footpaths and cemeteries. The parish council is also consulted on highway and planning applications.

A councillor may serve on more than one tier of local government – so a county councillor may also be a district councillor and a parish councillor.

At the start of 2019, England had 27 counties split into 201 districts, 56 unitary authorities, 37 metropolitan districts, 32 London boroughs (plus the City of London), 30 combined and metropolitan fire and rescue authorities (FRAs), 15 county FRAs and 10,000 parish and town councils. These figures changed slightly in April as a result of reorganisation in Dorset and Suffolk. Wales has 22 unitary councils, 1,000 community councils and a regional assembly.

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Devolution

Devolution is the transfer of power and funding from national to local government. This process is important because it means decisions are made closer to the people, communities and businesses they affect. This helps councils develop more effective public services and provides residents with better value for money. It also helps to build stronger partnerships with local organisations such as businesses, universities and the NHS.

Since 2014, when the first 'devolution deal' was signed between government and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, similar deals have been struck around the country, transferring new powers over skills, employment, health and housing to local areas.

The LGA has been involved throughout this process – advocating on behalf of member authorities, working with national government to develop policy, and providing direct support to areas looking to develop and secure further devolution. We have built strong relationships with the elected 'metro mayors' and continue to push for devolution outside the framework of a mayoral combined authority.

The LGA is working closely with central government, LEPs and others to ensure that emerging local industrial strategies are backed by the devolution of funding and powers over key policies such as skills and employment support. We have also made it clear that Brexit presents an opportunity to empower councils, to provide them with new legislative freedoms and flexibilities so that residents and businesses benefit, as powers return to the UK from Brussels.

Our 'devolution hub' has the latest publications and tools
www.local.gov.uk/devolution

How are decisions made?

Councils are political organisations, and their arrangements for decision-making are known as their 'governance'. Councils can adopt (or be directed to adopt) one of the following four models:

- a leader and cabinet
- a committee system
- executive arrangements with a directly elected mayor
- arrangements prescribed by the Secretary of State.

Most operate a leader and cabinet model. The full council elects a leader who, in turn, appoints and chairs the cabinet. Each cabinet member has a specific area of responsibility – for example children and young people, housing or finance. The cabinet meets regularly (weekly or fortnightly) so decisions are made quickly.
The cabinet may also be called the executive.

In some areas, an executive mayor is elected for a four-year term. The mayor has greater powers than a council leader and may or may not be a member of the majority party on the

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council. He/she proposes the budget and policy framework and appoints and chairs the cabinet, which can be single or cross-party.

Some councils opt for a committee system. The council establishes a number of committees, each with a specific area of responsibility. The political groups appoint elected members to those committees. More councillors are actively involved in decision making, but it can take longer to reach decisions.

Increasingly, areas are creating joint decision-making arrangements such as combined authorities or joint leaders' boards to deal with important issues that cross local authority boundaries, such as economic growth and transport.

Whichever system an authority opts for, it must have a full council on which all councillors sit. This is responsible for setting the policy framework, agreeing the budget and spending plans, electing the leader and making constitutional decisions. It is also a forum for debate on major issues affecting the council and its local area. In councils with a directly elected mayor, the budget and framework are proposed by the mayor and can only be amended or overturned by the council with a two-thirds majority.

Councils that do not opt for the committee system must establish overview and scrutiny arrangements through which non-cabinet councillors can scrutinise decisions.

There are some regulatory and quasi-judicial functions over which the cabinet does not have responsibility – for example, determining planning applications and making decisions on licensing. These are delegated to separate planning and regulatory committees.

The constitution

As a new councillor you will receive a copy of your council's constitution, which sets out how the council conducts its business, including:

- who is responsible for making decisions and how decisions are made
- procedural matters (set out in the 'standing orders')
- the role of officers
- standards and ethical governance.

It is important to familiarise yourself with these parts of the constitution, in particular the standing orders. These specify the terms of reference of the council's various member structures, the rules on declarations of interest, the timings and order of business at council meetings and the rules of debate.

Agendas and minutes

By law the council's formal meetings must be held in public, although the public and press can be excluded for discussions on some confidential items (known as 'Part 2'). Councils must give at least five days' notice of a meeting and must make the agenda available at least five days before the meeting. The minutes should be published on the council's website and available on request. The council must also publish its forward plan, showing the key decisions to be made in the next four months.

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Defamation and privilege

Councillors can be sued for defamation if they say or write anything that will 'lower a person in the estimation of right-thinking people'. However, in council meetings they have a qualified privilege to allow freedom of speech. This can protect you against being sued for something you say as part of your duty as a councillor or to defend or support the interests of the council – but it only applies if you can show that you honestly believed what you said and were not motivated by malice.

The council workforce

A council's paid employees are called officers. Unlike civil servants, who work for the government, local government officers have a duty to support the whole council, not just the cabinet. This means that they must remain politically neutral.

Very simply, councillors set the strategic direction and agree the policy framework of the council; officers are responsible for delivering the council's policies and for the day-to-day operation of the organisation.

Officers fall broadly into two main categories: front-line and support. Front-line officers deliver services to the public – for example teachers, social workers, care assistants and refuse collectors. Support staff ensure that front-line services and the democratic process can operate smoothly – for example through administrative, finance, legal, communications and IT support.

Councils also deliver services through various partnerships and outsourcing arrangements. These staff are not directly employed by the council but are affected by decisions made by councillors.

Specific provisions will be included in the standing orders about the involvement that individual councillors can have in the appointment and dismissal of staff and in setting employment policies. Many councils have protocols or policies to govern councillor/officer relations. All councillors have a general duty of care towards officers, but the protocol will set a framework for members to promote equality and respect the impartiality and integrity of staff.

By law, every council must appoint three key officers:

1. **A head of the paid staff** – usually the chief executive (or managing director) who advises councillors on policy, procedure and legislation.
2. **A monitoring officer** – responsible for advising councillors of the legal framework within which they operate, and for ensuring that they understand if their decisions or actions could lead to a legal challenge or be found to be maladministration.
3. **A Section 151 officer** – usually the director of finance, whose task it is to monitor the financial affairs of the council.

The senior management team will head up the main functions or departments of the council. Good member/officer relationships are important to a high-performing authority, but the relationship between the leader or elected mayor and the chief executive is particularly important and can have a profound effect on the council's performance. In some instances, more than one council share a senior management team or other management arrangements.

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Equality and community cohesion

At the heart of the Equality Act is the public sector equality duty, which aims to tackle discrimination and inequality by embedding equality considerations in the day-to-day work of all public bodies. Public bodies must have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity between different groups
- foster good relations between different groups.

Councils must publish:

- one or more equality objectives every four years
- information to demonstrate compliance with the equality duty each year
- information on their employees and others affected by their policies and practices.

Councillors are expected to understand the impact of cutting budgets and to mitigate potential negative outcomes, especially the cumulative impact on specific groups of people. Getting this right will ensure fairness and equality of opportunity for local people.

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Mike Bush, Independent, Tendring District Council

I live in the rural Essex village of Great Oakley and was elected as a district councillor in 2017. I am an active member-volunteer in our village community-run pub and, having listened to the issues raised by local residents, I wanted to be their voice in council and make a difference to our village life.

It has been a steep but rewarding learning curve and I have worked on a variety of cases, from potholes, fly-tipping and flooding through to anti-social behaviour and planning applications. I am also a parish councillor, which provides different challenges.

My advice for new councillors is:

- Introduce yourself to as many officers as possible – get to know their roles and how they can provide support and advice to assist with your casework.
- Get to know other councillors who have experience and knowledge to guide you through the council protocol.
- Always respond to your residents' issues promptly, keep them informed and ensure you get out in your community to let them know what you can do for them.

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Support for councillors

Councils provide support to councillors in their role as democratically elected representatives, although the level and type of support provided will vary. It can include:

- induction and training
- access to space in the council offices, such as a members' room
- office equipment such as a mobile phone, computer and printer
- access to media and general communications advice
- research support.

Some support is provided for all councillors, while other support is provided via the political groups (or, if you are an independent councillor, your council may have an independent group office). The leader of the council and cabinet members are more likely to have access to dedicated support, along with the chairs of scrutiny in some councils.

Induction and training

Most councils offer induction courses for new councillors to familiarise them with their new role and how the council works. Your induction should introduce you to the members and officers you need to know to do your job effectively, and show you how and where to access the information you will need. It should also run through the legal framework you will be operating within.

Some councils provide a wider range of training for councillors. This may build your knowledge in a particular service area (such as education, adult social care, housing or planning) or develop your skills – for example effective scrutiny, working with the media, presentations, political leadership, influencing or time management.

From time to time, your council may hold briefings and away-days to bring everyone up-to-date with the big issues affecting the council and its local area, or joint events where officers and councillors work together to formulate strategy and build good working relationships.

Accessing information

Most of the information you need to be effective in your new role as a councillor will be available online. Your council's website and intranet will contain lots of information about the council, the way it works, its services and the local area.

Council papers may be provided electronically and/or in paper form. Many councils have good tele-conference facilities that enable you to attend meetings with residents remotely, or you may be able to join these meetings through video chat or voice call services.

Officers have a duty to ensure that councillors have access to the information they need in order to make well-informed decisions. They may do this by producing factual reports, making presentations or arranging visits – for example, taking members of the planning committee to visit a site that is subject to a planning application. In some councils, the larger political groups may have a political assistant who can carry out research on their behalf.

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Allowances

All councillors are entitled to a basic allowance. Those with additional roles may also receive a special responsibility allowance (SRA) which reflects the level of responsibility and expected time commitment. Allowances are set by the council on the recommendation of an independent remuneration panel. Councils may also cover the cost of childcare or dependent care, along with travel and subsistence.

Allowances are subject to income tax, and it is your responsibility to ensure that you pay the correct amount. Some incidental costs, such as use of a home office and telephone, can be deducted before calculating the tax to be paid.

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Kelly Braund, Labour, London Borough of Merton

I became a councillor in 2017, having run the Merton campaign for Britain Stronger in Europe. I was a committed community organiser and loved nothing better than being on the doorstep talking to residents.

I have made a speech at every council meeting I have attended – and now I even look forward to it. Seeing as I was terrified of public speaking only a few years ago, it shows how becoming a councillor allows you to challenge yourself.

My advice for new councillors is:

- Ask questions. At one of my first scrutiny panels, everyone was using an acronym that I didn't recognise, so I asked. The other members sighed with relief – they didn't knew what it stood for either.
- It's a steep learning curve: take advantage of all the training on offer, take time to meet the officers and find a mentor to show you the ropes.
- Say yes: positions are always coming up on committees, panels and task groups. Your fresh ideas might be exactly what are needed.

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HIGHLIGHTING POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

THE LGA DEVELOPMENT OFFER

Inspiring local communities, making a real difference and changing people's lives to help create a better future for the people and places we represent requires ambitious, bold leadership. Effective political leadership is the building block of a healthy and vibrant democracy.

The LGA's range of political leadership development programmes supports councillors to become more confident, capable and skilled and better prepared to make a difference. There is a programme for everyone, whether you are a brand new councillor or a seasoned veteran at the top of your political career.

As a local politician, finding the time to reflect, build your networks and learn can be tricky. The LGA development programmes provide opportunities to do just that, building the leadership capacity of individuals and the wider sector. For new councillors in particular, our community leadership resources offer includes workbooks, e-learning tools and in-house training to support you in your role as a community leader, facilitator and broker.

The **Focus on Leadership** series provides seminars and workshops to help councillors in their existing roles and as they move towards challenging new leadership positions. These include the **Young Councillor's Weekender**, which helps councillors to build networks with their peers early on in their careers; the BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) programmes; programmes for women councillors; and the **Effective Opposition** programme.

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Themed learning opportunities for portfolio holders or service committee chairs are available in the Leadership Essentials programme, which concentrates on specific portfolio areas (such as planning or adult social care) or a specific theme such as scrutiny or effective community engagement.

Next Generation is a modular development programme which has been developed and designed within party political groups. It offers ambitious and talented councillors an unparalleled opportunity to develop their leadership, with a particular focus on their own party traditions.

For councillors already in leadership positions and looking to stretch their skills further (including group leaders, portfolio holders, portfolio shadows and committee chairs), we provide the highly respected **Leadership Academy**. This modular programme delivers accredited leadership development opportunities all year round.

And for those who have reached their ambition of council leader we offer, by invitation, the **Leaders programme**, aimed at new council leaders in their first term of leadership. Leaders may also choose to be involved in the **Leading Edge** series, which brings together leaders and chief executives to share ideas and look at the current challenges facing local government.

For further information
www.local.gov.uk/councillor-development

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Communications

An essential part of being a good councillor is knowing how and what to communicate with different audiences. The following broad principles can help you.

Listen as well as promote

As an elected representative it is important to let local people know what you have been doing, but it's equally important to listen to people and groups in your area, such as:

- local residents
- fellow councillors and officers
- local MPs
- your political party or group
- local organisations (businesses, voluntary and community sector, partners)
- the media
- community and faith leaders.

Make the most of available help

Most councils have a communications team whose job it is to represent the council from a corporate point of view, reflecting the policy decisions made. The 'code of recommended practice on local authority publicity' states that they are not allowed to write or send out press releases on behalf of individual councillors, but they can still help you to promote council work you have been involved with. If you think you have an item of interest to your residents or the media, your communications team can advise you on how best to promote it.

Find out what methods of communication are available to you and who their audience is (for example council and party websites, newsletters and magazines, e-newsletters, social media channels and events).

Meet people where they are – online and offline

Over the last decade, there has been a dramatic shift in how people get their information and how communities come together on different issues. Whereas previously a story in the local media might have been the way to raise awareness (and still might be), depending on the audience you are speaking to, you might find that a Facebook group, social media campaign or organising a local forum will be more effective. You need to think about who you are trying to reach, then use the channels that audience uses. Your communications team might have this information through resident surveys.

Good communications need not cost a lot, sometimes just the price of a coffee. You can:

- visit local meeting places – cafes, shops and markets
- write newsletters (paper and/or email)
- run events or meetings
- hold surgeries, either in person or online, providing opportunities for local people to ask questions or raise concerns
- use social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and YouTube (make sure your content is accurate,

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informative, balanced and objective – if in any doubt then check your council's social media policy)

- set up a basic website, blog or vlog.

Using social media

Councillors, officers and the council itself will use social media in distinct ways. However, there is a set of universal principles that are useful to keep in mind.

- **Be strategic** – plan ahead: who do you want to engage with, why and how? What do you want to achieve?
- **Be human**: be approachable in your language and tone, behave online as you would in person.
- **Be engaging**: respond to questions and join in when you can move the conversation on or help.
- **Be professional**: remember that you represent your council, so be aware of how your public voice comes across.
- **Share and attribute**: you can share what others have posted but it is polite to acknowledge and attribute where this has come from.
- **Go to where your audience is**: if the people you want to connect with are on a particular platform, forum or group, join it.
- **Content is king**: by creating sharable and engaging content you can contribute to the conversation and be heard.
- **Be authentic**: don't pretend to be something you are not.
- **The internet is forever:** remember that what you post now could be found in years to come.

Develop a positive relationship with the local media

Local journalists are always looking for good stories. By building and maintaining a positive relationship with reporters in your area, you can establish yourself as a valuable and credible contact for news and comment.

Journalists you have built up trust with may call you looking for tip-offs. Think about the stories you can offer – even if they are not necessarily council-related. If you have a story of interest, don't assume that issuing a press release will automatically do the job. Get to know local media deadlines and give reporters as much notice as possible.

Present a story

The best news stories are those that tell the TRUTH: topical, relevant, unusual, trouble or human.

Remember that your greatest strength with the media is as a community leader. A local reporter may not be interested in a political press release, but they will take notice if you are campaigning on behalf of your residents on high-profile local issues.

Know your residents, relate to their concerns, understand their ambitions and be their champion. Work with community groups – often they will be involved in campaigns of interest to the media that can help to boost your profile. And think pictures: if a story has an obvious visual angle involving local people, it is far more likely to be covered.

If you want to know more about best practice in communications, visit www.local.gov.uk/comms-hub

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- **#FutureComms** pulls together fresh thinking from leading figures in the communications industry, along with case studies highlighting best practice across local government: www.local.gov.uk/future-comms
- Our digital communications resource shares guidance on social media and how best to communicate with residents via email: www.local.gov.uk/digital-communications
- You will find information and tools to help you build a stronger dialogue with local residents on our resident communications page: www.local.gov.uk/resident-communications

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Philippa Hart, Liberal Democrat, South Cambridgeshire District Council

I grew up in my ward and love representing its residents. Forty per cent of my council time is spent dealing with casework, often liaising with officers to ask them to assist with a particular matter. Twenty per cent is spent keeping residents informed: I write reports for meetings and magazines and, with fellow Lib Dem councillors, a monthly email newsletter.

The other 40 per cent of my time goes on being on the scrutiny and planning committees and attending monthly full council meetings.

My advice for new councillors is:

- For at least six months you will feel like you don't know anything. Democratic services were a lifeline during that time.
- Some councillors schedule meetings at school pick-up or evening meal times. Ask for meetings to be held at family-friendly times so that candidates from a wider age range can consider becoming a councillor.
- Face and name recall are very useful. The people you meet will remember your name, so it's nice to repay the compliment by remembering who they are.

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Access to information

Freedom of information

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives people rights of access to the information held by councils and other public bodies. The legislation aims to give people a better understanding of how organisations make decisions, carry out their duties and spend public money. The Act created two principal obligations for councils:

1. All councils must adopt and maintain a publication scheme setting out details of information they will routinely make available, how the information can be obtained and whether there is a charge for it.
2. All councils must comply with requests made under the Act for information they hold (unless an exemption from disclosure applies). Requests for information should be responded to as quickly as possible, and within 20 working days, except in some limited circumstances.

As a councillor, the decisions you make and the actions you take are all subject to public scrutiny. Your allowance, along with any expenses that you claim, will be published on the council's website.

Protecting data

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a Europe-wide law which replaced the Data Protection Act 1998 in the UK, and was enacted in the Data Protection Act 2018, with some additional provisions. The Government has indicated that these provisions and the GDPR will continue to apply after the UK exits the EU.

The GDPR sets out requirements for how organisations must handle personal data. In addition to other changes, it enhances the rights of people whose data is held (known as 'data subjects' under the Data Protection Act 1998) and gives them more control over what happens to their data.

The new Act contains six data protection principles which state that personal information should be:

- processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner
- collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and not further processed in a manner that is incompatible with those purposes
- adequate, relevant, and limited to what is necessary
- accurate and, where necessary, kept up-to-date
- retained only for as long as necessary
- processed in an appropriate manner to maintain security.

Councillors will continue to have data protection responsibilities for the personal information they process, although they are no longer required to pay a fee to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). This means you are responsible for ensuring all personal data is handled in a way which complies with the requirements of the GDPR.

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Detail on how these legislative changes affect councillors can be found on the ICO website (www.ico.org.uk/for-organisations/political). There is also helpful guidance on the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act, including how they work together. The ICO also has a telephone helpdesk.

Better use of data in local government

Data is increasingly being recognised as important in the design, delivery and transformation of local public services. It can be used to improve outcomes and drive efficiencies, which is particularly valuable within current financial constraints. The LGA delivers a programme of work to help councillors and councils get a better understanding of the value of data in public services and to support them in using it. This work aims to encourage councils to open up, share and better use data to:

- design services around user needs
- drive efficiencies within services and across the council
- support public sector transformation and digitisation
- engage and empower citizens within their communities
- be transparent and publicly accountable.

In 2019/20, initiatives are being developed to:

- brief, debate and instruct councillors to remain on top of the extraordinary developments in IT, digital communications and data practices in recent years
- develop projects, products and services to encourage closer working between local service delivery organisations by pooling learning, expertise and resources
- facilitate capabilities to allow councils and fire authorities to self-assess their data practices, then suggest options for improvement 'next steps'
- continue to maintain and promote the use of local government's information-sharing standards and publishing practices, to remain compliant with the expectations of the transparency agenda and national data practices
- represent local government interests in the areas of transparency, open data publishing and consistency of data quality
- commission initiatives to demonstrate the benefit of sector-wide data standards.

Open data

Since 2010 there has been a strong emphasis on transparency in local government, with an expectation by the public of more information being shared openly. Some data is mandated to be shared in the 'Transparency code', and the LGA offers guidance for councillors and officers on this: http://transparency.opendata.esd.org.uk

Publishing data openly, and sharing it within and between local service providers, can create opportunities for efficiency savings and organisational innovation. The LGA leads on a range of projects and support services to encourage sector-led learning and improvement in all aspects of data standards, governance and information best practice.

A series of online eLearning modules has been developed to encourage

local government to support greater transparency and better use of its data. There are six modules: the first three are for information officers and focus on data standards and open publishing; the second three are for council officers and councillors, and outline practical examples and case studies for promoting better use and re-use of data.

The eLearning modules can be found at http://lga.learndata.info

Using data

Together with local government, the LGA has assembled a range of case studies, guidance, tools, training and other resources in one place, to help councils improve outcomes for communities by being more efficient and the better use of data. These resources are gathered in a larger 'improvement hub', which was made available for councils to test in April, for launch in July. See page 60.

A strategy is currently being produced for the open publishing of information about services delivered locally by councils, and their partners in the private and voluntary sectors, to a consistent data standard. This will support easier discovery and encourage innovation through emerging 'apps' to identify appropriate services matched to individuals' specific needs, eligibility and location. Pilot trials are planned during 2019 to apply this strategy to tackle the challenge of loneliness.

There will also be continued support for local government's response to the requirements of data protection standards in the GDPR, via an online knowledge-sharing portal and services such as the powers and duties tool, to help explain the legislative framework.

The LG Inform service, now entering its 10th year, brings together a range of key performance data for councils in an online tool. It presents the latest metrics, measures and context about local places and organisations, allowing reports and comparisons to be made. It includes data and statistics drawn from education, health, democracy, housing, environment and waste management, safety, council assets, facilities and population demographics. www.lginform.local.gov.uk

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor James Hill, Conservative, Northampton Borough Council

I became a councillor in 2015. It came somewhat out of blue, I wasn't expecting to be elected. I stood because I felt it was important to have younger people on the council to reflect the electorate.

The chance to make a small but important difference in people's lives is very satisfying. I am the Assistant Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning, a role which is essentially about the future regeneration of the town, which is really exciting.

My advice for new councillors is:

- The first six months are a whirlwind – it takes time to find your feet and learn how the council works, but don't worry, every new councillor feels like this.
- Involve your family and friends. As a married father of four I involve my family wherever possible. This might include bringing them to community activities such as litter picks and fun days.
- Use various ways to engage with residents: as well as social media I run surgeries, use email and am always available on the phone.

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Local government finance

The local government finance system is complex and has evolved over many years, so it has a reputation for being difficult to understand. Part of your role as a councillor will be to debate and agree your council's budget, so it is important to know the basics.

Local authority spending in England falls into three main categories:

- spending on capital projects such as roads or school buildings (capital expenditure results in the creation, acquisition or enhancement of an asset)
- revenue spending on council housing
- revenue spending on all other areas (mainly pay and the other costs of running services). The following sections cover the funding and setting of this part of councils' budgets.

Generally speaking, councils cannot use capital resources to fund their revenue expenses without specific government authorisation. For instance, staff salaries cannot generally be paid using the proceeds from the sale of a building or by borrowing.

An exception to this is the 'flexible use of capital receipts', introduced from 2016/17 and now extended until 2021/22, under which councils may treat certain revenue expenditure designed to 'generate ongoing revenue savings' as capital expenditure, provided it is then funded from capital receipts that were received in the same period.

Councils find out their individual revenue funding figures for the next financial year in December (excluding housing) through the provisional local government finance settlement. Once it is approved by Parliament, usually in February, councils know how much they will get from central government.

They then estimate the total business rates they will collect and be able to retain, look at how much they will spend in the coming year, and calculate the amount of council tax revenue needed to meet the shortfall between their spending needs and expected income from other sources. The limits set by government on council tax increases mean that, in practice, this process can work in reverse. For example, a council might instead start by considering how much it can raise from council tax and will receive from other income streams, as well as government grant, then calculate how much it can afford to spend on services as a result.

In 2015, the Government announced a four-year settlement for the financial years 2016/17 to 2019/20. Councils were invited to sign up to an 'offer' covering the final three years of the period, and 97 per cent of councils signed up. The figures for 2019/20 were confirmed by Parliament in February 2019.

Allocations for 2020/21 and subsequent years are expected in late 2019, following the conclusion of the Government's work on further business rates retention, review of relative needs and resources and the Spending Review (which is the process by which the UK government sets its high-level

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spending plans, at departmental level, for a number of future years).

Setting council tax

Dividing the council tax requirement by the 'council tax base' (roughly speaking, the number of Band D-equivalent domestic properties in the area), will give the council tax that will be charged for a band D property. The rates for other bands are a fixed ratio of the band D charge, with Band H twice the level of Band D and three times the level of Band A.

Currently, increases to the council tax level are effectively limited. Councils must hold a local referendum if they want to raise council tax above a certain percentage threshold decided by central government. The referendum result is binding, so they must have a contingency plan in place, with a rise below the threshold, in case of a 'no' vote.

For 2019/20, the general referendum limit for single-tier and county councils was three per cent – so they could raise council tax by 2.99 per cent before triggering a referendum. Northamptonshire County Council was an exception, with a general referendum limit of five per cent. District councils could raise council tax by whichever was larger of £5 or three per cent per band D property per year.

Since 2016/17, single-tier authorities and county councils can raise a 'social care precept' in addition to the general referendum limit. In 2019/20 the adult social care precept limit was two per cent (although the total increase over the three years up to and including 2019/20 should not have exceeded six per cent).

Business rates

Business rates are a tax levied on non-residential properties. They are calculated by taking the 'rateable value' (the estimated rental market value of the property) and multiplying it by a government-controlled multiplier.

Until 2013, business rates collected by councils were paid into a central pot to be redistributed as grant funding ('formula grant'). Since then, councils have been able to retain a portion of business rates raised locally – the 'local share'. Government decides what share of business rates can be kept by councils (currently 50 per cent).

When introducing 50 per cent business rates retention in 2013, the Government put in place a system so that councils with relatively high needs, but relatively low income from business rates, would receive a 'top-up'. Equally, councils where the relative income from business rates was deemed to be greater than their relative need pay a 'tariff' to government.

These top-ups and tariffs rise in line with the change in the business rates multiplier each year. Fifty per cent of any extra income due to growth in the 'rateable value' is kept in the local area, subject to a levy on growth, and there is a safety net to protect councils from losses in business rate income below a certain level. Adjustments were made to tariffs and top-ups when there was a business rate revaluation (a revaluation of non-domestic properties) in 2017, to ensure no council was better or worse off as a result.

This means that a council receives more income from business rates

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if it experiences growth in its local business rates base (the total rateable value) and loses income if it experiences a reduction, although protected by a safety net. The Government's aim is to incentivise councils to promote local economic growth by rewarding them for every new business they help to put on the map.

From 2020/21, the Government intends to allow local government as a whole to keep 75 per cent of all of the business rates it collects (although this is subject to Spending Review decisions). Under these plans, councils will no longer receive revenue support grant. At the same time there will be a reset of the starting amount of business rates each council is allowed to keep.

This will be informed by the Government's review of relative needs and resources (known as the 'fair funding review') currently underway, which is looking at how relative council spending needs are measured, how resources such as council tax are taken into account, and the rules governing transitioning from the current pattern of funding distribution to the one implied by the results of the review.

Five areas (Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, West Midlands, Cornwall and the West of England) have been piloting 100 per cent business rates retention since 2017. In 2019/20, there were 16 further 75-per-cent retention pilots.

Budgets

Revenue and capital budgets cover all the costs of the council – employees, services, buildings and so on. They represent the fundamental tools that councillors use to make their policies and strategies come alive. The budget process enables councillors to:

- review spending priorities
- monitor actual spending
- control spending by service departments and budget holders
- enable redirection of resources
- identify gaps in provision
- plan ahead.

Generally, the ruling group or coalition will present a set of budget proposals to full council following consultation

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Anna Charles-Jones, Independent, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

I have lived in Heald Green for more than 10 years, becoming increasingly involved in the local community. It is the only ward we know of with a 90-year unbroken record of all councillors being independent 'Ratepayers Association' councillors. This was a fantastic opportunity for someone like me, who is interested in politics but could never conform to a party-political whip.

My ward borders two other councils on the edge of Greater Manchester, which brings unique challenges, particularly around where to put new housing.

My advice for new councillors is:

- Don't be afraid to go straight to the top: I have had queries resolved much more quickly by approaching senior officers, rather than trying to work up through the ranks.
- Don't be afraid to take a day off. Being a councillor is a 24/7 role which can take over your life if you allow it to.
- Be yourself. Residents and officers appreciate a councillor who is honest, genuine and has a well-reasoned opinion, even if it differs from their own.

with officers and local residents. This tends to use the previous year's budget as the starting point, with adjustments made to reflect changing service priorities, statutory duties and the need to make savings. The budget will also include reserves and contingencies to manage risk. All councillors have a critical role to play in monitoring budgets and ensuring money is spent on delivering the council's policies and strategies.

The budget year runs from April to March. The cycle is largely driven by the need to set council tax, which must be done annually. As well as an annual budget, the council will have medium-term financial plans which look three to five years ahead.

The four main stages of the budgeting process councillors should think about are:

1. **Planning and setting the budget**: what does the council want to achieve?
2. **Scrutinising the proposed budget**: does it comply with the council's policies?
3. **Monitoring the budget throughout the year**: is there an over- or under-spend?
4. **Reviewing the budget**: did the allocated budgets achieve the desired type and level of service?

Income and expenditure

Revenue and capital income comes from a range of sources. Most revenue income comes from:

- business rates, the 'local share' and the net effect of any tariff or top-up
- revenue support grant, which is not ring-fenced (so can be spent on any lawful purpose)
- specific government grants, some of which are ring-fenced for specific services
- council tax.

Income from fees and charges to residents and service users (such as planning fees, social care contributions, commercial waste, parking and leisure) is a relatively small proportion of council income. Councils also receive funding, through the New Homes Bonus, for any increase in the number of domestic properties in their area over a threshold of 0.4 per cent.

Holding the council to account

Overview and scrutiny

Overview and scrutiny lies at the heart of local accountability. It is one of the principal democratic means, between elections, of ensuring that decisions made by the council and its partners are held to account. In many councils, scrutiny has built up a reputation as a strong voice in the policy development process, and a place where ideas for improvement can be debated and evaluated.

Depending on the type of council (districts and counties have slightly different powers), overview and scrutiny has some specific statutory roles – such as the scrutiny of health bodies and other partner organisations. The legislation setting up scrutiny arrangements makes it clear that scrutiny committees can look at any issue which affects the area

or the area's inhabitants. Scrutiny's principal powers, however, relate to councils.

Scrutiny committees can require that cabinet members and council officers attend meetings; that information held by the council be provided to it; and that the cabinet provides responses to its recommendations. In addition, committee members have enhanced rights to access information held by the council.

Many councils now carry out the bulk of their detailed scrutiny work in informal time-limited task groups. These can carry out investigations into any issue, collecting evidence from a wide range of sources. They make recommendations which, through a scrutiny committee, are sent to the council's executive (or cabinet) to be either accepted or rejected.

Combined authorities must have an overview and scrutiny committee (although this does not replace those of the individual councils). Councils that have opted for a committee system are not required to have an overview and scrutiny committee; those with a cabinet system or an elected mayor must have at least one.

Scrutiny has no formal powers to stop the cabinet from doing something (or to make it do something), but it is far from toothless. If members work to build positive relationships with the executive/cabinet and external partners, and make recommendations clearly based on evidence, it can act as a constructive, critical friend and can have significant influence over policy.

This is best achieved by scrutiny carrying out timely, relevant work that focuses on tangible outcomes for local people, and producing meaningful and realistic recommendations. The executive has a responsibility to ensure that scrutiny is properly resourced and supported and that they engage with it openly and honestly.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) promotes the value of scrutiny and accountability in public services. It is part-funded with an LGA grant specifically to provide advice and guidance to councillors and officers.

Health scrutiny

County and unitary councils have specific responsibility for holding the health service to account when local health bodies are planning 'substantial variations' to services. Health scrutiny is one of the most important ways that councils can respond to the concerns of local residents about health and wellbeing. It enables councillors to scrutinise how local health needs are being addressed, how health services are run and how they can be improved.

It can be a challenging task, as health scrutiny can play a critical part in identifying failures and poor care. Councils need to recognise its important role – not only in holding acute trusts and other health bodies to account, but in bringing about change to improve health and reduce health inequalities.

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The Ombudsmen

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) investigates complaints from the public about councils and some other bodies, including registered adult social care providers, providing public services in England. The LGSCO investigates allegations of maladministration that have caused injustice to the complainant. Most council services can be investigated, including some areas of housing, planning, education, social services, council tax, housing benefit and highways. Similar duties are carried out by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

The LGSCO service is provided free-of-charge to the complainant. By law, councils or providers should have an opportunity to resolve complaints before they are referred to the ombudsman, and a complaint will not be considered unless this has happened. Complaints will only be considered if someone has suffered a significant personal injustice and the council or provider has not taken, or is unwilling to take, satisfactory action to resolve it.

If the LGSCO finds that the council or provider acted 'with fault' which caused the person an injustice, it will recommend a remedy to put things right. This can be a requirement to make a decision, reconsider a decision, improve procedures or make a payment. Where appropriate, it also recommends action to avoid similar issues affecting other people, such as reviewing practice and procedure, and can recommend remedies for other persons affected by the same fault.

Although it can hear complaints of maladministration stemming from the actions of individual councillors and council employees, the service can only seek to remedy the injustice and cannot discipline the employee(s) responsible. Unless they are also members of a professional body, such as the Law Society, individual officers can only be disciplined by their employer.

The LGSCO also carries out joint investigations with the other ombudsmen. For example, a complaint about a council's social services department and the NHS would be jointly investigated with the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (see below), with the LGSCO managing the joint investigation.

For more information, visit www.lgo.org.uk

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) was set up to provide an independent service to handle unresolved complaints relating to the NHS in England and UK government departments. Its findings are shared with Parliament to help it scrutinise the organisations being investigated, and are shared more widely to help drive improvements in public services. As a body, the PHSO is accountable to Parliament and is scrutinised by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, which is made up of MPs.

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The PHSO combines the two statutory roles of parliamentary commissioner for administration (the Parliamentary Ombudsman) and the health service commissioner for England (Health Service Ombudsman). It is not a part of government or the NHS. Its role is to investigate unresolved complaints, unfair treatment and poor service in relation to government departments, other public organisations and NHS-funded healthcare services. Complaints about a government department or service must be referred by an MP.

For more information, visit www.ombudsman.org.uk

Housing Ombudsman Service

The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) is an executive non-departmental public body which requires social landlords (such as housing associations and councils) to be members of an approved scheme. Private landlords may also join the scheme on a voluntary basis.

The HOS investigates complaints and resolves disputes involving members of the scheme. Tenants of housing associations, local authorities and arms-length management organisations have the right to ask for their complaint to be considered by a 'designated person' once it has been through their landlord's complaints procedure. As a councillor, you may be asked to be a designated person. You can try and resolve the complaint yourself or refer it straight to the HOS.

For more information, visit www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Children's services, education and training

Safeguarding and looked-after children

Local government plays a crucial statutory role in safeguarding children. The director of children's services and the portfolio holder for children are ultimately accountable on behalf of the whole community and partner agencies, so everyone must play their part, along with the wider community.

Councils can use their links with police, schools, health professionals, community groups and faith groups to highlight the signs and ensure people know where to turn if they have concerns. High-profile cases in recent years have led to a national focus on child sexual exploitation, and each local area is expected to raise awareness and have multi-agency planning in place to respond to local issues.

Councils have a duty to ensure there is a sufficient supply of appropriate high-quality placements for all children in care, and all councillors have a duty as a 'corporate parent' for looked-after children and care leavers. In practical terms, this means councillors should ensure their council is recruiting enough foster carers; providing appropriate foster care placements and high-quality residential care homes; and that there are efficient plans for adoption, adopter recruitment or special guardianship, where appropriate. Support for children in care and care leavers is also key.

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The LGA produces resource packs for councillors to support the scrutiny and development of local children's services. Resource packs are currently available on the LGA website publications page looking at support for care leavers, the corporate parenting duty, youth justice, achieving permanence, and early education and childcare.

Making sure all children and young people can have the bright future they deserve is a key ambition of every council, but children's services are under increasing pressure. In recent years, demand for these services has increased significantly.

The number of children subject to child protection enquiries has increased from 76,800 in 2007/08 to 198,090 in 2017/18, a 158 per cent increase in just 10 years. Over the same period, the number of children on child protection plans increased by almost 25,000. Although councils are finding innovative solutions, a £3.1 billion funding gap for children's services is expected by 2025.

Through our '**Bright Futures**' campaign, the LGA is pushing for urgent action to be taken to reduce the financial pressures, along with for a renewed focus on investing in early intervention.

Find out more
www.local.gov.uk/ bright-futures

Education

Despite considerable changes in national education policy over recent years, councils still retain the bulk of their statutory education duties. They have a key role as champions of educational excellence for all children and young people.

Significant budget cuts and the increasing number of academies and free schools mean the council role in school improvement is changing. Schools are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their own improvement and for helping other schools. Different models are developing across the country, with councils facilitating and supporting school-to-school improvement partnerships. Examples of differing approaches to school improvement taken by councils are set out in research commissioned by the LGA: www.local.gov.uk/enabling-school-improvement

Councils must ensure there are enough good-quality school places locally but they do not have the power to open new schools, which must be opened as free schools. Many areas

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are facing a large rise in demand for school places.

Councils still have a significant role in ensuring fair school admissions and have duties in relation to home-to-school transport for some children and young people. They continue to have a role in allocating school funding, despite the introduction of a national funding formula. The Department for Education will calculate funding for each council area, but councils themselves will continue to consult local schools, through the schools forum, to determine a locally agreed formula.

Children and young people with additional needs

Councils have a responsibility to provide support to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), working with schools, colleges and health services. Support for children and young people with SEND, across all settings, should be focussed on helping them to achieve the best educational and other outcomes, preparing them for adulthood.

The Children and Families Act 2014 changed the legal framework in which statutory agencies must work to support children and young people with SEND from birth up to the age of 25. These reforms introduced 'education, health and care plans' (EHCPs), replacing statements of special educational needs, along with duties on local statutory partners to work together to design and deliver a more coordinated system of support for children, young people and their families.

Demand for support for children with SEND has increased in recent years, with a 35 per cent rise in the number of EHCPs from 2014-18. This has not been matched by an increase in funding, with councils facing a funding gap of £472 million in 2018/19.

Careers advice and guidance

Since 2013, councils no longer have a statutory duty to provide independent and impartial careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG). Schools and colleges have a statutory duty to secure independent careers guidance for all registered pupils in years 9-13 on the full range of education and training options, including apprenticeships and the new T-levels. Despite this shift in policy, there is a great deal of innovative work taking place in councils to coordinate and deliver CEIAG schemes. This subject is explored in the LGA position paper 'Principles underpinning good careers advice and guidance' www.local.gov.uk/lga-position-paper-principles-underpinning-good-careers-advice-and-guidance

In 2018, 20 new careers hubs were announced. Each will consist of up to 40 local schools and colleges, working together with universities, training providers, employers and careers professionals to improve careers education for young people in the region. This initiative is part of the Government's careers strategy. The aim is to have at least one hub in every region of England outside of London, working with 710 schools and colleges.

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Raising the participation age

Young people must be engaged in education or training up to the age of 18. Councils have a statutory duty to support them – including re-engaging those who have left (or are on the verge of leaving) education and training, and developing a local strategy that provides young people with choice and sufficient places. This strategy should include support for specific groups of young people including those with SEND, young offenders and children in care.

The 'September guarantee' entitles all 16 and 17-year-olds to an offer of a suitable place in education or training. It helps councils fulfil their duty to provide education and training to young people by working with partners (schools and colleges) to agree the process for their particular areas.

Councils also have a responsibility to track and record young people's progression in learning and training and to identify numbers of 'NEET' young people (not in education, employment or training), or those where this information is unknown. This tracking can help councils to identify local need.

Apprenticeships

The Government is committed to increasing the quantity and quality of apprenticeships in England to meet economic demand and plug the skills gaps. In 2015 it set an ambitious target of three million starts over five years, and it has been working towards this with public and private sector employers. Apprenticeships provide a good opportunity for councils to improve the skills base of their employees and ensure that they are able to meet current and future challenges.

All in-scope public sector employers, including councils, are required to increase the number of apprentices in their workforce. In-scope public sector bodies with 250 or more employees are set an annual target to employ an average of at least 2.3 per cent of their headcount as new apprenticeship starts over the four-year period from April 2017.

Some employers, including most councils, are now required to contribute to the Apprenticeship Levy. The levy is charged at a rate of 0.5 per cent of an employer's annual pay bill. All councils with an annual pay bill of £3 million or more are in scope to pay the levy.

Adult social care and health

Adult social care

Adult social care and support is a vital service in its own right. It helps people with care and support needs to live the life they want to live. It helps strengthen our communities, sustains our NHS and provides essential economic value to our country.

The system operates under the legal framework set out by the Care Act 2014. The Act is built on the principle of promoting individual wellbeing, defined in broad terms to include physical, mental, social, economic or emotional wellbeing. It embeds the concept of personalisation and gives individuals more control over their care

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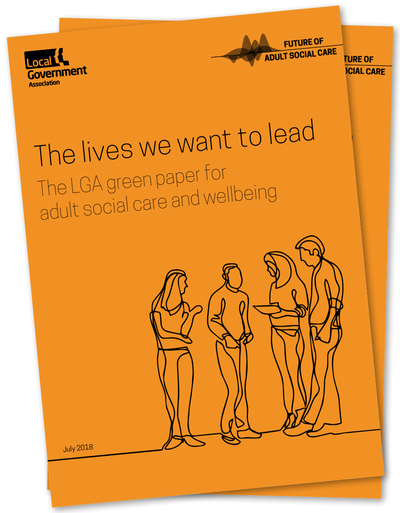
and support. The Care Act covers issues including:

- general responsibilities of local authorities (wellbeing, prevention, integration, information and advice)
- the individual's journey through the system (assessment, national eligibility, charging, care planning)
- provider failure and market oversight
- transition to adult services
- safeguarding adults at risk of abuse or neglect.

All councils in England with adult social services responsibilities must be consistent in their assessment of people's needs and must follow a national minimum threshold of eligibility for care and support. Councils also have a duty to promote a diverse and efficient provider market, so that a range of services are available locally to meet people's needs.

In recent years, various commissions and inquiries have made the case for reforming the way that adult social care is funded. This includes the LGA's own Green Paper for adult social care and wellbeing, 'The lives we want to lead' (published in July 2018) and the follow-up report setting out key findings and implications from the consultation, along with a series of recommendations to Government. The LGA developed its Green Paper because the Government's own, originally planned for 2018, has been continually delayed.

More information on the Green Paper can be found on our website www.local.gov.uk/lives-we-want-lead-lga-green-paper-adult-social-care



Funding for adult social care and support is a key issue for councils. The LGA has been vocal in highlighting the significant pressures on adult social care and the consequences of underfunding, which include the risk of more providers leaving the publicly-funded market or ceasing to trade; increased unmet and under-met need; further pressure on the care workforce and unpaid carers; and a reduced ability of social care to help deal with pressures facing the NHS.

The LGA has long argued for government funding to make the system more sustainable. In 2017, the Chancellor announced that councils would receive £2 billion of new Improved Better Care Fund funding over the next three years, including £1 billion in 2017/18. While this was good news, the challenge of securing the short, medium and long-term sustainability of adult social care remains.

The LGA estimates that adult social care faces a funding gap of £3.56 billion by 2025. This includes £2.12 billion of 'core pressures' (such as inflation and demography) and an immediate and annually recurring

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£1.44 billion pressure to stabilise the provider market. The funding gap does not include other known pressures, such as the cost of funding historic liabilities and current and future costs associated with 'sleep in' payments for care workers.

Safeguarding adults

All councillors share a responsibility in relation to keeping people safe. Councillors may identify safeguarding concerns through their work with local residents which they need to raise. They can also ask questions of the council, and other organisations, about the safety and quality of services and the focus on achieving the best outcomes for vulnerable people.

Councillors will want to ensure that local people achieve the best possible outcomes across health and social care. People with learning disabilities, autism, mental health needs, dementia, physical disabilities and others, such as people experiencing loneliness or isolation, may rely on their council for information, advice, support and services.

Care and health integration

The Care Act places a duty on councils to promote integration. However, integration is not an end in itself – it is a means of improving health and wellbeing outcomes by joining up services around the individual and making the best use of public resources. The LGA is committed to supporting councils and their health partners to adopt a place-based and person-centred approach to improving health and wellbeing outcomes, and integrating care and support to achieve this end.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 requires all unitary and county councils to:

- set up health and wellbeing boards
- publish joint strategic needs assessments and joint health and wellbeing strategies
- promote integration of health, social care and other services to improve health outcomes
- procure local Healthwatch (a patient and public involvement body).

Health and wellbeing boards bring together the political, professional, clinical and community leadership in an area to identify key health challenges, agree priorities and drive integrated activity to improve health outcomes for local people. They are statutory committees of the council but are unlike any other council committee. They include, as a minimum, at least one councillor, the directors of adult social care, children's services and public health, and representatives from local clinical commissioning groups and local Healthwatch, all of whom are equal partners.

All councillors have an important role in identifying health and wellbeing priorities for their communities. Some will occupy key positions on health and wellbeing boards. Others will take part in health overview and scrutiny, be non-executive directors on the boards of mental health, community and acute trusts, or be involved in other ways.

In 2018, the LGA published 'Shifting the centre of gravity: making place-based, person-centred health and care a reality' with the NHS Confederation, NHS Clinical Commissioners, NHS Providers, the Association of

Directors of Public Health and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), setting out our refreshed system-wide vision for a fully integrated health and care system. It re-stated our commitment to transforming health, care and wellbeing services to improve people's health and care outcomes.

Care and health improvement

The LGA represents its members' interests, including around social care commissioning and provision, and is in a unique position to bridge the interface between national policy and local implementation.

Through its Care and Health Improvement Programme, the LGA is working with ADASS, NHS Clinical Commissioners, NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care on a range of social care and health integration improvement initiatives, taking a sector-led improvement approach. This includes resources and events for councillors.

The priorities for 2019/20 are:

- resilience in adult social care
- effective care and health systems
- fulfilling our role with NHS England in the Transforming Care programme.

The Better Care Fund

The Better Care Fund (BCF), introduced in 2015, created a local single pooled budget to incentivise the NHS and local government to shift resources into social care and community services for the benefit of people, communities and health and care systems. In some areas it has provided an impetus to joint working, and in many areas it has supported existing joint work. However, the way in which the fund was set up means the impact has been less positive in some places.

In 2017, the Chancellor announced the £2 billion Improved Better Care Fund to go directly to councils in order to meet adult social care needs, reduce pressure on the NHS and ensure that the local social care provider market is supported.

However, this funding comes with greater central influence and direction over how local areas spend it. In the LGA's view, the imposition of national targets for reducing delayed transfers of care, in particular delayed transfers that are attributable to adult social care, is not helpful and undermines the role of local health and care leaders to agree their own priorities for the BCF.

The future of the BCF beyond 2019/20 is currently being reviewed. The LGA will continue to work with NHS England and government departments to ensure that the BCF returns to its original objectives: to fund adult care and support and to provide joined-up, community-based services to improve health, wellbeing and independence, thereby reducing pressure on acute health services.

The NHS long-term plan

In January 2019, the Government published the 'NHS long-term plan', which provides a comprehensive action plan and set of national priorities for how the NHS will use the additional 3.4 per cent annual increase in funding for the next five years.

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The LGA has produced a briefing which looks at the key proposals of the long-term plan, which can be found at www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/nhs-long-term-plan

Adult mental health

Councils have statutory and non-statutory duties that form an integral part of mental health care and support. They have a statutory responsibility to provide approved mental health professionals (AMHPs) and a number of responsibilities under other legislation, such as the Care Act, to promote health and wellbeing, including mental health.

In most cases, when people are treated in a hospital or mental health facility, they have agreed or volunteered to be there. However, there are situations where a person can be detained ('sectioned') and treated without their agreement under the Mental Health Act 1983. This Act covers the assessment, treatment and rights of people with a mental health disorder and was amended by the Mental Health Act 2007. The Act has recently been reviewed and a number of recommendations made, which are currently being considered by the Government with a view to introducing new legislation.

Councils make a significant contribution to the mental wellbeing of their local communities and preventing people from reaching a crisis point. The LGA supports a re-focus in mental health policy away from medicalisation and mental ill-health to prevention, early intervention and mental wellness. Our report 'Being mindful' explored how councils influence people's mental wellbeing and how council services, from social care to parks, education and housing, help to make up the fabric of mental health support for our communities.

It is important to recognise the full spectrum of mental health services, from prevention and mental wellbeing to crisis intervention, treatment and recovery, designed around the needs of the person, their family and carers. It is also important to build upon the benefits of connectivity between the NHS, local government and other partners in mental health prevention and recovery, such as integrated NHS/local government community mental health teams.

For many years, mental health services at all levels have been reduced, despite rising demand. The LGA fully supports the aim of parity of esteem between mental and physical health. We are raising awareness of local government's role in promoting good mental health through:

- system-wide leadership through health and wellbeing boards
- public health responsibilities that promote mental wellbeing and prevent poor mental health, throughout the life course
- statutory duties and powers related to mental health for children, young people and adults
- broader statutory duties related to children and young people, particularly in education, for children with SEND and in children's social care
- the overview and scrutiny of mental health provision
- services such as adult social care that support people in vulnerable circumstances and/or at crisis points, and the provision of wider community services.

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We are also highlighting the funding pressures facing local government. For example, whilst the NHS has seen increased spending on mental health of £11.4 billion since 2010, with a further £1 billion promised by 2020/21, the social work element of mental health provision has seen no such investment.

Suicide prevention

Suicide prevention is a public health priority for local government and our partners. Although we are making progress, too many people die by suicide. Nearly every council has a multi-agency suicide prevention plan in place, despite this not being a statutory responsibility. Many also have suicide prevention partnerships which work with public health teams, clinical commissioning groups, primary and secondary care, the voluntary and community sector and people affected by suicide.

Councils' public health remit means they have responsibility for addressing many of the risk factors of suicide, such as alcohol and drug misuse, while their broader responsibilities for housing and local growth have an impact on the wider determinants. They provide and commission mental health services for children, young people and adults, as well as the all-round social care that is needed. It is crucial that councils have the necessary investment in public health, mental health services and social care services, if we are to prevent people from experiencing suicide risk factors.

Loneliness

Loneliness has a major impact on people's lives, relationships and wellbeing, and is a societal issue as well as a serious public health concern. Tackling loneliness is a preventative measure that improves quality of life for individuals and reduces long-term costs for health and social care.

In 2018, the Government published the first loneliness strategy for England. This marks a shift in the way we see and act on loneliness, and sets out dozens of new policy commitments from a range of government departments. It is an important first step which helps lay the foundation for further policy work.

Councils have a unique role to play in supporting people in the community and combating loneliness. This includes:

- a statutory role to provide care, support, information and advice
- a wider leadership role to promote good health and wellbeing, community assets and participation
- commissioning voluntary and community services.

Children's mental health

The UK is seeing an increase in the number of children and young people experiencing mental health disorders, trying to access child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and self-harming. At the moment, just under 40 per cent of young people trying to access CAMHS are unable to, either because they are diagnosed as not unwell enough or because of a lack of capacity. A further third see their mental health deteriorate as they wait for assessment and treatment.

Councils have a role in children's mental health through public health, children's social services and adult social services (for 16 to 25-year-olds), as well as through their roles with

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schools and housing. Some councils jointly or directly commission CAMHS. More than half of incidents of mental ill-health start before the age of 14, and 75 per cent by 24 years of age. If opportunities for early support are missed, councils have responsibilities for supporting individuals managing a lifetime of mental ill-health, as well as their families and carers.

The 2015 report 'Future in mind' set out the structures and funding for improving CAMHS up to the 2020/21 Spending Review. It committed government to an additional £1.4 billion in funding for CAMHS, since increased to £1.7 billion, and established that local transformation plans should be developed with local partners and signed off by health and wellbeing boards. The LGA has been calling for transparency over how this money is invested, and is advocating a strong role for health and wellbeing boards in overseeing children's mental health.

The 2018 children and young people's mental health Green Paper set out the Government's plans for strengthening the link between schools and CAMHS through new mental health support units and in-school approaches. The LGA has welcomed the focus on whole-school approaches, but believes it is important that children and young people not in full-time education, such as those home-schooled or excluded, have access to the same level of support.

The LGA is making the case for the new mental health support units to work with councils, as well as schools, and has raised concerns about the lack of ambition for roll-out, as based on current plans it will be 2039 before all children in the country have access to this additional support.

Children's mental health is part of the LGA's 'Bright Futures' campaign www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures-camhs

Autism

More than one in 100 people in the UK are believed to have autism, a lifelong developmental disability that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others. Subject to assessed needs, councils provide a wide range of care and support to children and adults with autism and their carers.

Local areas must follow statutory duties around transition for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), which will include most young people with autism. Protocols should be in place in every area for the transition of clinical mental health care for children with autism who have been under the care of CAMHS.

The Autism Act 2009 placed two specific duties on government: to produce and regularly review an autism strategy to meet the needs of autistic adults in England, and to produce statutory guidance for councils to implement the strategy locally. The strategy has since been extended to cover children, and is being reviewed by the Government in 2019.

Learning disabilities

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities – for example household tasks, socialising or managing money – which affects someone for their whole life.

Councils have legal duties to assess and meet the care needs of people with learning difficulties. Councils work

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in partnership with the health sector and other partners to ensure people with learning disabilities have the support and services they need in the community. The continued integration of health and adult social care is key to this. With the right level of support, most people with a learning disability can lead independent lives.

Councils are experiencing a growth in demand from adult service users who have a learning disability, or are within the autism spectrum, requiring help and assistance. Most of these new adult service users will have received substantial help from councils as children, prior to their transition to adult services. Managing this growth in demand presents a significant challenge in many councils.

By the time young people transfer to adult services, they and their families may have become used to a particular way of meeting their needs. The approach adopted by children's services does not always coincide with that of adult services. There are other challenges for adult social care when looking to help adults with learning disabilities. The costs of care, especially residential care, are much higher for this group of service users than for people with similar needs from other groups.

The LGA is working with key national organisations to improve care and support for people with learning disabilities and/or autism and mental health problems or behaviour that challenges. The NHS England long-term plan sets out our shared ambitions to reduce the use of specialist inpatient beds, progress further discharges for people who have been in hospital for a long time, and ensure people with a learning disability are able to live fulfilling lives in their local community.

Mental capacity

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 provides a legal framework for acting and making decisions on behalf of adults who lack the capacity to make particular decisions for themselves. The Act allows for those providing care and support to request changes in people's care and support in hospitals, care homes or communities, but these can only be approved if they are in the person's best interests and, ideally, involve the least restriction possible.

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Adam Ellison, Labour, South Tyneside Council

I became a councillor in 2015 at the age of 19, becoming the youngest person ever elected to South Tyneside Council. I am Vice-Chair of the Safeguarding and Education Panel and as such play a role in scrutiny of education and children's services.

My day-to-day activities involve attending council and public meetings, visiting residents and responding to calls and enquiries from the community that I represent. It is a real honour to represent my home ward of Hebburn North.

My advice for new councillors is:

- Try to be organised from the start: it is easy to get lost in emails, letters and information if you don't keep on top of it.
- Go with your own gut. As a new councillor you hear lots of conflicting information from others about the role and what they're doing in their area. It's your own role to shape and embrace.
- You won't always achieve the outcome you would like, but don't be disheartened – there are lots of ways to make an impact.

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Council staff and employers have a duty to ensure they know how to use it so that all those affected can benefit from the protection of rights the Act offers. The current 'Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards' scheme under the Mental Capacity Act is to be replaced by a new scheme, the 'Liberty Protection Safeguards'. Both are statutory safeguards introduced to prevent deprivations of liberty, and both include independent consideration and authorisation.

The LGA has called on the Government to provide a fully-funded scheme, so that councils can work with people and partners to ensure that those who lack capacity remain at the heart of decisions made about their care.

More information, including resources to support implementation and improvement, can be found at www.local.gov.uk/adult-social-care/mental-capacity-act-including-dols

Councils and health

The biggest influences on the health of individuals and populations are the social, economic and environmental conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. Despite concerted action over several decades, health inequalities (the gap between the healthiest and least healthy in society) are widening. This has led to major change in the way service providers work together to identify health priorities and improve outcomes.

An introduction to the health system for councillors can be found at www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-health-system-england

Councils have had responsibility for the delivery of public health services, such as smoking cessation, drug and alcohol treatment and sexual health services, since 2013, along with Public Health England. This transfer of responsibility from the NHS represented a major extension of local government powers and duties, along with an opportunity to change the focus from treating sickness to actively promoting health and wellbeing.

Preventing illness and empowering people to stay well requires action from all sections of the community. The broader determinants of health – people's local environment, housing, transport, employment and social interactions – can be significantly influenced by how councils deliver their core roles and functions. Public health in individual councils is backed by a ring-fenced grant and a specialist public health team. Other services, such as housing, planning, leisure and children's services, can support work around public health issues.

In 2015, responsibility for commissioning the Healthy Child Programme for 0-5 year olds transferred from NHS England to upper-tier and unitary authorities. Unlike the previous public health transfer, only the commissioning transferred and not the workforce. The transfer joined up commissioning for 0-19 year olds (and up to 25 for young people with SEND) and improved continuity of care for children and families. It presented an opportunity for councils to look at integrating these services with children's services, health, education and social care to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

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Councils and the economy

Economic development is not a statutory role for councils but they play a vital role in supporting local economies and driving growth, for example by:

- supporting growth and investment in new and existing businesses, for example through regulatory services
- working alongside business leaders through local enterprise partnerships on developing local industrial strategies
- enhancing the quality of life for their communities and making local areas more attractive to shoppers and business investment
- improving infrastructure, such as better transport or broadband services
- working with colleges and training providers to ensure local people have the skills that they, and local businesses, need.

Local economies do not follow council boundaries – for example, people travel to work in different areas.

Councils play a strategic role in determining economic priorities and working towards economic growth and job creation, and they work closely with others in their sub-region. In many areas, councils are coming together to form combined authorities, which allows them to pool resources around issues such as economic development and transport to support growth across a wider area.

Central government recognises the importance of local or place-based factors such as the availability of skills, local infrastructure and socio-economic issues such as income levels and housing affordability. It is therefore looking to work with councils to improve economic productivity and career opportunities, as set out in the new National Industrial Strategy. Mayoral combined authorities appear to be central government's favoured structure for further devolution of economic-related powers to local areas.

Whether your council is part of a combined authority or not, it will be working with leaders from the private sector and universities as part of a local enterprise partnership (LEP). There are 38 LEPs covering all parts of the country. Their priorities vary depending on local economic circumstances, but they were set up as business-led partnerships between councils and the private sector. LEPs play a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and job creation. They usually receive funding from their constituent councils and from central government, and businesses may offer support 'in kind'.

Local industrial strategies are being led by either mayoral combined authorities or LEPs. Their purpose is to promote the coordination of local economic policy and national funding streams, and establish new ways of working between national and local government and the public and private sectors. The first local industrial strategy was due to be agreed by March 2019, and the aim is to have them agreed with all places in England by early 2020.

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Supporting town centres

At a more local level, many councils are taking the lead in revitalising their town centres. In recent years, town centres have been undergoing change, with many well-known retail brands disappearing from the high street, often leading to empty shop units and job losses. This is to do with a combination of changing shopping habits, the impact of out-of-town shopping and people's growing preference for shopping over the internet.

Many councils are looking at this as an opportunity to repurpose their town centres – bringing a better balance between housing, leisure, public services and cultural hubs, as well as retail. The LGA has a handbook and an online toolkit on town centres designed for councillors and officers.

Employment and skills

At present, a range of different central government departments and their agencies are directly responsible for employment and skills policy, funding and oversight. There is no common plan for how they work with each other, nor a duty to discuss with councils and combined authorities how services will operate in their areas. Local areas, therefore, have little ability to influence their priorities, funding or delivery, and they want more influence and control.

The LGA's **Work Local** campaign is seeking to better integrate these services at a local level. Across a local area, take-up of the Work Local vision could result in 8,500 more people in work and 6,000 increasing their skills each year. For the average combined authority, that would mean a £280 million benefit to the public purse, alongside a £420 million boost to the economy.

For further information on the campaign
www.local.gov.uk/work-local

HOT TOPIC DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

A digital connection is now widely considered 'the fourth utility', in the same league as a water, gas and electricity supply. Councillors are increasingly campaigning to improve the speed and reliability of connection for residents and businesses, whether fixed-line broadband to the home or office or mobile on-the-go coverage.

Councillors also have an important role to play in helping to find the best location for new digital infrastructure. Improving a local area's mobile coverage often requires the building or upgrading of mobile phone masts. Councillors can represent the views of their community to mobile operators, and can help balance the needs of those wanting better coverage with those who might disagree with the placement of a mast. Mobile operators have signed up to a code of practice obligating them to make councillors aware when a new mast is to be erected in their ward. As a local representative, you can request that they liaise with you and your community on the best placement of new mobile infrastructure.

The council-led superfast broadband programme has already enabled 95 per cent of premises in the UK to have superfast speed. On top of this, the Government recently committed to deliver nationwide full-fibre coverage (which can deliver up to 1Gbps of download speed) to all areas by 2033. Until then, for the final five per cent of areas without adequate download speeds, the Government is introducing a 'universal service obligation', so that by 2020 everyone in the UK will have a right to request high-speed broadband of at least 10Mbps download speed. Following lobbying from the LGA, the Government has committed to introduce legislation to ensure all new-build homes are connected to full-fibre connectivity as standard. The LGA is currently producing a councillors' handbook on digital connectivity.

Helping people and places to thrive

Culture, tourism, leisure and sport

Culture, tourism, leisure and sport are among the most used and highly valued council services. Library services alone were visited 225 million times in 2014/15 – more than visits to Premier League football games, the cinema and the top 10 UK tourist attractions combined.

The economic impact of these services is considerable. The creative industries are worth £84 billion a year to the UK economy, while tourism is worth almost £127 billion. Both are among the fastest growing economic sectors – making them relevant to any council considering growing the local economy, including diversifying the high street in response to the loss of retail.

Most of these services are of a non-statutory nature, so there is a lot of variation in the services that councils provide and how they provide them. Exceptions to this are the statutory provision of public libraries by upper-tier and unitary councils and the statutory protection, by planning authorities, of listed buildings and scheduled monuments.

Delivery models are diverse, ranging from direct provision to shared services, trusts, public/private partnerships and community owned or managed facilities. Culture and sports assets such as libraries, museums and leisure centres are increasingly used as gateways to other local services. This reflects the sector's focus on positioning and evidencing the contribution of culture, heritage, tourism and sport to wider community outcomes such as economic growth, health and wellbeing, support for young people and community cohesion.

The LGA works closely with Arts Council England and Sport England to provide support and advice to councils on these services, including leadership training for portfolio holders and fully-funded cultural and library peer challenges.

For more information and best practice www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport

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Supporting low-income households

In 2012, the Coalition Government embarked on a major programme of welfare reform which was intended to simplify the existing system, improve work incentives and reduce national spending on working-age benefits.

Councils have supported households throughout the implementation of these ongoing welfare reforms. They have identified those most at risk of poverty, health inequalities and social exclusion, in order to offer targeted advice and support. A number of national initiatives, most notably the Troubled Families programme, have focused on better integration of services, with an emphasis on prevention, to address multiple disadvantage.

The last decade has seen considerable pressures on many households, particularly those at the lower end of the income spectrum and those facing other barriers to social inclusion and social mobility, such as ill health.

Many parts of the country now have low levels of unemployment. However, low pay, part-time work, poor progression opportunities and the 'gig economy' continue to present real challenges for many working households. Councils, government and key partners are increasingly recognising the need to address in-work poverty by working with employers, education providers and other partners to improve in-work progression. There is an explicit emphasis within Universal Credit implementation on improving employment outcomes and 'making work pay'.

A shortage of social and affordable housing, along with high rental costs in the private rented sector, present real challenges for councils and families across the country. These challenges have become more acute since the Government, in 2016, froze the amount of housing benefit that can be paid in the private rented sector. Ministers are currently discussing options for reviewing the freeze with councils and other partners, including landlords and homelessness charities. Recent announcements, such as the lifting of the housing revenue account (HRA) borrowing cap, should make it easier for councils to build much-needed housing, which will alleviate pressures in the longer term.

Councils are bringing together funding and services across welfare benefits, housing, employment, education, health and social care and financial inclusion to ensure that those most at risk of socio-economic disadvantage have choices and opportunities and can access the support they need to improve their life chances.

Welfare reform

Councils are working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Jobcentre Plus and other partners (such as the learning and skills sector, voluntary and community sector and housing) to help with implementation of welfare reform and support those affected.

The Government's stated aim is to simplify the benefits system and improve work incentives. It is making significant changes to entitlement and the way in-work and out-of-work benefits are calculated and administered.

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Councils have a central role in both implementing the reforms and managing the transition and impact for local people. The reforms are extensive, and in some cases contentious and politically contested. The main areas of change are outlined here.

Universal Credit

Universal Credit combines the main working-age benefits into one monthly payment per household. All new claimants to any of the qualifying benefits will now go on to Universal Credit (with a few exceptions for households with specific vulnerabilities). Claims are made and managed online.

Citizens Advice is offering 'help to claim' support to new claimants from April 2019. Until now, councils have provided this support, and in many cases they will continue to be part of a wider integrated support offer alongside partners such as Citizens Advice and Jobcentre Plus.

Claimants who have remained on legacy benefits throughout the implementation will be transferred by the end of 2023, a process referred to as 'managed migration'. Many of the people in this group have vulnerabilities. The Government has therefore decided to work closely with councils and voluntary and community sector stakeholders to pilot managed migration, working with a small number of claimants first, from July 2019.

Support for housing costs, which was previously often paid directly to landlords as housing benefit, will be provided as part of the Universal Credit payment. Responsibility for administering housing benefit is gradually transferring from councils to the DWP as Universal Credit is implemented. However, councils currently retain considerable responsibility for housing benefit, particularly for more vulnerable residents, and will still administer pension credit (which provides housing payments for older residents).

Households in temporary accommodation will remain on housing benefit until at least 2022 to resolve some issues, in particular around assessment periods.

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Rhys Taylor, Liberal Democrat, Cardiff City Council

I was elected in 2017, and it's a privilege to represent residents and help shape city-wide priorities. Being a councillor is a hugely varied role. The issues residents have raised with me have ranged from the state of pavements and roads to missed waste collections, planning applications, school admissions and the air quality around our schools.

I serve on the children and young people scrutiny committee, which oversees education, children's services and play services, and the public protection and licensing committee, with oversight of taxi and premises licensing and air quality across the city.

My advice for new councillors is:

- Get to know officers in key departments and get to grips with any enquiry or information systems your council has – it will make dealing with issues far easier.
- Give yourself time to switch off on a regular basis – it will be good for you and your residents.
- Enjoy your time, the people you meet and help and the experience you gain as a councillor.

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Within Universal Credit, considerable changes are being made to work-related benefits – for example through reductions to working tax credits, the current freeze on private sector housing benefit, and bringing work-related Employment Support Allowance in line with Jobseeker's Allowance.

The benefit cap

This places a cap on the total benefits for most households where no adult is in work, currently £442 a week for families in London and £385 outside London (£296/£258 for single people). It was first implemented as a reduction to housing benefit, administered by councils, but is being applied as a cap on Universal Credit as this is introduced. The benefit cap can present particular challenges for lone parents with young children, and many councils are prioritising targeted support for these households.

Removal of the spare room subsidy

Unofficially referred to as the 'bedroom tax', this is also known as the social sector size criterion or the under-occupancy penalty. It applies to housing benefit recipients in social housing who are deemed to have spare bedroom/s, with some exceptions. Housing benefit is reduced by 14 per cent for one spare room and 25 per cent for two or more. Councils have been given additional discretionary housing payment funds to support residents with a convincing case for needing an extra room.

Local housing allowance

Local housing allowance (LHA) is the maximum level of rent used to calculate housing benefit entitlement for those renting privately. It is currently the 30th percentile of average local rents. The Government has frozen most working-age benefits, including local housing allowance, until 2020. This is one of the main ways in which it hopes to realise £12 billion of planned savings. The Government announced additional funding for the Targeted Affordability Fund in 2017 to address some of the issues in higher-cost areas.

Disability benefit

The Government has significantly reformed disability benefits, introducing more regular and stringent eligibility testing and reducing awards in the transition from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to the Personal Independence Payment (PIP), with an estimated saving of around £1 billion a year. Many studies, using government statistics, show that disabled people are particularly at risk of detrimental impacts from reforms to the welfare system.

Local support for households

Many councils place their support for those affected by welfare reforms within the context of wider strategies to reduce poverty and promote social and financial inclusion. Separately identified funding for local welfare schemes ceased in 2015, and the number of councils providing this kind of support has reduced significantly as a result.

Councils receive money for discretionary housing payments (DHP), which is intended to help housing benefit claimants who face short-term

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or transitional challenges with meeting their housing costs. The use of the DHP pot, and the pressures upon it, vary from council to council.

Financial support and debt advice

Councils are increasingly focusing on the provision, commissioning and signposting of financial support alongside their support on housing, employment and public health. It may be integrated with other forms of direct financial support or advice and mentoring, for example as households move to Universal Credit.

Councils take account of financial inclusion in the design of their local council tax support schemes and their approach to debt recovery.

The LGA has recently produced a report, '**Reshaping financial support**', which explores local approaches.

Councils and the environment

Planning

As a councillor you are likely to be involved in planning at some point. Planning decisions can impact on housing, job creation, climate change, investment, infrastructure and the quality of people's lives. They can be controversial, and finding the right balance between conflicting perspectives can be challenging. Community involvement is critical in both plan-making and dealing with applications.

The Planning Advisory Service, a programme within the LGA, provides advice and support to councils (officers and councillors) to help them understand and respond to planning reform. As the service is a grant-funded programme, some of its support is offered free of charge. www.local.gov.uk/pas

The Local Plan

The Local Plan is written by councils in consultation with community groups and other stakeholders. It sets out the council's approach to development and is used as the basis for planning decisions. Groups of councils can write a joint plan. It must reflect the National Planning Policy Framework.

The Local Plan is examined by the Planning Inspectorate. If agreed then the local authority adopts it, making it the statutory plan for the area. Plans must be kept up-to-date or councils risk decisions being made against national, rather than local, policies.

Neighbourhood planning

Neighbourhood plans are written by parish or town councils or neighbourhood forums. They are a tool to give communities more influence over the type, location, size, pace and design of development in their area (providing it fits with local and national policies).

These plans become part of the development plan for the area once they have been passed by an examiner

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and ratified by the community through a referendum. Councillors can encourage communities to take advantage of this tool, help them to understand the process, act as a liaison with the council and contribute to the development of proposals in their ward or division.

Planning applications

Sometimes called development management, this is the aspect of planning that people are most familiar with and the main way of implementing the Local Plan. Decisions are made in two ways. Officers can determine some of the more straightforward applications, leaving the planning committee to focus on strategic or controversial applications. The committee aims to balance the economic, environmental and social impacts of development to achieve the ambitions set out in the Local Plan.

As a councillor, you may be lobbied by individuals or groups on planning applications. If you are not on the planning committee, you can ask to address it as the local councillor when it considers a particular application.

If you are on the committee, you can get involved and express your opinions in advance of the decision as long as you retain an open mind, listen to all the evidence and don't predetermine the decision. Check your council's code of conduct for guidance on getting involved in planning proposals.

Housing

Housing authorities have different arrangements for meeting local housing need. Some run their housing stock directly or through an arms-length management organisation. Others may have transferred their stock and will work closely with local housing associations to place residents on the council housing waiting list.

Demand for housing is steadily increasing and there are lots of opportunities for councils to support the development of new housing. This can include working in partnership with housing associations or the private sector, using public sector land, building new homes and bringing empty properties back into use.

However, far fewer homes are being built than we need. The country has not built enough homes to meet demand since 1977/78, when 44 per cent of homes were built by councils. While 183,000 homes were built in 2016/17, we need between 220,000 and 250,000 new homes a year to meet demand.

The Government has begun to respond to the urgent need for housebuilding by committing to building one million homes by 2020/21. It has responded to LGA Housing Commission asks by, for example, increasing the funding and flexibility for the Affordable Homes Programme, and removing the cap on borrowing through the Housing Revenue Account.

We continue to push for a more ambitious vision and substantive measures – including allowing councils to retain more 'Right to Buy' receipts to invest in housing and creating a stable financial environment. That will enable local government to build the genuinely affordable homes communities need.

The LGA is providing some support for councils to help them act on opportunities to build more homes

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through sharing of good practice and capacity-building programmes.

Homelessness

Local housing authorities have the main duties towards people who are threatened with or experiencing homelessness. These are primarily defined by Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, which requires councils to provide advice and assistance, and to house certain limited groups of people experiencing homelessness.

These duties were significantly reformed by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which introduced a duty on local housing authorities to intervene to prevent homelessness a full 56 days before homelessness occurs. It also requires them to spend 56 days attempting to relieve homelessness for those who are already homeless. Unlike the Housing Act, the Homelessness Reduction Act applies these duties to all eligible people. However, should homelessness not be prevented or relieved, the main duty on local housing authorities to house limited groups of people still holds.

In practice, councils do much more than house homeless people; they directly provide or commission a wide range of activities which will help them to discharge their prevention and relief duties. These activities are set out in local homelessness strategies, which are a legal requirement.

Effective homelessness prevention and relief requires the cooperation of a broad range of public bodies, so that a whole-system approach can be taken to addressing the factors which cause or exacerbate homelessness. The Homelessness Reduction Act includes a 'duty to refer', which explicitly requires certain public bodies to play a role in preventing homelessness by referring individuals at risk (or already homeless) to local housing authorities. Many councils go beyond this, by highlighting the role of other agencies in their local homelessness strategies and enlisting their help in delivery.

Homelessness has gone up significantly in recent years. Rough sleeping, its most visible form, has seen a rise of 165 per cent since 2010. The Government published its rough sleeping strategy in 2018. This places a renewed emphasis on the role of local homelessness strategies as an effective tool for planning to end homelessness, and acknowledged the role of a wide range of public bodies and government departments in tackling rough sleeping.

The LGA is calling on the Government to go further, by making local homelessness strategies the primary vehicle through which government funding to end homelessness flows, replacing the current, fragmented system of nationally controlled pots of money. The current system prevents councils from effectively planning to end homelessness in a strategic way. We are also calling on Government to close the funding gap of over £110 million.

Waste

Councils have duties to collect and dispose of waste. The arrangements for this vary. In two-tier areas, district councils are responsible for waste collection and county councils for waste disposal. Some metropolitan districts and London boroughs are combined waste and disposal authorities, but others have

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responsibility for collection only, with disposal provided by statutory waste authorities. All unitary councils have responsibility for waste and disposal.

Councils have different approaches to the frequency of collection and the services offered. Some have joint arrangements with neighbouring authorities. Defra (the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) published a new waste and resources strategy in 2018. This proposed several changes that will affect delivery of services in the future, and could change the way household recycling services are funded and delivered.

Climate change and extreme weather

The Climate Change Act 2008 set a target for an 80 per cent cut in greenhouse gases by 2050 in order to mitigate the potential impacts of a changing climate, such as increased flood risk and heatwaves.

Extreme weather can have a major impact on council services and property. In recent years, drought, snow, heatwaves, storms, wildfires and flooding have affected many buildings and public areas, damaged roads and bridges and created challenges in maintaining essential services such as schools and home-based care. With extreme weather predicted to increase, councils are being encouraged to put in place appropriate long-term risk management strategies.

Transport

Councils play a vital role in keeping people and businesses moving so that they can work, shop, use local services, visit friends and family and deliver goods. A council's role includes transport planning, maintaining highways and managing traffic, supporting public transport and promoting road safety. Locally managed roads make up 98 per cent of the road network and are the responsibility of highway authorities (top-tier and unitary councils). In London, Transport for London manages trunk roads and councils manage the local network.

Strategic transport authorities (county and unitary councils, passenger transport authorities and London boroughs) produce long-term transport plans and strategies. These typically aim to support more sustainable and healthier transport systems, manage air quality through vehicle emissions and improve public health and safety, while also improving the local and sub-regional economy.

There are also emerging sub-national transport bodies, groups of councils voluntarily coming together to produce joint transport strategies. These will have a role in deciding how funding decisions on the new Major Road Network are taken (a network of the most strategically significant local roads).

Maintaining highways and managing traffic

Councils spend a significant amount of money on maintaining roads and managing traffic. This includes fixing potholes, gritting and clearing main roads in the winter, and inspecting, regulating and providing information on roadworks (such as those carried out by utility companies). Fixing potholes is expensive, so where possible councils will try to spend their limited funding on

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planned works and improvements that make road surfaces more resilient to extreme weather.

Parking enforcement is another key role. Parking controls exist for many reasons, but they are typically designed to:

- ensure roads are safe
- enable traffic to flow freely
- manage the competing demands of residents, businesses and commuters
- provide parking for disabled people and health/care workers.

Public transport

Councils support public transport as part of their broader transport strategy and to help meet the needs of local communities. In most places outside of London, local bus services are run by private operators. Many routes which would not be commercially viable rely on financial support from, and contracts with, the council. The national concessionary travel scheme provides free off-peak bus travel for older people and eligible disabled people, and is administered by councils.

Councils also provide home-to-school transport and support demand-responsive transport as a cost-effective way of providing vital services in areas of low demand. They may provide grants to voluntary and community sector schemes for those who find it difficult to access other forms of transport. District and unitary authorities are responsible for licensing the provision of taxis and private hire vehicles.

Road safety

Councils play an important role in promoting road safety through design features such as traffic calming, cycle lanes, improving visibility and road layout design. They will look at engineering solutions in areas with accident problems and carry out safety audits on new roads and changes to existing road layouts. Many also deliver a programme of education, publicity and training to increase the skills and knowledge of local road users.

HOT TOPIC
MANAGING AIR QUALITY

The state of air quality in our towns and cities is a high-profile issue for local and national politicians. As a result of the UK being in breach of nitrogen dioxide limit values under the EU Air Quality Directive, the Government and many councils are prioritising air quality more than they used to. Councils have a responsibility under Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) legislation to review air quality. Where concentrations exceed national objectives, measures should be put in place to reduce emissions, and this should be reported in the local air quality action plan.

Transport is responsible for 80 per cent of harmful roadside emissions. Typical measures to reduce emissions from local sources include traffic management, encouraging the uptake of cleaner vehicles, and increased use of public transport – along with more sustainable transport methods such as walking and cycling. The Government's latest air quality plan set out further measures to help councils manage air quality and bring the UK to within national air quality standards.

This can include 'clean air zones', with measures such as charging high-polluting vehicles to enter areas where the council is trying to tackle air pollution.

Safer, stronger communities

Councils have a huge contribution to make towards ensuring safer and stronger communities, and a wide variety of different services support this area of work.

Community safety partnerships

Community safety partnerships (CSPs) are made up of representatives from the police, local council, fire and rescue service, health service and probation, as well as other non-statutory partners. The purpose of CSPs is to make the community safer, reduce crime and fear of crime, reduce anti-social behaviour and work with residents and businesses on the issues of greatest concern.

The Government's serious violence strategy calls on CSPs to put tackling serious violence at the heart of their work and actively consider how they can best prevent and disrupt such crime, including how early intervention and prevention can be applied locally.

Police and crime panels

Most areas in England have directly elected police and crime commissioners (PCCs) who are responsible for holding the local police service to account. In London and Manchester, the elected mayor performs this function. PCCs have a duty to ensure that there is an efficient and effective force in their area, set the strategic priorities through a five-year plan, set the police precept, and hire (and fire) the chief constable.

The work of every PCC is scrutinised by a police and crime panel. In London and Manchester, the panels are a committee of the Greater London Assembly and Greater Manchester Combined Authority. A different system operates in the City of London. Police and crime panels must scrutinise the PCC's police and crime plan, the annual report on progress, the proposed precept and some senior appointments. The panel can veto the precept and the appointment of a chief constable. Panels have a minimum membership of 10 councillors and a maximum of 18 (plus two independent appointees).

Domestic abuse

Successfully addressing domestic abuse requires a multi-agency public health approach to supporting victims. PCCs have a clear role to play, given their statutory responsibilities for victims, but councils and other public services have an important role to play alongside the police.

Councils are already working towards achieving the objectives set out in the 'national statement of expectations' (NSE) to tackle domestic abuse. The NSE aims to provide a framework for collaborative, robust and effective local provision. The objective is for local services to be victim-centred and strategically commissioned, and to include a focus on safeguarding individuals, managing perpetrators and raising awareness locally.

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Anti-social behaviour

Councils have a key role to play in helping to make local areas safe places to live in, work in and visit, and tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB) continues to be a high priority for councils and their partners. The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 introduced significant changes to the way councils respond to ASB. New powers include the introduction of ASB case reviews (or the 'community trigger'), which will provide victims of ASB with the right to request a review of how local agencies have responded to previous complaints and consider what further action might be taken where the problem persists.

Community cohesion

As leaders of local places, councils and councillors have a hugely important role in promoting community cohesion, both at strategic and operational levels. Cohesion work cuts across a broad range of different policy areas including growth, housing, culture, regulatory services and supporting new arrivals.

In 2018 the Government launched its Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, which acknowledged the role of councils around cohesion, alongside five integration area pilots to help develop local strategic responses.

Councils also have a key role to play in responding to cohesion challenges – from local neighbourhood issues that can increase community tensions, to developing resilience to the threats from extremism and radicalisation. At a national level, the counter-extremism strategy includes objectives to counter extremist ideology, disrupt activity and build cohesive communities. It also recognises the broad impact that extremism can have on local areas, including from wider harms such as hate crime and illegal cultural practices.

The UK's counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST) comprises four strands: Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare. The 'Prevent' strand aims to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 introduced a statutory 'Prevent' duty for councils, which requires them to have due regard to the need to prevent people being drawn into terrorism. This includes establishing multi-agency case management panels, known as 'Channel panels', to offer support to people at risk of radicalisation.

Some councils receive additional government funding for dedicated posts to support work around 'Prevent' and counter-extremism. A local authority-led network, the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism, has been set up to provide support and develop and disseminate good practice on countering extremism, and is open to all councils.

Modern slavery

Modern slavery can take various forms, such as sexual or labour exploitation, and can affect a range of different people. Councils play a key role in tackling modern slavery, working in four key areas: identifying victims, supporting victims, disrupting activities and ensuring their own supply chains do not involve modern slavery.

Councils are designated 'first responder' organisations, a statutory duty under the Modern Slavery

Act 2015. First responders are organisations with a responsibility to identify and refer potential consenting adult or child victims of modern slavery to government support. Councils also have a duty to notify the Home Office of suspected adult victims who do not consent to be referred.

Public protection

Environmental health, trading standards and licensing have two important functions: protecting communities and supporting local businesses. Collectively, they may be known as public protection or regulatory services. Around half of all business contact with councils is through these services, which gives them an important role in facilitating economic growth, maintaining consumer confidence and supporting the high standards that make an area attractive to live in, work in and visit.

Licensing exists to protect customers and businesses, and to support economic development in a way that manages the risk of potentially dangerous or irresponsible activities harming individuals, businesses and communities. It provides assurance to residents about the businesses they engage with and boosts consumer confidence in an area.

Councils are responsible for issuing more than 150 different types of licences, consents, permits and registrations covering a diverse range of trades and activities. These include licences permitting the sale of alcohol, overseeing local taxi/private hire vehicle services and overseeing gambling premises. Councillors have a specific role in licensing through the work of licensing committees. The LGA has produced a series of handbooks for councillors on different areas of licensing.

Fire and rescue services

Fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) are responsible for delivering fire and rescue services through a variety of governance models. In some areas, fire and rescue is part of the county council. In others, it is delivered by a standalone organisation called a combined fire authority (made up of members from a number of councils). In large cities responsibility falls to the metropolitan fire authorities, while in London and Manchester it falls to the directly elected mayor (with a deputy mayor for fire).

FRAs can also be led by the local police and crime commissioner (PCC). To date, four areas have chosen this arrangement: Essex, Northamptonshire, Staffordshire and North Yorkshire. PCCs wishing to follow this route must consult the affected councils, communities and employees and, where there is local disagreement, put together a business case for the Secretary of State to decide on.

FRAs are statutory bodies and, in the case of combined and metropolitan authorities, are made up of a politically balanced committee of local councillors which oversees policy and delivery. Councillors on county or unitary councils can be nominated to serve on FRAs by their councils. County councils with responsibility for fire and rescue will have a portfolio holder leading on these services.

Building safety

Councils have two core roles in relation to building safety. Their first role is as regulators: fire and rescue services,

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building control and environmental health functions all have a role in building safety, and are all carried out to some degree by councils.

During design and construction, requirements for means of escape, structural precautions, smoke control and fire and rescue facilities are set out in the building regulations (minimum standards for design, construction and alterations), which are approved by a council's building control service. However, the role of building control has declined in recent years following the introduction of 'competent person schemes', which has led to an enhanced role for private approved inspectors.

Once buildings are occupied, responsibility for safety transfers to the Housing Act 2004 and Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, which are enforced by local housing authorities and fire and rescue services respectively. The Housing Act makes requirements about the condition of individual dwellings, including flats, and allows councils to issue enforcement and improvement notices against landlords where the condition of dwellings poses risks to occupants. The Fire Safety Order applies to the common parts of a building and requires building owners to ensure fire safety.

The second role for councils is as landlords. As of March 2017, local authorities owned 1.6 million of the 23.9 million dwellings in England. The safety of residents is therefore a core priority.

Following the fire at Grenfell Tower in 2016, there has been an increased focus on councils' role in helping to keep buildings safe. This is being achieved partly through delivery of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) building safety programme, which has two elements: remediating unsafe buildings and overhauling the building safety system to prevent future disasters.

Councils have led the way in removing unsafe cladding, of the type used on Grenfell Tower, from their buildings. This has been supported by £400 million of funding from MHCLG, following successful lobbying by the LGA. Work to enforce the removal of dangerous cladding from privately owned buildings is now underway, and the MHCLG-funded, LGA-led joint inspection team will provide councils with expertise to support their enforcement efforts.

The LGA is also supporting councils to help shape the new regulatory framework for building safety, which will look at elements including escape routes for residents, new duties for building owners and joint working arrangements between regulators. The Government will consult on proposals for a new framework during 2019.

The voluntary and community sector

The term 'voluntary and community sector' (VCS) covers a range of organisations including national and local charities, tenants' and residents' organisations, faith organisations and community groups. Sometimes referred to as the 'third sector', it can also include housing associations, social enterprises and cooperatives. These not-for-profit organisations seek to reinvest any income generated in social, environmental or cultural objectives.

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Councils can support, and gain value from, the VCS through grant giving (although this has become less common in recent years) and by directly commissioning them to deliver specific outcomes or services. Councils themselves have created new not-for-profit organisations to deliver services previously delivered by the council, such as youth services, libraries, playgrounds and children's centres.

The VCS can also be supported through the delivery of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, better known as the Social Value Act. This requires those who commission public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits – including by awarding public service contracts to the VCS.

Resources to support councils in the delivery of this Act are available on the Social Value Portal www.socialvalueportal.com

In 2018, the Government published its civil society strategy, which explores the empowerment of citizens and communities and makes a commitment to broaden the range of funding options for community initiatives – including the revival of grant-making. It also launched a new Innovation in Democracy programme to pilot participatory democracy approaches, whereby people are supported to take part in the decision-making that affects their communities.

Many VCS organisations employ significant numbers of local people and offer a route into employment through volunteering programmes. As such, they are an integral part of efforts to deliver on wider inclusive growth ambitions. The VCS is often represented in local partnership structures such as health and wellbeing boards and local strategic partnerships. Building strong relationships with the sector can form a significant part of every councillor's role.

The LGA is working to support councils to better engage local communities in the design and delivery of services.

For more information www.local.gov.uk/community-action and www.local.gov.uk/new-conversations-lga-guide-engagement

Improvement and productivity

Local government is the most efficient part of the public sector. Councils are developing new and innovative approaches to service delivery in response to the ongoing cuts to public spending and the increased demand for services.

Improvement support

Each council is responsible for its own performance and improvement, and councils collectively are responsible for the performance of the whole sector. Our role at the LGA is to provide tools and support to help councils improve, and to maintain an overview of performance so we can offer specific support to councils facing particular challenges.

Based on what we know from experience works best, our key support offer includes:

- leadership training and development
- challenge from peers

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- performance comparison with others
- our efficiency and productivity programme.

The LGA's improvement support is being refreshed all the time in response to feedback from councils. For example, a finance support offer has been developed which includes a financial peer challenge, financial health check, a budget challenge and tools to enable councils to assess their own financial position.

Peer challenge

A peer challenge is an opportunity for a council to get an independent, external perspective on how they are doing. It provides an opportunity to review and transform how they work and their services, and to deal with performance issues. Delivered by experienced local government officers and councillors, it is a voluntary process tailored to the needs of an individual council. There is an expectation that every council will have a corporate or financial peer challenge every four to five years, at no cost. County and unitary councils may also qualify for a subsidised or fully-funded children's safeguarding peer challenge/diagnostic.

A corporate peer challenge focuses on priority setting, leadership, governance, financial management and capacity. The process includes:

- a challenge team with experienced councillors and officers
- a pre-visit; four days on site; end-of-week feedback and a final report
- a challenge shaped to focus on the council's own priorities
- a follow-up visit by the challenge team one or two years later.

Recent corporate peer challenges have looked at:

- providing an organisational 'health check' and reassurance about overall performance and direction of travel
- new ways of working, service delivery and relationships with citizens/partners
- corporate priorities such as regeneration and economic development
- proposed corporate strategy and future financial plans.

New improvement hub

Developed with local government, for local government, the LGA is creating a new hub that brings together improvement and efficiency support in one place. Responding to councils' call for more practical help, a range of case studies, guidance, tools, performance data, training and other resources is being assembled, to help councils continue to deliver value for money and better outcomes for communities.

An online self-assessment tool will help councils identify improvement opportunities and other appropriate support, such as peer challenge or wider sector-led resources.

We are currently working with councils to make sure we get this right. If you would like to find out more and try the prototype please visit www.local.gov.uk/improvement-hub

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The LGA's productivity offer

Supporting your council to innovate, save money and generate income

We work with councils to show what is possible, with projects to demonstrate how authorities can save money, generate income and become more efficient and effective. Using a range of approaches, including brokering and sponsoring expert interventions, training, providing small grants and commissioning research.

Redesigning public services (case studies, grant funding)

Together with the Design Council we offer support to councils and health partners wanting to apply design processes and methods to their public health challenges. If your organisation requires some fresh thinking or a different approach, this could be your opportunity to receive training and support.**www.local.gov.uk/design-public-sector**

Changing behaviour to make a difference (case studies, experts, grant funding)

Behavioural insights is a technique used to generate better outcomes for communities by encouraging changes in the way we act.
www.local.gov.uk/behavioural-insights

Cyber security (case studies, grant funding)

Cyber security is an increasing risk to the public sector and the services we run. As part of the National Cyber Security Strategy, the LGA has been granted funding by the Cabinet Office to ensure that councils are as resilient against cyber-attacks as possible.
A sector-led improvement programme with grant funding is now available to councils to strengthen their cyber security arrangements and the overall resilience of local government.
www.local.gov.uk/cyber-security

Commercialisation (case studies)

As funding shrinks, councils are exploring new ways of generating an income. Many councils are using their assets wisely, trading services with others across the public and private sectors, and selling commodities to generate income.
www.local.gov.uk/commercialisation

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Modern slavery (guidance, case studies)

Councils are not currently required by law to submit Modern Slavery transparency statements but nearly 100 councils have already demonstrated ethical leadership by doing so voluntarily.
www.local.gov.uk/modern-slavery

The National Procurement Strategy and resources (guidance, toolkits)

Councils spend some £55 billion a year on bought in goods, works and services. Following requests from the sector we have updated our National Procurement Strategy to meet the changing needs of local government.
www.local.gov.uk/nationalprocurement-strategy

Shared services map and Shared Service Expert programme (case studies, experts, grant funding)

Local government leads the way in the public sector when it comes to service delivery and implementation through shared service arrangements, saving the taxpayer over £971 million in cumulative efficiency savings from over 559 partnerships.
www.local.gov.uk/shared-services

Transforming local public services using digital tools and solutions (case studies, experts, grant funding)

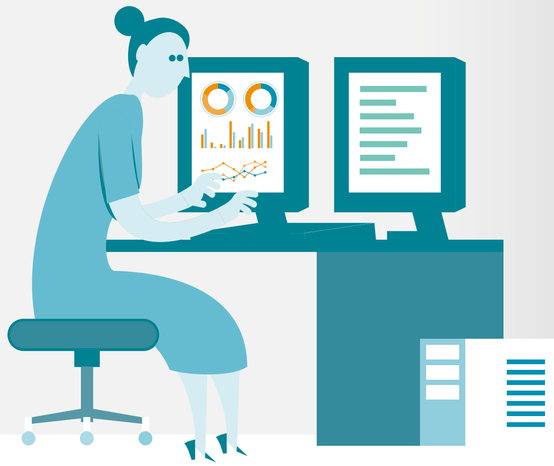
Helping councils to significantly improve how services are designed and delivered online for communities, enabling staff to work more effectively both in and out of the office. We have worked with over 60 councils so far, with estimated savings of more than £5.6 million.
www.local.gov.uk/digital-funded-programmes-and-case-studies

Commercial skills masterclass for councillors

Commercialisation and entrepreneurialism are becoming increasingly key to the role of the modern councillor. The commercial skills masterclass is a free masterclass hosted by an LGA member peer and an experienced commercial trainer. The host shares practical commercial skills, including a case study from the LGA member peers about how they have put their commercial skills into practice.
commercialskills@local.gov.uk

Access an expert to help with your productivity (case studies, experts, grant funding)

The Productivity Experts programme aims to create efficiency savings and/or income generation for councils in any service area. So far, the programme has worked with more than 100 councils, together totalling £180 million worth of savings and/or income generation.
www.local.gov.uk/productivity-experts-programme



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Where to find out more

The Local Government Association website
www.local.gov.uk

The LGA website is updated daily to provide the latest news, information and guidance for councillors and officers. From here, you can sign up to email bulletins – handy digests of the latest news, analysis and best practice, and on-the-day briefings – summaries of important events and developments that might affect local government.

Topics can include the Budget, the Queen's Speech or new legislation.

The LGA's four political group offices (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Independent) each have their own home pages with links to events, publications and group activities. The Independent Group represents independent councillors and those who belong to any of the smaller political groups (with the exception of the BNP).

The latest analysis, guidance and good practice on the issues that affect councils and their residents are covered under the following broad headings:

- children and young people
- communities
- community safety
- culture, tourism, leisure and sport
- devolution
- economic growth
- employment and skills
- environment and waste
- European and international
- finance and business rates
- fire and rescue
- housing and planning
- licences, regulations and trading standards
- severe weather
- social care, health and integration
- transport
- welfare reform.

first is the LGA's free membership magazine, sent each month to around 18,200 councillors and local authority chief executives in England Wales. It's the primary way that our members – particularly councillors – find out about the work of the LGA. It also provides updates on local government news, policy issues, Parliament and local elections.

All the content is available on our revamped and searchable website, www.local.gov.uk/first, where you can also subscribe to the first e-bulletin – which is published ahead of the magazine and provides a sneak preview of our top stories.

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The LGA's Twitter handle is **@LGAcomms** which provides updates and information on its work. The handle **@LGANews** provides updates on media work promoting local government.

The Twitter handles of the LGA's political group offices are:

LGA Conservative Group:
@LGACons

LGA Labour Group:
@LGA_Labour

LGA Liberal Democrat Group:
@libdemlocalgov

LGA Independent Group:
@LGA_Independent

Other handles of interest include:

District Councils' Network:
@districtcouncil

County Councils Network:
@CCNOffice

Centre for Public Scrutiny:
@CfPScrutiny

The information contained in this guide was believed to be correct at the time of publication. Opinions expressed by individuals remain their personal views and do not necessarily represent those of the Local Government Association (LGA). The content does not purport to give legal opinion and councillors should raise any points of law with the relevant officer. The LGA cannot take responsibility for errors or omissions.

Some councillors quoted in the text may no longer hold the office ascribed to them. References to government, government policy, legislation, plans and intentions refer to their status in March 2019.

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