

# Daring to be different

Annual Report 2017/18





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# Introduction

This annual report provides updates from our group's leadership, including board and committee representatives and peers. It shows the work we've done and achievements over 2017/18. Getting involved in the activities of the Independent Group enables you to influence the positions and activities of the Local Government Association (LGA), which in turn allows you to achieve more for your residents, leveraging the influence of the LGA to affect government policy.

Despite the changes that result from elections each May, the LGA Independent Group remains the most diverse group of councillors and the most representative of the public within the LGA. It is this diversity, of views, interests, and approaches, alongside our commitment to and connection with our communities, that gives our group strength. When we share a view and take a stand, our voice is powerful. We truly dare to be different and when we work together we can be most effective.

Given the (often adverse) influence of party politics on local government, our group's voices are valuable and needed. Our member's approaches – listening, considering carefully and speaking up for our communities, our councils and our country, rather than dogmatically following a manifesto and a whip – provide an important counter point to the approaches of the large parties.

In this report, members of our group demonstrate how our group continues to influence the national debate on key issues such as housing, social care and business rates; how we fight for fairer funding for local government and a long term solution to the health and care crisis; how we have helped maintain the pressure on

government to properly fund our roads and infrastructure; continued to support the campaign for Proportional Representation; and been a critical voice in the Brexit negotiations, achieving commitments to ensure local government will play a role at the heart of future decision making.

The success of our work in supporting Independent Group members, helping raise skills, profile, and reputation is demonstrated in remarkable successes in all corners across our two countries and in all of our groups.

Through the LGA's Independent Group, members from across England and Wales dare to be different and work together to be a positive voice for their residents and for local government. In this report you'll read of both the outcomes the group has achieved and our aspirations looking forward.





## Leader of the LGA Independent Group

### **Councillor Marianne Overton MBE**

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

Congratulations and welcome to all of you who have won and kept the support of your residents. Clearly you know a thing or two!

The LGA Independent Group has an important independence from the three parties, focussed instead simply on getting the best solutions for our residents, and that remains our key character. We connect well with our communities, understand local needs and aspirations and speak up clearly, genuinely working for better lives locally. That gives us an important perspective.

The National election announcement crashed through our elections last year and this year it was again hard for people to concentrate on the importance of solid local representation. UKIP have three out of 123 seats nationally and taking our groups share down by 0.5 per cent, which affects our LGA seats held by right. Plaid Cymru gained magnificently last year and the Green Party gained a little this year, while Independents have held their own. Thus the group is now 76 per cent Independent, Plaid Cymru nine per cent, Green eight per cent and UKIP six per cent. We remain united in thoughtful focus on local issues to get the best solutions for our residents.

## **LGA Independent Group**

### **Successes this year**

Our group has led on getting funding such as the extra £2 billion started this year for adult social care in England and £20 million in Wales. I had meetings with the ministers and our members gave evidence to the Select Committee. We persuaded the Government to allow Councils to choose their own tax levels up to six per cent over three years, without the cost of a referendum. Colleagues and I followed that up with press work to support councils as many councils were forced by this government to raise tax levels just to make ends meet.

We also fought in the front line on rural funding, obtaining a welcome extra £15 million, based largely on the case we made on the costs of providing care in rural areas. We also gained the pothole fund, some of which is still being spent now. We gained 10 more pilot areas, made up of a number of councils, who are able to keep their business rates, adding some welcome millions to each council.

Our group has taken a lead in getting the best from Brexit, including the honouring of promised funds, calling for the return of funds to our councils, investigating ports and free ports, supporting Lords and Ministers with relevant information for their amendments.

We also have representatives fighting our corner in European local government bodies, with some success. I have personally worked on your behalf as the spokesperson on environmental regulations.

The National Planning Policy Framework was dubbed a ‘developers’ charter’ and new government proposals plan to make it more so. Our group led in shaping a robust response from the LGA. We secured recognition and support that housing without adequate infrastructure nor services is simply not good enough. We looked at causes of homelessness, alternative build and led in making the case in the new Industrial Strategy, which now directly provides some infrastructure for many councils.

This year we worked on funding for children's services and the LGA's 'Bright Futures' campaign<sup>1</sup> and related publication is excellent in making our case. Two billion pounds was forthcoming this year, but unfortunately it went to the NHS, so we are asking where it was spent. As you know, local government now commissions the front line mental health services for children, under the public health budget. Children's mental health support has long been so badly underfunded that waiting times can be over a year in some areas. That is a long time for a child to wait for help.

### **The year ahead**

Finding and supporting new candidates as councillors is probably one of the most important jobs we do. Thank you for your support of the Be a Councillor Campaign, with a series of events including Bristol, Redcar and Cleveland, and London. If you would like to host an event, please let us know and you can do a lot through social media too. We provide election, media and leadership training. The Next Generation training was again hugely successful in raising skills and aspirations of our members. We need to continue to attract the best and build election success.

I look forward to seeing you at one of our many events through the year, or speaking through our communications. I hope you continue to enjoy being a councillor as much as I do. I am always so impressed to find our members being bright beacons in our councils and our communities, clearly making decisions and bringing resources and drive to focus on helping our communities thrive.

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1 <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures>



### Thank you from the Independent Group Executive

A huge thank you to our brilliant staff in the Independent Group Office. I was pleased to secure skilled and talented Dr Toby Ganley earlier this year. He and his team have taken us safely through some significant upheavals in moving office and locating excellent new staff in Aimee Wittams-Smith after Vanessa Chagas moved with her family to Portugal. Thanks to Noleen Rosen, who continues to show commitment in her work for the Independent Group. Our team also successfully included an intern this year.

Thank you to the many members who have engaged with the Independent Group at the LGA this year, more than ever. The training, information and support, monthly discussions in house and by emails, accredited peer support and all that we do, is designed to help you and your colleagues do the best job possible. I hope you have found these opportunities informative and fun! More of our members than ever are using those skills to be effective in getting better results for people and the environment.

Thank you for all your ideas and contributions on issues that have helped shape our group direction and give confidence to our leading members in standing up for what you can see is needed. We have drawn on your experience shared with us to illustrate each case,

through direct correspondence, through the think tanks, through development sessions and webinars, through two rounds of regional conferences and through party conferences and our two LGA Independent Group annual conferences.

Being well-informed and well-prepared has meant our members are able to do well in their communities, their councils and in the LGA. A huge thank you to all our lead members. Thanks to our Executive, whose drive and enthusiasm provides valuable contributions to policy and direction, shown from our annual 'away day', to all their communications. They form a wise engine to our group, representing all regions across England and Wales. Thank you. In particular, thanks to my Deputy, Peter Reeve and Treasurer, Lisa Duffy. In working closely on the LGA Executive and in support of our group, Peter has gained great respect from members and from across the whole LGA. Congratulations to our new core team, I look forward to working with you.

Thanks to our lead members who have also contributed full reports published in our booklets and on line. Together we have drawn on your strengths, your connection with our communities and your good sense, ploughed into our group's representations on policies on some very big issues.





## Group budget Report 2017/18 and 2018/19

**Councillor Lisa Duffy**

Huntingdonshire District Council

LGA Independent Group Treasurer

### **2017/18 budget report**

Our budget for 2017/18 was set at £19,410 which was an increase on the previous year, which helped us increase our regional activity, continue to provide development opportunities specifically targeted to our members.

We ended the year with a small overspend, of £498.00. This was due to one-off costs associated with the move back to Smith Square.

We again utilised other sources of funding this year to deliver bespoke programmes for our members, including a fourth annual Next Generation programme for aspiring leaders; and various events for aspiring councillors through the Be a Councillor campaign.

Once again we held our annual conference in November, and 12 regional meetings (an increase from five the previous year) in regions across England and Wales.

Unfortunately, Cllr Lisa Duffy did not continue as a Councillor following the elections in May, but we thank her for her service as Treasurer to the Group.

### **2019/20 budget**

Our budget for the 2019/20 financial year is set at £16,350, which reflects the changes to the group's proportionality resulting from the 2017 local government elections.



## An update from our lead member peers

### **Councillor Mike Haines**

Teignbridge District Council  
National Lead Member Peer



### **Councillor Colin Mann,**

Regional Lead Peer: London and the South East,  
plus the Plaid Cymru councillors in Wales



### **Councillor Alan Seldon,**

Regional Lead Peer: West Midlands and North



### **Councillor Shirley Pannell,**

Regional Lead Peer: East of England and North



### **Councillor Phelim Mac Cafferty,**

Regional Lead Peer: South East and London



### **Councillor Paul Cullen,**

Regional Lead Peer: Yorkshire and Humber

Independent Group peers have continued to give support and advice to our members across England and Wales. This year we have increased the number of regional lead peers from five to six (within the same overall budget) to increase our regional support. We are:

**Cllr Mike Haines** - Independent Group National Lead Peer, and Regional Peer: South West.

**Cllr Paul Cullen** - Regional Lead Peer: Yorkshire and Humberside.

**Cllr Colin Mann** - Regional Lead Peer: Wales.

**Cllr Phelim Mac Cafferty** - Regional Lead Peer: London and the South East.

**Cllr Alan Seldon** - Regional Lead Peer: West Midlands and North West.

**Cllr Shirley Pannell** - Regional Lead Peer: North East, East Midlands and East England. At the start of May 2018 Shirley resigned as a district councillor and stood down from her position as a Peer. Her regions are now covered via Mike until the new appointments in the summer.

**Graham Brown** had been a regional lead peer for several years, but stood down as a councillor at the elections in May 2017, he continued for a few months in a consultant role whilst Alan took up the role in his former regions.

At a regional level our work has included providing support for lone members; helping to resolve ongoing disagreements; advice to group members where there was a change of control; leadership support and mentoring; advice on policy issues and advice on protocols. There have also been regular peer meetings as part of the LGA's sector improvement discussions. Our peers have also attended various development days along with the LGA's peer conference last September.



In addition to our regional peers, we have a strong pool of 34 member peers who have supported councillors in various ways. This year peers have undertaken three Corporate Peer Challenges, one planning policy and planning application and one strategic care and health peer challenge. The team have provided 1:1 mentoring support and advice in areas including budget setting, social care and regeneration, as well as co-facilitating workshops on issues such as prevention and health, children's services, planning, finance and new councillor inductions.

### **Next Generation**

I helped facilitate the Independent Group's fourth 'Next Generation' programme for future leaders. This involved three weekend residential modules in Warwick attended by 13 councillors. The feedback from this was once again encouraging, and it is good to see many former participants go on to leadership roles within their councils and the LGA.

### **Corporate Peer Challenges**

One of the key benefits of LGA membership continues to be the sector-led support on offer, including the Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). I would encourage all councillors to check whether their council has had a CPC in the last five years and if not, request one via your leader or chief executive.

## Looking forward

We are always keen to do more, and we continue to receive many requests for peer support, via the group and the LGA more widely. I am sure this will continue in the year ahead, particularly where Independent Group councillors hold the balance of power in NOC (No Overall Control) councils. National politics seem in a more uncertain phase and some of us will face more local elections in May 2019.

If you are interested in receiving support from any of our member peers or would like to become a peer, please contact:  
Sarah Woodhouse, Head of the Group Office.





## Culture, Tourism and Sport Board

### Councillor Geoff Knight

Lancaster City Council

Vice-Chair, Culture, Tourism and Sport Board

The LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport (CTS) Board continues to run 'Leadership Essentials' courses for elected members and held a well-attended CTS conference in Hull. At the conference we launched 'Growing Places', a paper which explains how local government stands ready to meet the challenges of a changing world and sets out the resources and shifts in thinking the Government needs to implement in order to make this happen. This led to an announcement in 2018 of £100 million funding for the 12 Local Delivery Pilots.

We continue to work closely with Arts Council England (ACE) with 'culture led regeneration' a board priority. Thanks to input from our Independent Group Culture, Tourism and Sport Think Tank I was able to include Cornwall as one of the rural case studies.

The CTS Board discussed the notion of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) supporting innovative projects that promote local economic growth, such as the HLF 'Heritage Enterprise' scheme, which provides the opportunity for councils and others to regenerate areas through the use of underutilised heritage assets. We have recommended that local industrial strategies would prove a good way to embed this, and been encouraging the HLF to engage with Local Economic Partnerships (LEP) and councils to recognise this approach to heritage-led regeneration.

Heritage is one of the most often cited reasons for visitors to come to the UK, and we strongly endorse HLF's plan to engage internationally, although we believe this should be through partners like Visit England and VisitBritain rather than investing HLF direct resources into this work. In doing so, HLF should focus on supporting the development of regional products and local destinations outside of London, as is happening with the 'Great Places' scheme.

We met in Birmingham with Nick Rhodes, Chief Executive of National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) Market Place to discuss the visitor/tourism impact of Christmas markets on the local economy. Research by the LGA/ NABMA reveal that all areas studied have seen an increase in the past 12 months, with Christmas markets on track to break the record £250 million spent in 2015.

Live music venues – the CTS Board has provided input to a Private Members Bill supporting live music venues including pubs, theatres and concert halls under threat from outdated noise restrictions. The bill will see the person responsible for a change in noise conditions being held responsible for managing that change.

Sport - sometimes, good collaborative working doesn't always happen at a local level as it should.

The board is now working to develop a guide which will help improve how councils and sport and recreation providers work together more effectively. The CTS Board is also working to organise sports leadership training for councillors with responsibility for sport and physical activity.

We met with the Football Association (FA) to discuss how we can support them to roll out their investment in new and improved pitches. This is a huge opportunity to transform local grassroots sport across England and the benefits it will bring to our communities. We have written to councils encouraging them to support this initiative.

We have supported the Women's Local Government Society in their preparations for the 2018 centenary of the Representation of the People Act and helped to promote the £5 million fund made available by the government to support local celebrations.

I would like to thank the policy team at the LGA, members of the Independent Group Think Tank and others for their contributions and support over the past year.



## Community Wellbeing Board

**Executive Elected Mayor Kate Allsop**

Mansfield District Council

Deputy Chair, Community Wellbeing Board

Both Councillor Claire Wright and I have attended all meetings of the board and attended an Away Day meeting where Jackie Doyle-Price MP Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Care and Mental Health attended. The big challenge, she told us, is money, she reminded us of the positives of continuing to keep people out of hospital and residential care and that the Government appreciate the work the LGA are doing.



We have received presentations on adult social care, which is by far the biggest issue discussed at every meeting, we have heard about the role of the CQC, the future of integration and the Better Care Fund we have heard the case for prevention funding for councils who face significant spending cuts. Mental health has been a priority of the board we have worked closely with the Children and Young Peoples Board looking at young people's mental health and wellbeing. We have also had presentations around preventable

dementia, supported housing and the Adult Social Care Green Paper, which the board is working to influence. Sleep-ins has caused considerable concern and we await the outcome of a Court of Appeal case taken by Mencap on back pay for sleep-ins. The LGA is talking to Government about the liability on individuals who pay for care via a personal budget, direct payment or as a private individual paying for care, the position of councils who have directly employed care workers in the past six years, the social care funding required to meet this going forwards and the mounting pressure on the £2 billion for social care for the next two years, as this was not intended to cover back pay for sleep-in shifts.

I have spoken on behalf of the LGA Community Wellbeing Board at a Shaping Transformation Conference, Age UK National Conference, Unite's Health Visitors Conference in London and again for the Southern Regional Meeting in Esher. I have chaired the New Care Models conference the Supported Housing Consultation and then spoke at the following Supported Housing Conference. I attended the Mental Health Concordat and was asked to join the Data Security Board. After attending this meeting I was asked to become the LGA spokesperson from the Community Wellbeing Board on data security. Finally, I attended with other lead members a round table discussion with Philip Dunne MP and later Minister Caroline Dineage MP discussing the Social Care Green Paper.

The board is very busy and varied; I have signed off many documents and final versions of letters to ministers and commented on consultation documents. Claire has made a positive contribution to the board and it has been a pleasure to work with her and the Independent Group over the past year. The support I have received from the LGA has been exceptional.



## Resources Board

**Councillor Graham Whitham**

London Borough of Sutton

Deputy Chair, Resources Board

The Resources Board almost seems to operate in a twilight world with so much of its work labelled confidential. That being said its remit covers some of the most sensitive and pertinent fields in local government.

Both the Great People for Growing Places consultation and the Recruitment and Retention campaign for adult social care in England demonstrate an ever recurring and growing problem with workforce priorities. The target driven culture pervading the working environment means the low skills low pay and low productivity roundabout remains with many of those at the lower end seeing little to effectively incentivise them. Too often, all managers seem to do is load greater pressure on those at the cutting edge, attempting to meet contractual demands of more and more for less and less.

It was to try and address the current malaise that all four LGA Groups supported what was seen as a realistic wage offer. Formal acceptance was dependent on all of the involved parties agreeing and at the time of writing, whilst there is still work to be done the response of some of the unions recognises the seriousness of the employers offer.

On finance on both Fair Funding and Business Rates the Government continues to drag its feet. On the latter I have made it quite clear that our group sees both the pilot scheme and 75 per cent retention as renegeing on the legislation that was lost when the 2017 General Election was called. It also seems to me that the Fair Funding Review will deliver neither adequate funding nor funding that is fair. The opportunity has been taken to remind colleagues in the other three groups that the Government's agenda remains driven by deficit reduction with the only difference being that Philip Hammond's timetable is longer than George Osborne's.

The work on the Insurance Mutual, whilst progressing more slowly than hoped for is, nonetheless, progressing which is more than can be said over funding and investment currently sourced from the EU. Once again LGA officers and members are having to constantly address funding issues against an ever changing backdrop of Government shifts and confusion as to its own aims and expectations from Brexit.

This will be my only report as Resources Board lead. After 36 years in office I have called time on my local government career. I have only been involved with the LGA Independent Group for just three years but in that short time I have made a number of friendships, across the various groupings that make up the Independent Group, which will remain with me.

I would like to mention Vanessa who has now left and her successor Aimee who also has made the journey from Sutton. Sarah, who will shortly return and Toby who has so ably stood in as Head of Office. Noleen who has provided the one thread of continuity in the office and has given so much personal encouragement. Finally I must acknowledge the role of Carl who made the time originally to welcome me into the group and ultimately Marianne who has shown such faith in supporting me and giving me unexpected opportunities.

Right at the end of a political career that started in 1962 you have given me the best three years I have ever had, thank you all so very much, you have been a joy to work with and in local government I will miss you the most.



## Children and Young People Board

### **Councillor Gillian Ford**

London Borough of Havering

Deputy Chair, Children and Young People Board

The Children and Young People Board has been considering some challenging topics during this last year, at a time of reducing funding and increasing demand for children's services.

The vision of youth services was an agenda item, and discussions took place on reducing family violence as part of a bigger piece of work that is taking place. The board also received a presentation from The Education Endowment Foundation outlining their research studies, their engagement with schools and their current work programme.

A new challenge for local authorities and their partners that required action this year was the learning around 'county lines exploitation'. The board discussed the threat to young people being controlled to sell and transport drugs across authorities, improving the effectiveness of the child protection system was also an area of focus.

Two campaigns were launched during the year, starting with the Task and Finish Group, Bright Futures-Children's Social Care Improvement report. The report outlined seven areas where local authorities and their partners need to work together including a better understanding of what works for children and a strengthened morale and support for social workers. This work included a meeting in Rotherham to discuss the high profile challenges the authority faced after the identification of CSE within the borough. The second was the Bright Futures - Children and Young People's mental health services (CAMHS).

Children and young people's mental health has had a high profile over the last year, where I have undertaken a lead role on a number of roundtables and studies including the Maternal Mental Health Roundtable, APPG Children's mental health psychological mental health, SCIE and Department for Education (DfE) Mental Health for Looked After Children Expert Group. The DfE are currently

considering the report and the recommendations they wish to accept from the report.

I have also represented the LGA at the Working in Partnership to Safeguard Children and Young People integrating Children's Services to Improve Outcomes, DfE National Fostering Stocktake, NCAS Conference 2017 and Elective Home Education in the Lords with Lord Solely.

Invitations were received throughout the year to sit on a number of panels and groups along with presenting opportunities. These include the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers, and PEP – Mental Health Foundation. Conferences chaired, or asked to present include A New Vision for Youth Service, Coram BAFF and the conference Supporting Families and Children.

A new Task and Finish Group was established by the board, with members from the four political groups focusing on SEND. Elected as Chair of the group, a number of engagement roundtables have been organised and a research study commissioned. The final report is due to be launched at this year's NCAS conference in Birmingham.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Children and Young People Network members for their engagement over the last year.





## Economy, Environment, Housing and Transport Board

### Councillor Rachel Eburne

Mid Suffolk District Council Deputy Chair, Economy,  
Environment, Housing and Transport Board

The board covers a wide range of topics and one of my concerns is whether we are able to equally do them all justice. Throughout the year the board contributed too many consultations and reviews varying from town centre support to the Major Roads Network to fracking.

As with last year, housing remained a core focus of the board's work. Our year started with the first discussions resulting from the terrible tragedy at Grenfell Tower and there were calls for better Government funding and to ensure the review of building regulations led to real improvement.

Housing was the focus of many Government consultations and the board discussed in detail housing supply ('Right homes in the right places'), the proposed revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and housing delivery tests. The board were generally united in concern on new housing numbers and the trend away from local determination towards centralisation. Our comments included asking for greater support for existing infrastructure and more measures for local authorities to get homes built. My request for a further review of what constitutes affordable housing is being taken forward and many of our comments on the NPPF have been incorporated into the LGA response to Government.

Following the Autumn Budget and party conferences other housing issues were raised - pressing for funding to help with the administrative burden involved with dealing with private sector landlords and clarity on the legal duties.

In addition to this I represented the LGA as a witness at the DCLG Select Committee on The Homelessness Act and, while welcoming

the principles of the Act, focused on the short timeframe to implement it, the financial burden and the delay in secondary legislation.

On flooding we had an interesting presentation from a Director at the Environment Agency and officers from Leeds City Council. There is much greater interest in using a variety of natural and manmade defences but the problem remains of how to fund it.

A discussion on the future of transport primarily looked at technology with a move towards more electric vehicles. We asked about the implications for rural areas and particularly what impact there is likely to be on producing local plans bearing in mind the long timescales councils work to.

A LEP review was undertaken as part of the work on Government's Industrial Strategy where we asked questions on accountability and governance. The chair of the board held discussions with ministers who were receptive to the board's input.

Post-Brexit there is an opportunity to review how waste and recycling is measured and methods such as using carbon emissions or a simple weight of residual waste per household were discussed. With the launch of the 25 Year Environment Plan the board discussed future areas to focus on. We asked for more work on producer responsibility and ways to reduce food waste. The board also responded to issues around China rejecting recycles and the deposit scheme for plastic bottles. More is expected on this in the coming months.

At the end of my first year serving as Deputy Chair on the board I would like to thank members of the Independent Group for their support. I have welcomed all the contributions from those who responded to the Think Tank particularly as these comments help considerably in putting across our views to the wider board. I would like to thank Councillor Linda Gillham for her assistance on the board with me and also the Independent Group office for all their help and guidance.



## City Regions Board

### **Councillor Liz Hazell**

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

Deputy Chair, City Regions Board

The work of the City Regions Board has continued to be both challenging and interesting. Having only one member from the Independent Group can lead to the representative feeling a little pressure, however, Councillor Liz Hazell again attended all the board meetings and participated in all the lead member meetings.

Key priorities this year have been fiscal devolution, community cohesion, higher education, trade and investment, skills and employment, and the industrial strategy.

### **Fiscal devolution**

With the Government's focus on Brexit, and a relative pause on devolution, the board is working hard to be well-prepared to make proposals and influence thinking when this comes back onto the agenda.

### **Community cohesion**

The Safer and Stronger Communities Board leads this area but it is of particular interest to City Regions. This board has been considering the response to the Government's Integrated Communities Strategy.

### **Higher education**

The City Regions Board is considering refreshing the LGA's stance on universities, particularly in relation to the possible contributions that might be made to the industrial strategy, and to better understand the various impacts students have on local areas.

### **Trade and investment**

Work in this area is focused on building evidence for the role councils can play in building trade and investment links with cities and regions across the world, showing the challenges of the existing

sub-national approach to trade and investment support, and supporting the development of Local Industrial Strategies so they are able to take account of future changes to the UK's trade and investment landscape through devolution and funding.

### **Skills and employment**

Alongside the People and Places Board, City Regions is joint lead in the LGA's Work Local Campaign. Both boards have setup a strategic working partnership with the skills minister/Department of Education. They are also finalising the details of the Skills Workforce – a cross-board jointly-led LGA working group which steers the work of the campaign.

### **Industrial strategy**

Following from the release of the Industrial Strategy last year, the board receives regular updates with particular reference to the Local Industrial Strategies and when this is being rolled out.

### **Thanks**

Liz passed on her thanks to her colleagues and the officers of the Independent Group, who supported her. And, of course, our thanks goes to Liz for her great work on the City Regions Board, and her contributions to the group.



## People and Places Board

### Councillor Robert Jennings

Epping Forest District Council

Deputy Chair, People and Places Board

The People and Places Board represents the interests of all non-metropolitan authorities in England and Wales. It currently represents 27 county councils, 56 non-metropolitan unitary councils and 201 borough/city/district councils in England and 22 unitary councils in Wales.

In 2017/18 the board comprises 22 elected members - 14 Conservative, four Labour, two Independent and two Liberal Democrat members. The Independent Group is represented by Councillor Bob Jennings (Deputy Chair and Epping Forest District Council) and Councillor Helen Grant (North Yorkshire County Council and Richmondshire District Council) and is supported by the Independent Group's Think Tank, which currently comprises 22 elected members representing 17 local authorities in England and Wales.

In 2017/18 the board focused on:

**Brexit:** the establishment of a Post-Brexit England Commission to address the challenges presented by the UK's departure from the EU to non-metropolitan England, focusing on issues such as a better skilled workforce, more effective employment support services, more housing of all tenures, better transport and infrastructure, improved productivity, increased locally driven growth and attracting foreign investment.

**Devolution:** the commissioning of work to address potential gaps in the board's evidence base and to explore the public's perceptions (both positive and negative) to make a more compelling case to key audiences - the results of this work are scheduled for presentation in June.

**Digital connectivity:** the establishment of the Digital Connectivity Working Group to examine current provision in order to recommend proposals that will ensure future provision meets user's needs and expectations.

**Employment and skills:** working with the City Regions Board with representation from the Children and Young People, Community Wellbeing and Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport boards to establish a Skills Taskforce, which will help local areas to close their skills gaps, ensure apprenticeship provision matches the needs of employers and the skills of the population and create good employment opportunities across places, which residents can enter, retain and progress - the taskforce is scheduled to present its final report at next year's LGA annual conference.

**Industrial strategy:** working with the City Regions Board to survey elected members on the ability of LEPs to deliver local industrial strategies – also appointing a lead member of the People and Places Board to the LEP Advisory Panel to ensure the interests of non-metropolitan authorities are represented.

**Trade and investment:** continuing to evidence the role councils and mayoral combined authorities play in building trade and investment links with cities and regions across the world, demonstrating the challenges of the existing sub-national approach to trade and investment support and supporting the development of local industrial strategies to anticipate future changes to the UK's trade and investment landscape through devolution and funding.



## Safer and Stronger Communities Board

### Councillor Clive Woodbridge

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Deputy Chair,  
Safer and Stronger Communities Board

The scope of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board (SCCB) is wide and varied and I, along with other lead members, have been asked to comment on a large number of governmental inquiries and reviews into a broad spectrum of topics, from hand car washes and dangerous dogs to domestic abuse and gaming machines. Responding to these requests has helped ensure that members' interests and opinions are well represented in initiatives relating to counter extremism and cohesion, community safety, blue light services, community resilience and licensing and regulation.

A series of conferences on topics relating to the work of SSCB have been organised to keep LGA members informed of latest developments and issues. I have chaired events dealing with gambling and licensing over the past year and these have been lively and well-attended.

The board worked with officials at MCHLG to help shape the Government's Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper in the run up to its publication. Updated guidance for councilors on community cohesion issues will be published later this summer.

Community safety matters tackled have included modern day slavery, using Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs), county lines, moped crime, serious violence and serious and organised crime. Colleagues may be interested to know that a conference on county lines is being jointly organised with the Children and Young People's Board for July.

The reduction of harm caused by domestic abuse is a key governmental priority and SSCB has highlighted the need for councils to have the flexibility to commission a range of services for victims, and for investment in perpetrator programs to reduce

incidents of offending. Concern has been expressed however about local government being given additional responsibilities in this area unless they are properly resourced. The board broadly favors a strategy based around causing minimal disruption to the life of the victim.

With regard to licensing issues, over the last year substantial progress has been made in developing a national register of taxi/ PHV license refusals and revocations (NR3), which will be a very valuable tool for local authorities as they seek to ensure that only fit and proper individuals are licensed. It is expected to go live this summer. The board is united in its belief that a taxi and PHV reform bill is badly needed to bring this sector in line with technology changes, and also to strengthen safeguarding, and will press for parliamentary time to be given to such legislation. A ministerial working group, including LGA representation, has been reviewing this issue and is expected to issue its recommendations shortly.

Work to lobby Government on the regulation of gaming machines has yielded positive results with the Government's recent announcement of a £2 limit on FOBTs. This is something that the SSCB has consistently pressed for.

Looking ahead it is expected that the main themes of the SSCB's work program will stay broadly the same in the coming year. Key issues for 2018/19 include: working with MHCLG as it responds to the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, making sure councils' views on key issues are heard; lobbying government on the forthcoming Domestic Abuse Bill; working with councils to explore best practice in terms of commercialisation as they look at ways of ensuring the sustainability of regulatory services; and reviewing best practice around PSPOs.

Officers in the Safer and Stronger Communities team have over the past year helped to shape the LGA's response to the Grenfell tragedy, and will continue to support councils as they deal with the implications in their areas.



## LGA Commercial Advisory Board and LGA Property Board

### Councillor Clarence Barrett

London Borough District of Havering Chair of the Commercial Advisory Board and LGA (Properties) Ltd

This was my first year on the Commercial Advisory Board and Property Board, and it has been a particularly busy and productive period.

### **Commercial Advisory Board**

The biggest item by far has been the setting up of a Local Government Mutual company (LGAM Ltd) to provide a tailored Insurance offer to the sector. Councils spend about £650 million a year on insurance, ranging from property damage and fleet cover to employers' liability and protection against cyber-attacks. The new mutual will offer an alternative to the existing insurance market, thereby enhancing choice, promote best practice in risk management and drive through savings. The new mutual would not only aim to provide improved protection to LGA member authorities at a competitive rate, but it would be owned and controlled by council members themselves. So far, 17 councils signed up as potential members, alongside the LGA itself. A good example of where an Insurance mutual has worked well is the Fire & Rescue Indemnity Company (FRIC) which, after just 12 months of trading, achieved a 12.5 per cent surplus on contributions (£471,428). To explore this success further, I was kindly invited to attend the FRIC Annual General Meeting on in May which was most interesting. The next step is to procure a support service to enable a business case and operating model to be formed so that it can offer appropriately priced risk cover to local authorities.

Alongside this, LGA Commercial Services Ltd continues to maximise existing income levels and continues to explore fresh opportunities to generate additional income streams into the LGA. For example, LG Inform plus has attracted 13 new local authority subscribers,

realising a total income stream of £200,000. The 'Return to Social Work campaign' has secured £200,000 funding while the LGA commercial consultancy arm has seen positive growth with new income-generating work well under way. Other areas of opportunity are:

- training and development programmes - where the LGA has agreed to host, develop or deliver training to external parties
- consultancy - where the LGA provides or facilitates ad hoc advice, consultancy or other related services to specific entities individually or to groups of entities through thematic work
- conference and events - where the LGA arranges, hosts or delivers, either on-site or at external venues.

### **Properties Board**

The refurbishment of Local Government House, renamed 18 Smith Square, has been a major project which was not only contained within budget but completed to a high standard. While the works have created a modern and more comfortable work setting for staff and members alike, the opportunity to let space will create an important income stream to the LGA.

The next project for the board is overseeing the refurbishment of LGA's Layden House building in Farringdon. The building, sited in the Clerkenwell Green Conservation area, constructed in the 1970s and re-clad in the 1990s, is now in need of sympathetic modernisation. With the imminent arrival of crossrail to Farringdon Station, this also puts the building in a prime spot for creating a valuable rental income stream.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to officers and members for their kind support over the past year.



## Improvement and Innovation Board

### Councillor Ron Woodley

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Deputy Chair, Improvement and Innovation Board

This has been my second year as one of the deputy chairs for the Improvement and Innovation Board, and my role is currently the productivity portfolio. The board covers a wide range of areas helping council to innovate, sharing best practice and lessons learned.

Increasingly councils are looking to the LGA for support in managing their costs and demand pressures. Our efficiency and productivity programme provided support to help councils in reducing costs, generating income and working more efficiently. These programmes included the creation of procurement frameworks for the general use of all councils by using the productivity experts, who provided targeted support to individual councils, such as renegotiating contracts with suppliers. In addition this year we have undertaken work on innovation, digital and data issues, and demand management.

As part of our work on innovation, the LGA hosted a 'Behavioural Insights in Local Government' event in March. With council resources under increasing pressure, officers and members were able to hear how behavioural insights have been practically applied to council services. We launched the LGA and Behavioural Insights Team's top five recommendations to increase council tax revenue. Liverpool City Council used behavioural insights to reduce sugar consumption in the local population, to improve health outcomes. The project tested whether displaying sugar content of fizzy drinks at the point of sale has an impact on the number of fizzy drinks being sold. They were in fact reduced by 7.4 per cent.

Over the past year the LGA worked in partnership with the Institute of Directors to deliver commercial skills training, with officers from 35 councils across the country attending the programme. In February



and March of this year we designed and delivered two commercial skills masterclasses for councillors. 40 councillors attended the two sessions with excellent feedback: 'Useful to share experiences and candid case studies, sharing ideas and challenges with other councillors'.

Every year we produce an interactive map of shared services providing a compendium of council shared service and collaboration examples across England. This year we evidenced £657 million of cumulative efficiency savings and 486 partnerships, re-emphasising councils' reputation as the most efficient part of the public sector.

The LGA has worked with councils and across government on issues relating to the high profile collapse of Carillion. However, due to the careful contingency planning work undertaken in advance, council services in key areas continued to be delivered. The LGA was invited to give evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional affairs Committee on Carillion and Public Sector Outsourcing, and is a member of the Carillion Taskforce, chaired by the Secretary of State for BEISE.

I would like to thank the officers within the LGA productivity team for their help and support to this board over the past year.



## LGA Fire Services Management Committee

**Councillor Ian Stephens**

Isle of Wight Chair,

GA Fire Services Management Committee

I have chaired the Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) the past year, and have steered a course through a challenging period, and indeed it has a very busy year. The Home Office's Fire Reform programme has continued at pace, and the landscape looks very different now than it did a year ago.

The FSMC has been active in contributing to the reform programme with priorities on governance, transparency and standards, workforce, collaboration, procurement and value for money and funding, as well as the wider implications from the Grenfell Tower fire.

The LGA has been supportive of a change in fire and rescue service governance where it has been agreed locally. However, we still continue to have concerns that a change in governance can be made against the wishes of the relevant local authorities within an area. There have been a number of fire and rescue authorities (FRA) affected by governance changes where there has not been local consent to the Police and Crime Commissioner taking on the governance of the local fire and rescue service. The LGA has been providing support to the four affected FRAs and we have highlighted our concerns with the Government.

In July 2017 the Home Office announced that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) would be the new inspectorate for the fire and rescue service. Since then HMICFRS has been developing their new inspection regime. The LGA has contributed to the development of the regime through its membership of the HMICFRS External Reference Group as well as responding to a number of consultations on the inspection methodology and judgement criteria.

Diversity and inclusion in the fire and rescue service is a key strand of work for the FSMC. The LGA has published case studies on

recruitment and inclusion more generally, undertaken. The Fire Leadership Essentials course now includes a masterclass on diversity. We have also held a Summit of the signatories to our MoU on Equality, diversity, behaviours and organisational culture in the Fire Service to inform our future work on this issue.

Collaboration between fire and rescue services and other partners was highlighted at our Fire Conference in March. We opened out the sessions for bidding to showcase innovative and interesting work that FRAs had undertaken with their partners.

Procurement and value for money has continued to be of interest to the FSMC this year, and we continue to support the National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC) work on this issue.

The LGA made a number of requests for further funding for the fire and rescue service to cover the cost of a pay increase for firefighters to help increase collaboration. We highlighted the costs of further work coming out of the Grenfell fire to the sector and continue to undertake further work on this issue in partnership with the NFCC to provide an up to date figure on the one off and ongoing costs as a result of the fire. We will continue to lobby for funding based primarily on the basis of risk.

Following the Grenfell Tower fire, we have continued to contribute to the debate around building regulations and fire safety following the publication of the report of the Independent Inquiry led by Dame Judith Hackitt and the wider LGA work in response to the fire. The FSMC will lobby for any new burdens to be fully funded and monitor the impact on FRAs of increased inspections. The sprinklers working group will report on possible revisions to the LGA position regarding sprinklers and other automatic fire suppression methods and the FSMC will take these recommendations forward in line with wider LGA policy. The FSMC has received representation from various professional bodies and stakeholders at many meetings throughout the year encompassing a wide and varied number of solutions and concerns.

The FSMC work plan continues at a pace, and subject to FSMC approval in September will continue to focus on governance, transparency and standards, workforce, collaboration, procurement and value for money, funding and the Grenfell Tower fire.



## Committee of the Regions

### Councillor Andrew Cooper

Kirklees Council

Full Member of the UK Delegation  
of the Committee of the Regions

The spectre of Brexit looms large at our meetings in the EU Committee of the Regions and it is highly likely that we will not have representation on this body at the end of March next year. This has not meant that I have been inactive and I have taken opportunities to promote innovative new ways of addressing climate change as part of Europe's role in the COP United Nations lead climate change negotiations.

I was successful in getting passed an Opinion (policy paper) on the Environmental Implementation Review. The key thing to say about this is that it introduced the new concept of Locally Determined Contributions where local and regional authorities establish their own targets towards achieving our commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement. Currently there are only Nationally Determined Contributions that are decided by national Governments. This opinion became part of the Committee of the Regions key policy 'asks' at the COP23 Bonn Climate talks in November last year. I am pleased to report that the Global Summit of Local and Regional Leaders agreed in Bonn to develop a system of local and regional contributions. So this policy developed at the European level now has International recognition and may well come back to the UK as a new tool to help us reduce carbon emissions.

I am now working on the Committee of the Regions policy on climate change for the next COP talks in Katowice, Poland in December and I am leading on this as rapporteur on a new Opinion on Climate Governance. One of the principal things I will be seeking to achieve is ensuring local and regional authorities input into the planning of climate change policies is hardwired into the COP process. It is often

at the local level that action on climate change has to be delivered so it makes sense to involve the local and regional level in developing policies to reduce carbon emissions and to adapt to the reality of climate change.

I have written extensively on my work at the Committee of the Regions on my blog at [www.greeningkirklees.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.greeningkirklees.blogspot.co.uk) search under the tab 'Locally Determined Contributions' or EU Committee of the Regions'.

# Independent Group contact details

We always want to hear from our members, prospective councillors and those interested in the work of the Independent Group.

You can find out more about our work on our website, social media or by contacting a member of the team:

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Twitter: [www.twitter.com/LGA\\_Independent](https://www.twitter.com/LGA_Independent)

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We consider requests on an individual basis.