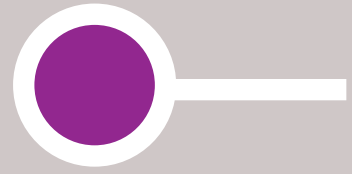
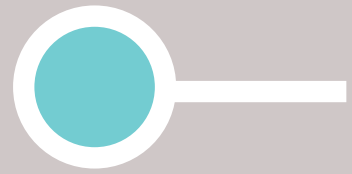
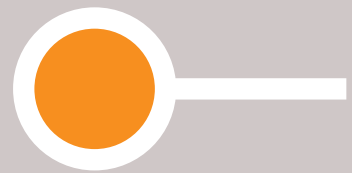
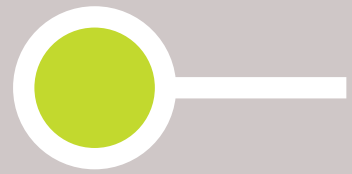
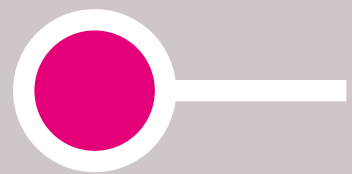


Councillors' Guide 2017



Guidance for new councillors



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Welcome

Welcome

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 David Simmonds CBE
Acting Conservative Group Leader and Acting LGA Vice-Chairman



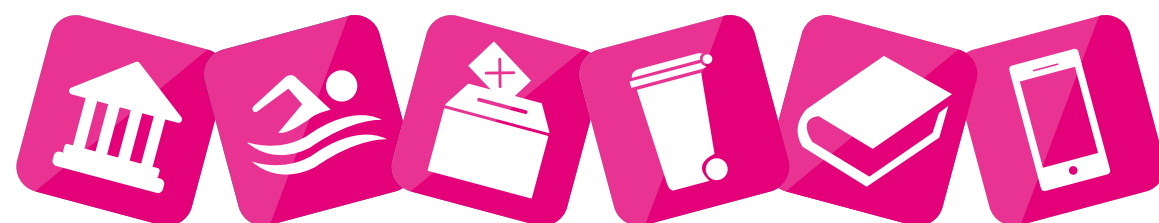
Councillor Nick Forbes
Labour Group Leader and LGA Senior Vice-Chairman



Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE
Liberal Democrat Group Leader and LGA Vice-Chairman



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





Welcome

From the Chairman

As Chairman of the LGA, it is my pleasure to congratulate you on being elected as a councillor and to welcome you to local government. For many of you, this will be your first time in elected office, an honour which will give you a completely new perspective on how vital councils are in improving the lives of those in your communities.

As you will all be aware, and I'm sure as you settle into your councils you will increasingly come to understand, local government is moving into uncharted territory. The challenges are growing as support from central government is shrinking. There is less money in the pot but demands for services are increasing – services which many people, quite rightly, expect.

Whilst this may seem daunting, rest assured the LGA is working hard with councils across the country, as well as with government, to make sure local authorities can still deliver those vital services which many people, often the most vulnerable, rely on. Local government, and the councillors who are at the heart of it, are a results-based and pragmatic group, who people look to for those real, tangible services that are used on a daily basis. Community care for the elderly and the vulnerable, education, road repair, housebuilding, recycling and street lights, the list goes on. The day-to-day life of a citizen is directly impacted by what we achieve as councillors.

Being a politically led organisation gives the LGA credibility to represent you on the national, and sometimes international, stage. One of our major roles is to engage with MPs and peers in Westminster, officials at Whitehall and representatives at the EU. This is something that, as a councillor, you are able to get involved in, helping to shape the landscape of local government for the future. I highly recommend that you take up this opportunity.

The LGA is also a resource to help you fulfil your 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 with and support you in your various roles.

I wish you the best of luck over the next four years, and hope to see you soon.

Lord Porter of Spalding CBE
Chairman of the LGA





Welcome

Welcome to the LGA

The national voice of local government

The LGA works with councils in England and Wales to support, promote and improve local government. As a councillor you will automatically have access to the full range of services that we provide.

We are politically led and cross-party, working with and on behalf of councils to give local government a strong, credible voice at national level. Having one politically-led membership body 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.

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. In the last year, 112 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 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

One of the LGA's key roles is to campaign on behalf of our members on issues that councils have identified as priorities. We have campaigned on a wide range of topics, from local government funding to securing vital changes to the social care system, devolution and housing.

2016 saw considerable change at local, national and international level, with growing pressure on finances and housing. There was a diversity of views in local government about Britain's membership of the EU and, to reflect this, the LGA remained neutral during the referendum campaign. However, the vote for the UK to leave the EU presents an opportunity to fundamentally reshape the way our country is run, and we have been campaigning for powers to be devolved from Brussels to local areas, not to Whitehall and Westminster, building on our successful DevoNext campaign.





Welcome

Our campaigning work on the crisis in social care successfully united charities and health and care providers to achieve wide agreement on the urgent need to help councils tackle the immediate social care pressures they face.

In the Spring Budget, the Chancellor announced that councils will receive £2 billion of new funding over the next three years, including £1 billion in 2017/18. While this is good news for local government, short-term pressures remain and the challenge of finding a long-term solution to the social care crisis is far from over.

We are also campaigning on overall funding for local government and ensuring that councils are helping to shape the way that the new business rates retention system will work. Our broadband campaign will keep pushing for access to superfast broadband for all, including rural and district areas where connectivity and speeds can be limited. And with our Housing Commission we will continue to make the case for councils to have the powers and money to resume their historic role in house building, to increase housing supply and promote

affordable housing for people who need it.

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

- Stopping the Education for All Bill from entering Parliament, which would have forced all schools to become academies.
- Securing funding for unaccompanied Syrian refugees arriving in the country.
- Mounting a successful defence in the High Court and Court of Appeal against the NHS's claim that councils are responsible for PReP, a preventative AIDS medication. A ruling in favour of the NHS could have had far-reaching implications for councils and opened the door for claims that they are responsible for many other preventative medications.
- Achieving a number of amendments to the Homelessness Reduction Bill, addressing councils' concerns and ensuring that any new duties must be fully funded.
- Securing a number of amendments to the Housing White Paper, including a minimum 20 per

cent increase in funding for local planning developments and a commitment to further flexibilities for councils to build council homes.

- Securing further New Burdens funding for councils, to cover the cost of actions brought against them by private search companies in the wake of government's changes to regulations. The total we have secured so far stands at £45 million, with further claims pending.
- Securing extended flexibility from the Government to raise council tax by up to £5 to all district councils, where this raises more than 2 per cent; councils will benefit from this flexibility again in 2017/18 and for the remaining years of the four year settlement.

As councils continue to face tough times, it is more important than ever for us to speak with one strong voice. Councils tell us that lobbying on their behalf and defending the reputation of local government in the media are two things they value most from the LGA.

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





Welcome

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 policies 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.

Community leadership

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





Welcome

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 and 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.

These principles 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 standards matters are the responsibility of individual councils, which are required to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by councillors. You must register any disclosable pecuniary 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.

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Stephen Canning, Conservative, Braintree District Council and Essex County Council

I grew up in Braintree, Essex, and it is a real privilege to represent this area on two councils. My responsibilities are quite varied and include receiving emails, letters and the occasional knock at the door from residents with problems. This can range from bin collections being missed to anti-social behaviour and immigration issues. To answer these queries I have the support of the council officers and my fellow councillors.

On a county level, I am Cabinet Member for Digital Innovation, IT and Customer Services, which means I am responsible for all the council's IT systems, the ways our residents interact with us and how we can use technology to improve the services we provide.





Welcome

Seven principles of public life

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 change poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Stephen Canning, Conservative, Braintree District Council and Essex County Council

My advice to new councillors is:

Never be afraid to ask for advice – it's much better to find the answers to your questions than to struggle on in silence.

Set aside time to switch off – make sure your council work doesn't take over every waking hour. This will ensure you don't burn yourself out and can serve your residents well for years to come.

No matter how trivial a resident's problem may seem, treat them and their issue with utmost respect.





Welcome

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 and 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 by law the council must do them. Some mandatory functions are tightly controlled by central government, resulting in a similar level of service across the country.

Other services are discretionary: 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 have been allowed to charge for some discretionary services, such as leisure facilities, for some time. They now have a general power 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.

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.





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- 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 the councils in an area can come together to form a combined authority, with a directly elected mayor, in return for greater devolution of powers from central government. Although each deal has bespoke elements, all have some common elements:
 - a single investment fund enabling pooling of central and local funding for economic growth
 - a fully devolved adult skills budget by 2018/19, and control over post-16 further education and the apprenticeship grant for employers
 - co-design with the Department for Work and Pensions on future employment support for harder-to-help claimants
 - tailored engagement of city regions on UK Trade and Investment services
- ‘intermediate body’ status for European regional development and social funds
- power to pursue bus franchising, pooled and devolved local transport funding and smart ticketing across local modes of transport
- devolved approaches to business support
- powers over strategic planning; power to establish public land commissions to influence decisions on disposal of public assets.
- Mayors have varying degrees of power over different matters, but all share some core characteristics:
 - chairing the combined authority cabinet
 - an effective veto over some decisions, for example the decision to create a spatial strategy, which requires unanimous approval of mayor and cabinet
 - mayoral spending plans (can be rejected by cabinet members on a two-thirds majority)
 - power to take on the role of police and crime commissioner with the consent of all appropriate authorities

- member of the local enterprise partnership.
- The first six combined authority mayors (Greater Manchester, West Midlands, Liverpool City Region, Tees Valley, West of England and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough) were due to be elected in May 2017.

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 one or more tiers of local government – so a county councillor may also be a district councillor and a parish councillor.

England has 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. Wales has 22 unitary councils and 1,000 community councils.





Welcome

Devolution

The LGA has long called for more powers and funds to be devolved to local areas. Now, the new generation of combined authorities (along with some individual councils) are agreeing 'devolution deals' with government. This is when central government hands specific powers and funding to local government, in exchange for the adoption of certain governance arrangements and the promise to meet agreed targets.

The first devolution deal was with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority in 2014. Other areas have since secured deals of their own, while many are developing proposals and negotiating. The main elements of the deals signed to date include devolution of powers and funds relating to transport, skills, business support, European funding and health.

The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act (2016) provides the legal framework for this. It includes an expanded remit for combined authorities, permitting them to take on any local government function, as well as more relaxed rules about their boundaries.

Support to help councils at all stages of their devolution journey can be found on our website:

www.local.gov.uk/topics/devolution

For a simple overview please check out our 'Don't be left in the dark' guide to devolution and mayors
www.local.gov.uk/topics/devolution

How are decisions made?

Councils can operate their executive governance arrangements in 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 councils 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.

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Saima Ashraf, Labour, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

I am a single mother of three wonderful girls and Chair of Governors at the largest primary school in the country. I enjoy playing an active part in the community, especially working with the local mosque and other faith groups to bring people together.

I have always been involved in community activism, but when the BNP came to my area I knew it was time to stand up and be counted. I enjoy getting to know local residents and am proud of the regeneration masterplan we have begun.

I am one of two deputy leaders of the council and Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement. It is interesting to be able to formulate and influence policy. Juggling being a single mum with my council role is not easy, but I really enjoy my role.





Welcome

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 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 (this is covered later in this guide).

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 a separate planning and regulatory committee.

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Saima Ashraf, Labour, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

My advice for a new councillor would be:

- set yourself aims of what you want to achieve and work hard at them
- always keep an open mind without being judgemental
- get to know as much as possible about different community groups, cultures and faiths.





Welcome

How are decisions made?

Councils have obtained new powers over their executive governance arrangements allowing them to operate one of the following four models:

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- a committee system
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The LGA has produced a practical guide for councils considering changes to their governance arrangements. 'Rethinking governance' can be found at: www.cfps.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Rethinking-Governance.pdf

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Niall Hodson, Liberal Democrat, Sunderland City Council

In 2016, I became Sunderland's only Liberal Democrat councillor. I decided to stand for election because I was frustrated with the actions of the local council, and because I wanted to do my bit to help our party in the North East.

Following a by-election victory I became part of a group of two. The council chamber can be a frustrating place for a small group – it can be difficult to have as much of an impact as we would like in council and on committees, but there is a lot to be said for being a thorn in the side of the ruling group.

What I most enjoy as a councillor is knocking on doors, talking with people, keeping them informed about the decisions being made and standing up for their views in the local media and council meetings.





Welcome

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 of the council and making constitutional decisions. It is also a forum for debate on major issues affecting the authority 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.

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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 a separate planning and regulatory committee.

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

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Niall Hodson, Liberal Democrat, Sunderland City Council

My tips for new councillors are:

- for every hour you spend in the town hall, spend at least two knocking on doors
- use your support networks – for me this has been colleagues, officers, the LGA Lib Dem Group office and the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors
- you don't know it all from the off, but you learn a great deal from experience and asking lots of questions.





Welcome

a meeting. The agenda must be made 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.

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.

Officers are not accountable to individual councillors or political groups (with the exception of political assistants).

Councillor viewpoint

**Councillor Hannah Dalton,
Residents' Association,
Epsom & Ewell Borough Council**

Epsom & Ewell is one of the few councils controlled by an independent group and not linked to a national political party. For this reason, I wanted to stand as a local councillor as it was an opportunity to be an active member of my community and make a positive and lasting contribution.

Combining working full-time with my council duties can sometimes be a challenge, so there is a required discipline to put regular time aside for council work. Whether this is responding to residents, reading council papers or working on your own initiatives, little and often pays dividends.





Welcome

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 shares a senior management team or other management arrangements.

Top tips

Key to good councillor/officer relations are:

- mutual trust and respect
- an understanding of your respective roles and responsibilities
- clear and open communication
- flexibility and good work practices
- avoiding close personal familiarity.

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 duty each year, and 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. For more information go to: www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/equality-frameworks





Support

Support

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 headquarters, 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; 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 authority 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 remotely, or you may be able to join 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.





Support



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 Jane Murphy,
Conservative, South Oxfordshire
District Council**

I was elected to the council in 2015 and am Deputy Leader as well as Cabinet Member for Finance, Legal and Democratic and Licensing. I see my role as a conduit between the residents and officers, as well as with other public bodies. I generally get a couple of requests each week to help individuals or groups. These vary from queries about housing benefit, planning applications, bin collections or grant applications through to urgent issues with housing or financial concerns.

As Deputy Leader I am involved in all major decision-making within the council. As the Cabinet Member for Finance, I have regular contact with the finance team. As soon as one budget is finalised then work starts on the next. I am also expected to advise the leader and cabinet members if they wish to bring forward a project with financial implications.



Support



HIGHLIGHTING POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

THE LGA DEVELOPMENT OFFER

Councillor development programmes

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, the **Community Leadership Programme** provides resources such as e-learning tools, workbooks and in-house training events 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 popular **Young Councillor's Weekender**, which helps councillors to build networks with peers early on in their careers, and the **Effective Opposition** programme.



Support

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 leadership skills further (including group leaders, portfolio holders, portfolio shadows and committee chairs), we provide the highly respected **Leadership Academy**. Another modular programme, it delivers accredited leadership development opportunities all year round.

And for those who have reached their ambition of council leader we offer the Leaders' Programme, a course with a bespoke design according to the needs of the participants, aimed towards new council leaders in their first term of leadership. Leaders may also choose to be involved in our Leading Edge series, where we bring leaders and chief executives together to share ideas and look at the current challenges facing local government.

For more information go to:
www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership





Support

The Member Development Charter

The LGA has been working with regional employers' organisations to establish and support the Charter for Member Development. The charter signifies a commitment from a local authority to introduce a policy that supports and encourages councillor development.

All nine UK regions have signed up to the charter and a growing number of councils are pledging to introduce it for their members.

The Member Development Charter and Charter Plus provide a robust and structured framework to:

- encourage councils to develop an effective strategy or approach to member development
- recognise those councils that have developed an effective approach
- encourage councils to continue that development and share experiences and learning.



Councillor viewpoint

**Councillor Jane Murphy,
Conservative, South Oxfordshire
District Council**

My advice for new councillors is:

- attend as many training sessions as possible, both within the council and externally
- attend all group meetings and state your point of view – this is where most of the political discussion takes place
- attend parish council meetings if possible, so that people know who you are and how to contact you.





Support

Want to learn more about the key skills you need to enhance your effectiveness as a ward or division councillor?

Councillor development e-learning

As an exciting new part of the LGA's Highlighting Political Leadership offer, you can now undertake your own member development through our new e-learning portal.

Free to access, the modules are based on our community leadership resources and workbooks; providing an interactive way to ensure that you are well-equipped and well-supported to make a difference, deliver and be trusted as a local politician.

Access e-learning modules at:
<http://lms.learningnexus.co.uk/LGA/>

To sign up, simply email
elarning@local.gov.uk
to receive a user name and password.



**HIGHLIGHTING
POLITICAL
LEADERSHIP**
THE LGA DEVELOPMENT OFFER





Support

Communication

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. By law, 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 a newsworthy item, your communications team can advise you on how best to promote it.

Learn about the different communication channels

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 focus groups). A good place to find out more about developing your approach to communications is: www.local.gov.uk/index.php/our-support/guidance-and-resources/communications-support

Develop a positive relationship with the local media

Local journalists are always looking for good stories. By building and maintaining a positive relationship with the 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 will often 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 the local media's 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.





Support

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.

Meet people where they are – online and off-line

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 or email)
- hold 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 and YouTube. Make sure your content is accurate, informative, balanced and objective

– if in any doubt then check your council's social media policy

- set up a basic website, blog or vlog (video blog).

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 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.
- Be strategic: plan ahead – who do you want to engage with, why and how? What do you want to achieve?
- The internet is forever: remember that what you post now could be found in years to come.





Support

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 one of the exemptions from disclosure applies). Requests for information should be responded to as quickly as possible, and certainly 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.

Data protection

The Data Protection Act 1998 regulates how personal data (information about a living person) is held and processed. It applies to information held electronically or on paper. Personal data includes, but is not limited to, a person's name, address, religion, ethnicity, trade union membership, political opinions, criminal convictions and physical or mental health.

The Act states that personal data should be:

- processed fairly and lawfully
- only kept for one or more specified and lawful purpose(s)
- adequate, relevant and not excessive for the specified purpose(s)
- accurate and kept up-to-date
- kept for no longer than is necessary

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Amanda Chadderton, Labour, Oldham Council

I work for Manchester City Council as a senior licensing officer and I'm a season ticket holder at Manchester City Football Club. I studied politics at university and did some work experience with an MP, which enabled me to become active within the local party. Back home after university, I was asked to help out with the local election. I spent nearly two years getting to know people and campaigning before I was elected as a councillor.

What I enjoy most is the ability to make a difference. You have the knowledge and contacts to help resolve issues for people. I am Cabinet Member for Education, which brings a varied workload. Working full-time and being a cabinet member requires plenty of time management, so I have learnt to prioritise and say 'no' sometimes.





Support

- processed in line with the rights of individuals (individuals can ask to see data relating to them and requests must be responded to within 40 days)
- secured against accidental loss, destruction, damage, unauthorised or unlawful processing
- not transferred outside the European Economic Area, except in certain circumstances.

If you handle personal data in line with the spirit of these principles, you will go a long way to ensuring that you comply with the law. The General Data Protection Regulation is due to become applicable in May 2018, placing new obligations on bodies subject to the Data Protection Act. Data protection law is a complex subject – if in doubt, talk to your council's data protection or legal officer.

The Data Protection Act requires every organisation or person processing personal data to register as a data controller with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), unless they are exempt. Failure to do so can result in a fine.

As a councillor, there are three ways in which you might use personal data:

1. When considering issues and making decisions as part of the council's business, for example in committees or working groups. This should be covered by your council's notification.
2. As a member of a political party canvassing for votes or working for the party. This is usually covered by the party's notification, but do check. If you are not a member of a political party you will have to notify the ICO yourself if you wish to process personal data in this way.
3. Carrying out casework in your ward/division. In this case you are the data controller and are required to notify the ICO yourself.

It is for each councillor to determine whether they should notify as a data controller. You should consider what personal information you hold and process in relation to your casework and, if necessary, submit formal notification on the ICO website.

Further advice can be found at:
www.ico.org.uk

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Amanda Chadderton, Labour, Oldham Council

My tips for new councillors would be:

- make friends – the first year is hard work and there will be ups and downs, so having people you can turn to makes it less daunting
- prioritise casework – first and foremost you are there for your local residents
- enjoy it – being a councillor is a privilege.





Support

Open data

Since 2010 there has been strong emphasis on transparency in government, with an expectation by the public of more local government 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.

During 2016-17, we have developed a series of easy to follow online eLearning modules 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 both council officers and councillors

and describe practical examples and case studies for promoting better use and re-use of data.

The eLearning modules are here: <http://lga.learndata.info>

Using data

In 2016, the LGA ran a series of projects to identify good practice on data use and information management. It assembled a range of case studies, online support and training aids to encourage councils to learn from each other and maximise the benefits that can be made from the data they hold. These resources include:

- Wise Council, a final report with case studies of councils making better use of data to improve efficiencies and service delivery
- a suite of eLearning modules
- the powers and duties tool, which helps to explain the legislation framework

LG Inform, which 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 and facilities and population demographics.

For further information see: www.local.gov.uk/our-support/benchmarking-data-lg-inform





Support

Local
Government
Association

Know your patch

Have you ever wondered what proportion of your residents are employed or how many local schoolchildren are obese? How does that compare to other places?



LG Inform gives you and your council easy access to up-to-date published data about your local area and the performance of your council and fire and rescue service.

Whether you're interested in scrutiny, a particular service area, or simply need an overview, it can help you review and compare performance with other authorities and assess whether your council is meeting your residents' needs.

► To view LG Inform and register visit: www.lginform.local.gov.uk





Community leadership

Community leadership

Local government finance

The local government finance system was never designed as a coherent whole. It 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).

Councils cannot use capital resources to fund their revenue expenses without specific government authorisation.

For example, staff salaries cannot generally be paid using the proceeds from the sale of a building.

Spending reviews

Central government plans spending on a multi-year basis through Spending Reviews. The 2015 review set total public sector budgets until 2020. By then, councils will have seen a reduction of almost 60 per cent in their external funding in the decade since 2010.

Local authorities find out their individual figures for the next financial year in December through the draft local government finance settlement. Once it is approved by Parliament in February, councils know how much they will get from the government. They can then estimate the total business rates they will collect and 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.

Currently, councils find out their individual figures for the next financial year in December through the draft

local government finance settlement. Once this is approved by Parliament in February, councils know how much they will get from the government. They can then estimate the total business rates they will collect and 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 the expected income from other sources.

In 2015, a four-year settlement was announced. The figures for the second year of this settlement were confirmed by Parliament in February 2017. Councils were invited to sign up to an 'offer' covering the following three years by October 2016; 97 per cent of councils signed up.

From 2019/20, when the new 100 per cent business rates retention scheme is introduced, it is expected that there will no longer be an annual local government finance settlement. Instead, finance settlements will cover a number of years.

For a simple overview please check our 'Don't be left in the dark' guide to business rates retention: www.local.gov.uk/topics/finance-and-business-rates/business-rates





Community leadership



Setting council tax

Dividing the council tax requirement by the 'council tax base' (roughly speaking, the number of properties in the area) will give the council tax that must be charged for a band D property. The rates for other bands are a fixed portion of the band D charge.

Councils must hold a local referendum if they want to raise council tax above a threshold decided by central government. The result is binding so they must have a contingency plan in place, with a rise below the threshold, in case of a 'no' vote. In 2017/18, councils with responsibility for social care could raise a 'social care precept' of three per cent in addition to the two per cent referendum limit, so a total of five per cent (although the total increase to 2019/20 for adult social care will not be able to exceed six per cent of the 2016/17 council tax). Other councils will be able to raise their council tax by whichever is larger of £5 or two per cent.

Business rates

Business rates are a tax levied on non-residential properties. Until 2013, business rates collected by

councils were paid into a central pot to be redistributed as grant funding. Since then, councils have been able to retain a portion of business rates raised locally – the 'local share'. Central government sets the maximum increase in the business rates multiplier and decides what share of business rates can be kept by councils (currently 50 per cent).

This means that a council receives more funding if it experiences real-terms growth in its local business rates base and loses funding if it experiences a reduction. It is designed to incentivise councils to promote local economic growth by rewarding them for every new business they help to put on the map.

From 2019/20, local government as a whole will be allowed to keep all of the business rates it collects. The Local Government Finance Bill currently going through Parliament will provide a legislative framework for this. There is much work to be done on how this will be introduced. It may involve councils taking on responsibility for more services, as the Government wants the transfer to be fiscally neutral.

Five areas (Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, West Midlands, Cornwall and the West of England) are piloting 100 per cent business rates retention in 2017/18.

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 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



Community leadership

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 an 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 and is spent on services that benefit local people. Most revenue comes from:

- business rates, the 'local share' and the net effect of any tariff or top-up
- revenue support grant, the largest single grant stream, funded mainly from the 'central share' of business rates, which is non-ring-fenced (so can be spent on anything)
- 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 income. Councils also receive a 'new homes bonus' for any increase in the number of residential properties in their area to encourage housing growth.

For more information, visit: www.local.gov.uk/topics/finance-and-business-rates





Community leadership

Holding the council to account

Overview and scrutiny

Overview and scrutiny lies at the heart of local accountability. It is 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 profile and influence of health scrutiny has grown in recent years – it is now playing a particularly important role as the NHS locally consults on and agrees sustainability and transformation plans (STPs).

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 cabinet to be either accepted or rejected.

Where councils come together to form a combined authority, it 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.

Getting it right

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 cabinet and external partners, and make recommendations clearly based on evidence rather than partisan politics, 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.





Community leadership



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 an important 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.

Centre for Public Scrutiny

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 with a scrutiny role.

Visit www.cfps.org.uk for more information and a range of case studies; telephone 020 3866 5100 or email info@cfps.org.uk for advice.

The Ombudsmen

Local Government Ombudsman

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) looks at complaints about most council services including planning, education, adult and children's social care, housing benefit, council tax, transport and highways, environment and waste, neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour, and some housing services (homelessness applications, housing allocations and transfers). It also considers complaints about adult social care where the service is provided by a private care provider.

By law, councils should have an opportunity to consider and respond to complaints before they are referred to the LGO, and it will not consider a

complaint unless this has happened. It will consider a complaint if someone has suffered a significant personal injustice and the council has not taken, or is unwilling to take, satisfactory action to resolve it.

The LGO 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 LGO managing the joint investigation.

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

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) fulfils the two statutory roles of parliamentary commissioner for administration (the Parliamentary Ombudsman) and the health service commissioner for England (Health Service Ombudsman).

Their role is to investigate unresolved complaints, unfair treatment and poor



Community leadership



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 and education

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 council 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 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. 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.

Education and training

Despite considerable changes in national education policy over recent years, councils 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



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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.

Councils must ensure there are enough good-quality school places locally. Many areas are facing a large rise in demand. 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 also maintain a major role in the allocation of school funding.

Young people must continue in education, training or apprenticeships to the age of 18. Councils must secure sufficient education and training provision for everyone aged 16-19 and people aged 20-24 with a learning difficulty. They must also identify and track any young person not in education, training or employment.

Councils have few formal levers to fulfil these duties and so rely on relationships with key local partners

to deliver this provision. They include schools, further education and work-based learning providers and neighbouring councils (to support young people learning or training in another local authority area).

Adult social care and health

Adult social care

Adult social care and support is critical to the wellbeing of people with a range of often complex needs, their carers and families and our wider communities. The system is operating under a new legal framework following the implementation of the Care Act in 2015. This was shaped by major inquiries and commissions such as the Dilnot Commission (which reviewed the funding system for care and support) and the Law Commission's work to review the laws and statutes covering care and support.

The Care Act is built on the principle of promoting individual wellbeing, defined in broad terms to include physical, mental, social, economic or

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Liz Morris, Liberal Democrat, London Borough of Haringey

My background is in marketing, and when I was a stay-at-home mum with young children I volunteered with a local community group. I was never happier than when I was in the throes of a busy campaign to either stop or save something. Becoming a councillor felt like a natural next step. In any one day I can be dealing with a planning application or unpaid benefits, problems with refuse collections or campaigning to save a local pub.

I sit on the Corporate Parenting Committee (which ensures the council is fulfilling its duty to looked-after children) and the Children's Scrutiny Committee. I am Haringey's Lib Dem spokesperson for children and education and deputy leader of our council group. Being a councillor and having a family can be a juggle at times but I have become a master multi-tasker.



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emotional wellbeing. It embeds the concept of personalisation and gives individuals more control over their care and support.

All councils with social services responsibilities in England must be consistent in their assessment of people's needs and must follow a new 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.

The Act introduced universal deferred payment agreements (subject to some qualifying conditions) to help prevent people having to sell their homes to pay for care. It also introduced a cap on the amount that people have to contribute towards their care costs, which has been delayed until 2020.

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)
- safeguarding adults at risk of abuse or neglect
- provider failure and market oversight
- transition to adult services.

Funding for adult social care and support is a key issue for councils. The LGA has been vocal in highlighting the pressure on adult social care and the consequences of underfunding including the risk of more providers leaving the market or going bust, increased unmet need, further pressure on the care workforce and informal carers, and a reduced ability of social care to help deal with pressures facing the NHS. The LGA has argued for urgent government funding to make the system more sustainable and in the Spring Budget, the Chancellor announced that councils will receive £2 billion of new funding over the next three

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Liz Morris, Liberal Democrat, London Borough of Haringey

My 'top tips' would be:

- If something doesn't make sense then do question it. The way things are done is not always the best way.
- Be courteous to council officers, thank them for their help and get their side of a story before rushing to a resident's defence.
- Don't say yes to every meeting: you must prioritise, otherwise you will spend your life in meetings.





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years, including £1 billion in 2017/18. While this is good news for local government, short-term pressures remain and the challenge of finding a long-term solution to the social care crisis is far from over.

For a simple overview please check out our 'Don't be left in the dark' guide to adult social care: www.local.gov.uk/topics/social-care-health-and-integration/adult-social-care

Care and health improvement

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 may rely on their council for support and services.

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.

The LGA has the ability to represent the social care sector and is in a unique position to bridge the interface between national policy and local implementation. Through the Care and Health Improvement Programme we are working with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) and the Department of Health on a range of social care improvement and health integration initiatives. The 2017/18 programme of work will use sector-led improvement to focus on:

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

Further information on care and health improvement can be found at: www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/care-and-health-improvement

For more information on adult social care, visit: www.local.gov.uk/topics/social-care-health-and-integration/adult-social-care

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) is widening. This has led to major change in the way service providers work together to identify health priorities and improve outcomes.

Since the Health and Social Care Act 2012 was introduced, all unitary and county councils must:

- set up health and wellbeing boards
- develop 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).



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Health and wellbeing boards

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. Their membership includes 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.

Public health

In 2013, responsibility for the delivery of public health services such as smoking cessation, drug and alcohol treatment and sexual health services transferred from the NHS to local government and Public Health England. This 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.

For further information go to:
www.local.gov.uk/topics/social-care-health-and-integration/public-health

Transfer of 0-5s health

In 2015, responsibility for commissioning the Healthy Child Programme (HCP) for 0-5 year olds transferred from NHS England to upper-tier and unitary authorities. New responsibilities include delivering five mandated universal health checks in addition to the HCP and commissioning health visiting and family nursing services.

Unlike the previous public health transfer, only the commissioning transferred and not the workforce, which is still employed by the provider organisations. The transfer joins up commissioning for 0-19 year olds (and up to 25 for people with special educational needs or disabilities) and will improve continuity for children and families. It presents a unique opportunity for health and wellbeing boards to transform and integrate children's services across health, education and social care and focus on improving outcomes for children and young people.





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Councillors and health

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 be non-executive directors on the boards of mental health, community and acute trusts or involved in voluntary and community organisations. The LGA has produced 'A councillor's guide to the health system in England' which is available on its website.

Further information can be found at: www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-health-system-england

Health and care integration

The Care Act places a duty on councils to promote integration, and health and wellbeing boards have a duty to encourage integrated working. However, integration is not an end in itself – it is a means of improving health and wellbeing outcomes by joining up services and making the best use of public resources. The LGA is committed to supporting councils and their health partners to escalate the scale and pace of integration of health and social care.

In 2016, we published 'Stepping up to the plate: the key to successful integration' with the NHS Confederation, NHS Clinical Commissioners and the ADASS, setting out our system-wide vision for a fully integrated health and care system. We also produced a self-assessment framework for local system leaders to assess their own readiness to drive forward integration, and introduced facilitated integration workshops as part of our care and health improvement offer to councils and their health partners.

The Better Care Fund

The £5.3bn 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 supporting existing joint work. However, the way in which the fund was set up from existing funding streams, financial pressures on the public sector and

the complexity of the conditions attached to the fund means that the impact has been less positive in some places.

The LGA is working with NHS England and government departments to ensure that the fund continues to meet its original objectives and improve the system. The ultimate aim is for all areas to reach a level of integration that no longer requires mandatory national action, but until then we recognise the continuing contribution of the BCF.

Sustainability and transformation plans

Sustainability and transformation plans (STPs) are part of a new planning framework for NHS services. They are strategic, multi-year plans running to 2021 which aim to address the three major challenges facing health and care systems: health and wellbeing, quality and safety and finance and efficiency. Across England there are 44 STPs that cover the full range of health services, from primary care to specialist services, with an expectation that they also cover local government provision.





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The LGA has worked hard to ensure that STPs help to strengthen local relationships across health and care services in order to develop clear transformation plans. They have huge potential to reshape and integrate health and care services for the benefit of local communities. However, there are concerns about how the process has been implemented in some areas – in particular, the lack of meaningful engagement with councillors and communities.

For further information on STPs, go to: www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/care-and-health-improvement/integration-and-better-care-fund

Councils and the economy

Although the national economy is growing, in many areas businesses are still struggling to stay afloat, unemployment (especially youth unemployment) remains high, and some people are finding it increasingly difficult to feed and clothe their families. Economic recovery has been uneven across the country.

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

- working with colleges and training providers to ensure that local people have the skills that they, and local businesses, need
- supporting growth and investment in new and existing businesses, for example through the regulatory services
- enhancing the quality of life for their communities and making local areas more attractive to shoppers and business investment

- improving infrastructure – for example through improved transport or broadband.

Economies do not follow council boundaries – for example, people travel to work in different areas. Councils have 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 allow 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 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 people’s career opportunities, as set out in the proposals for a national Industrial Strategy. Mayoral combined authorities appear to be central government’s favoured structure for further devolution of economic-related powers to local areas.





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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. They play a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and job creation. LEPs usually receive funding from their constituent councils and from central government, and businesses may offer support 'in kind'.

For more information, visit:
<http://www.local.gov.uk/index.php/topics/economic-growth>

Hot topic: digital connectivity

Councillors are increasingly campaigning to improve people's access to digital connectivity. They can play an important role in linking up communities, mobile operators and broadband infrastructure suppliers.

Improving a local area's mobile coverage often demands the building or upgrading of mobile phone masts. In this situation, councillors can represent the views of their community to mobile operators and 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 superfast broadband programme is forecast to connect 95 per cent of premises with superfast speed by the end of 2017. For areas without adequate download speeds, the government will launch a broadband 'universal speed obligation' to give all residents and businesses the right to request an improved speed from a provider.

The LGA's 'Up to Speed' campaign aims to ensure that every resident and business has access to faster broadband. Find out more at:
www.lguptospeed.org





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Culture, heritage and sport

Culture, heritage and sport services are among the most used and highly valued of local authority services. Most of these services are of a non-statutory (optional) 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 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.

Hot topic: library services

As a local councillor, you can play a key role in encouraging people to reach their full potential, meet up with like-minded individuals and develop their business ideas – all through local libraries.

Like all services, libraries are facing financial pressure. Proposals to change the way they are delivered can cause concern among the community. As a councillor, you can ensure that your residents are fully involved in discussions around the future of their library service.

Libraries are about much more than just books. They can offer:

- a safe space for study and learning
- digital skills training and access to computers and the internet
- access to business information for budding entrepreneurs and small businesses
- 'books on prescription', promoting public health
- a place for cultural and artistic activities, bringing communities together.

Find out more about the Government's ambitions for public libraries at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-to-2021>





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Welfare reform

The Government is implementing major reform of the welfare benefits system, which began under the previous Coalition. 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 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. This generated savings (against projected spend) of around £16 billion under the previous government, although overall spending on welfare remained static (largely due to the protection of pensioner benefits). The current Government is looking to make a further £12 billion of savings.

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 and simplifies the main working-age benefits into one monthly payment per household. The Government now expects to have Universal Credit available for all new claimants from July 2019, and for all claimants on existing benefits to be transferred onto Universal Credit by 2022. Most claims will be made and managed online.

Support for housing costs, which was previously often paid directly to landlords as housing benefit, will instead be provided as part of the Universal Credit payment. Responsibility for administering housing benefit is transferring from councils to the DWP. However, councils will still administer pension credit, which provides housing payments for older residents.

Councils and their local partners will continue to have a key role in helping

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Mark Stephenson, UKIP, Tendring District Council

I became a councillor in 2015 and the UKIP councillors then elected me as group leader. I stood for office because I'm not one for idly moaning but prefer to get involved and make a difference.

Ward work is one of the most rewarding things about being a councillor. I love the sense of achievement when community projects I initiated are completed. There is something very satisfying about the pride and community feeling that you can bring together in an area.



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people to make Universal Credit claims, manage their finances and access housing and employment. Provision of this support, together with access to other services relevant to claimants, is called Universal Support. In some areas, councils have worked with the DWP and other partners to reconfigure services so support is delivered from a single location, to improve efficiency and customer experience.

Within Universal Credit, considerable changes are being made to work-related benefits – in particular through reductions to working tax credits and bringing Employment Support Allowance in line with Jobseekers 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; and £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.

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 exemptions. 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 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 the main way in which it hopes to realise the £12 billion of planned savings. It is likely to have a considerable impact on residents in higher-cost areas.

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Mark Stephenson, UKIP, Tendring District Council

Outside of politics, I am married to Gemma and have two wonderful children. I run a successful design, print and distribution business and enjoy adrenalin-fed sports. I'm lucky in that my business is fully staffed and I can set my hours to work around council commitments. It does, however, flow over into family life: depending on how effective a councillor you want to be, expect to do a lot of reading in the evenings.

My advice for new councillors is:

- don't try to understand everything, very few people on the council do
- read and digest: this will grow your confidence
- don't be afraid to ask questions – you're new and people expect it.





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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.

Councils and the environment

Planning

As a councillor you are likely to become 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 PAS is a grant-funded programme, some of its support is offered free of charge.

To find out more visit:
www.local.gov.uk/pas

The Local Plan

This is written by the council 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 national policy, as set out in 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 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





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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.

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 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.

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 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.

Addressing climate change can help councils achieve other local priorities such as creating 'green jobs', delivering sustainable housing and improving residents' health. Embedding resilience as part of effective long-term planning for a changing climate is an integral part of ensuring business continuity,





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safeguarding people and places, protecting and enhancing the natural environment and contributing to a resilient economy.

A range of resources to help councils understand the business case and take action on climate change can be found at:

www.local.gov.uk/climate-local

Hot topic: flooding

As a local councillor, you can play a key role in encouraging communities to improve their resilience to flooding. Did you know...

- in the UK today, some 5.2 million properties are at risk of flooding
- flood damage costs around £1.1 billion each year.

Unitary and county councils are responsible for local flood risk management. As the lead local flood authority, they work with other risk management organisations to manage flood risk from all sources. Their responsibilities include:

- investigating and reporting flooding
- managing flood risk from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses
- producing a local flood risk management strategy
- being a statutory consultee on major planning applications with surface water drainage implications.

Further information can be found at:
www.local.gov.uk/floodportal

Transport

Councils play a vital role in keeping people and businesses moving so 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 local authorities 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 carbon emissions and improve public health and safety, while also improving the local and sub-regional economy.





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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 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 provide public transport as a part of their wider overall 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 fares 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 community and voluntary 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 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.





Community leadership

Safer, stronger communities

Police and crime panels

All areas outside London have directly elected police and crime commissioners (PCCs) who are responsible for holding the local police service to account. In London, the elected mayor performs this function. These commissioners have a duty to ensure that there is an efficient and effective force in their area, to 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, the panel is a committee of the Greater London Assembly. Police and crime panels must scrutinise the PCC's police and crime plan, the annual report on progress against that plan, 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).

A different system operates in the City of London.

For more on the role of PCCs, visit the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners website:

www.apccs.police.uk

Fire and rescue services

Fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) are responsible for delivering fire and rescue services. These fall into four distinct categories. In some areas, fire and rescue is part of the county council. In others, it is delivered by a stand-alone 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 it falls to the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (a functional body of the Greater London Authority).

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 the service's policy and delivery. Councillors on county or unitary

councils can be nominated to serve on these FRAs by their councils. County councils with responsibility for fire and rescue will have a portfolio holder leading on these services.

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 allows police and crime commissioners to take over the governance of fire and rescue services, or to become a part of the FRA. PCCs will have to consult the affected local authorities, communities and employees, and where there is local disagreement put together a business case for the Secretary of State to decide on. Devolution will also have an impact on FRAs – for example in Greater Manchester, responsibility will fall to the elected mayor.

Community cohesion and counter-terrorism

The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 placed a duty on councils to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism – the Prevent duty. Under this duty, councillors are expected to play a key role in countering terrorism.





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Councillors are well placed to work with their communities and other partners to promote community cohesion, counter extremism and identify those most at risk of being drawn into extremism. If necessary, they can refer individuals to the local Channel panel, which provides support to at-risk individuals.

Public protection services

Public protection services in councils (usually taken to include environmental health, trading standards and licensing) have two important functions: protecting communities and supporting local businesses. Around half of all business contact with councils is through public protection 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.

As they are relatively small, public protection services have been hit particularly hard by reduced budgets. Some councils face real challenges in ensuring these

services are sustainable. The LGA has been working with councils and professional bodies to explore how this can be addressed.

The LGA offers an online resource for councillors looking at how public protection services can support the needs of businesses and residents. The LGA offers an online training module for councillors looking at how public protection services can support local businesses and residents.

To access it, go to:
www.local.gov.uk/regulatory-services-training-module-councillors

Licensing

Licensing exists to protect consumers and businesses, and to support local 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 and overseeing local taxi services and betting shops. Councillors have a specific role in licensing through the work of licensing committees. Councillors' guides to the different areas of licensing can be found on the LGA website.

The LGA has argued through its 'Rewiring Licensing' proposals that licensing frameworks should be reviewed and updated to deliver a de-regulatory approach that frees up businesses and council time while maintaining important safeguards. Some councils have begun piloting new approaches to licensing. The Government responded to the LGA by calling on councils to work to implement a single, online licensing application process from 2018. The LGA is working with councils and central government to support this reform.

For more information, visit
www.local.gov.uk/topics/licences-regulations-and-trading-standards





Community leadership

The voluntary and community sector

The term 'voluntary and community sector' (VCS) covers a range of voluntary and community 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.

In the past, most councils gave grants to local VCS organisations, either to cover their core costs or to contribute to a particular aspect of their work. This model has developed in recent years, with councils often directly commissioning VCS organisations to deliver specific outcomes or services. Some councils have created new VCS organisations to directly deliver services previously delivered by the council, such as youth services, libraries and children's centres.

Given their evolving role, many VCS organisations employ significant numbers of local people or 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.

More information is available from the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (www.ncvo.org.uk), the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (www.navca.org.uk) and Social Enterprise UK (www.socialenterprise.org.uk).

The LGA is working to support councils to better engage their communities in the design and delivery of services, and details of this can be found at: www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/community-action





Community leadership

Improvement, efficiency and innovation

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
- peer challenge

- performance comparison with others
- our productivity programme.

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

For more information about the sector-led approach to local government improvement, visit: www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/what-sector-led-improvement

Peer challenge

A peer challenge allows councils to review and transform their services and 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. Every council is entitled to 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 which includes 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.





Community leadership

Recent corporate peer challenges have focused on:

- providing an external '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.

For more information visit: www.local.gov.uk/our-support/peer-challenges

Efficiency and innovation

Councils are constantly finding new and innovative ways of delivering services and improving the lives of people in their local communities. The LGA collates examples of these initiatives within the searchable case studies section of its website: www.local.gov.uk/case-studies

The Productivity programme includes a range of initiatives designed to help councils reshape their services and

increase efficiency. Nowadays, that inevitably means a focus on saving money and generating income.

The programme has three main areas of activity:

- **transforming services** either to make them more efficient and less wasteful or to find more effective ways of delivering services
- **smarter sourcing** through commissioning and buying services, goods and works that contribute to local outcomes more effectively and, where possible, more cheaply, and managing the resulting contracts to optimise value
- **generating income** – generating a greater proportion of funding locally, such as by commercialising the council's existing skills, assets or commodities or investing to grow the local economy to generate wealth for the area.

At a time of immense financial pressure and increasing public expectations, councils face their greatest challenge yet to reshape services in a way that meets local need and is cost-effective. New

councillors are in a unique position to be able to look with fresh eyes at how their council does things.

Cost-saving questions for newly elected councillors to ask

1. Given the budget restrictions required by all councils, how clearly articulated and understood is the political vision for the future role, size and shape of your council?
2. With the Government's plan to make local government financially self-sufficient, does your council have a strategy for achieving long-term financial sustainability?
3. Does the council influence how the resources held by other partners in the local area are prioritised and spent?
4. Does the council have a prioritised medium-term financial strategy for the next four years which allows for the appropriate level of reserves?
5. Have all potential savings been identified and agreed for the next few years, and is the council on track to make these savings?





Community leadership

6. What is the council doing to manage future demand for services – for example by focusing on prevention of need or getting things right first time?
7. Does the council have a shared services strategy to reduce management, support and back-office costs while protecting front-line services?
8. Does the council and its partners have a comprehensive view of the publicly-owned assets in the local area, is this published openly and are they being used to generate income?
9. Does the council negotiate its contracts with outside suppliers to maximise opportunities for making savings and adding social value?
10. Is the council working with a full range of social care providers to reduce the need for high-cost directly provided children's and adult social care?
11. What is the council doing to generate more income? Are there plans to increase access to services and information online and by smartphone to enable more customers to self-serve and increase business opportunities?

For more information, visit:

www.local.gov.uk/our-support/efficiency-and-income-generation





Information

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
- civil emergencies
- communities
- 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
- social care, health and trading standards
- transport
- welfare reform.

First is a monthly magazine sent to councillors and chief executives in LGA member councils. The online version is at: www.local.gov.uk/about/news/first-magazine

Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Simon Bull, Green Party, Bournemouth Borough Council

I put myself forward for the 2015 election as I was frustrated at not having a Green Party candidate to vote for in the past. I was selected to stand in my local ward and was surprised and delighted to win by nine votes (14 at the recount!). I am one of only three opposition members on the council. I joined the Audit and Governance Committee, Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Corporate Parenting Panel and Appeals Board.

I enjoy my council work, especially dealing with residents' issues. I have been involved in keeping local public conveniences open, getting the council to act on flooding problems and smaller things such as graffiti removal, fly-tipped items removal, pothole repairs, parking issues – things that make life a bit better if they are dealt with. I believe that I can influence the council's decisions despite being one voice out of 54.

Information





Information



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

Political group offices with Twitter handles 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 2017.

The Councillors' Guide 2017/18 is available to download free of charge from the LGA website: www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-2017



Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Simon Bull, Green Party, Bournemouth Borough Council

My tips for new councillors are:

- When first elected I was encouraged by an experienced councillor to ask a question at the first full council meeting and get it out of the way.
- Don't try to do everything – focus on issues that interest you and your local residents.
- Work with other councillors if you can. They may not see things in quite the same way but there could be mutually beneficial outcomes.



Our online guide for new councillors



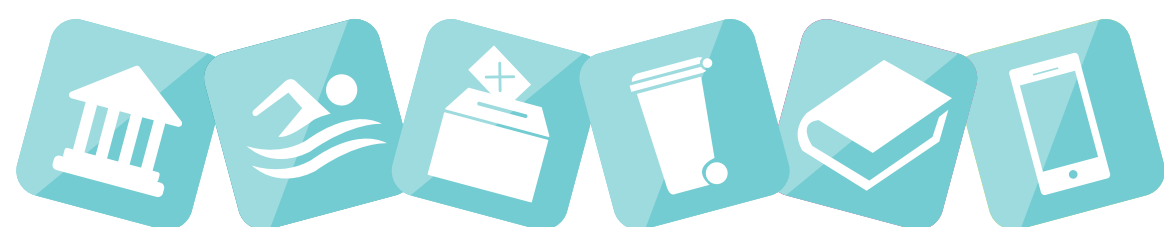
Being elected as a councillor is only the beginning. To help you get the best start, the LGA has designed an online resource to provide you with the key information that you need to know as a new councillor. As well as exploring some of the main issues and challenges facing local government today, you can find:

- the Councillors' Guide in an easily accessible format
- a quick reference tool
- hints and tips from experienced councillors
- links to other useful information.

Support also comes in the form of our Community Leadership Programme, which is part of 'Highlighting Political Leadership' – the LGA's development offer for councillors. The Community Leadership Programme offers a choice of different learning methods, with resources ranging from e-learning modules to self-guided workbooks and training events.

Find out more at:
www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-2017

Information





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