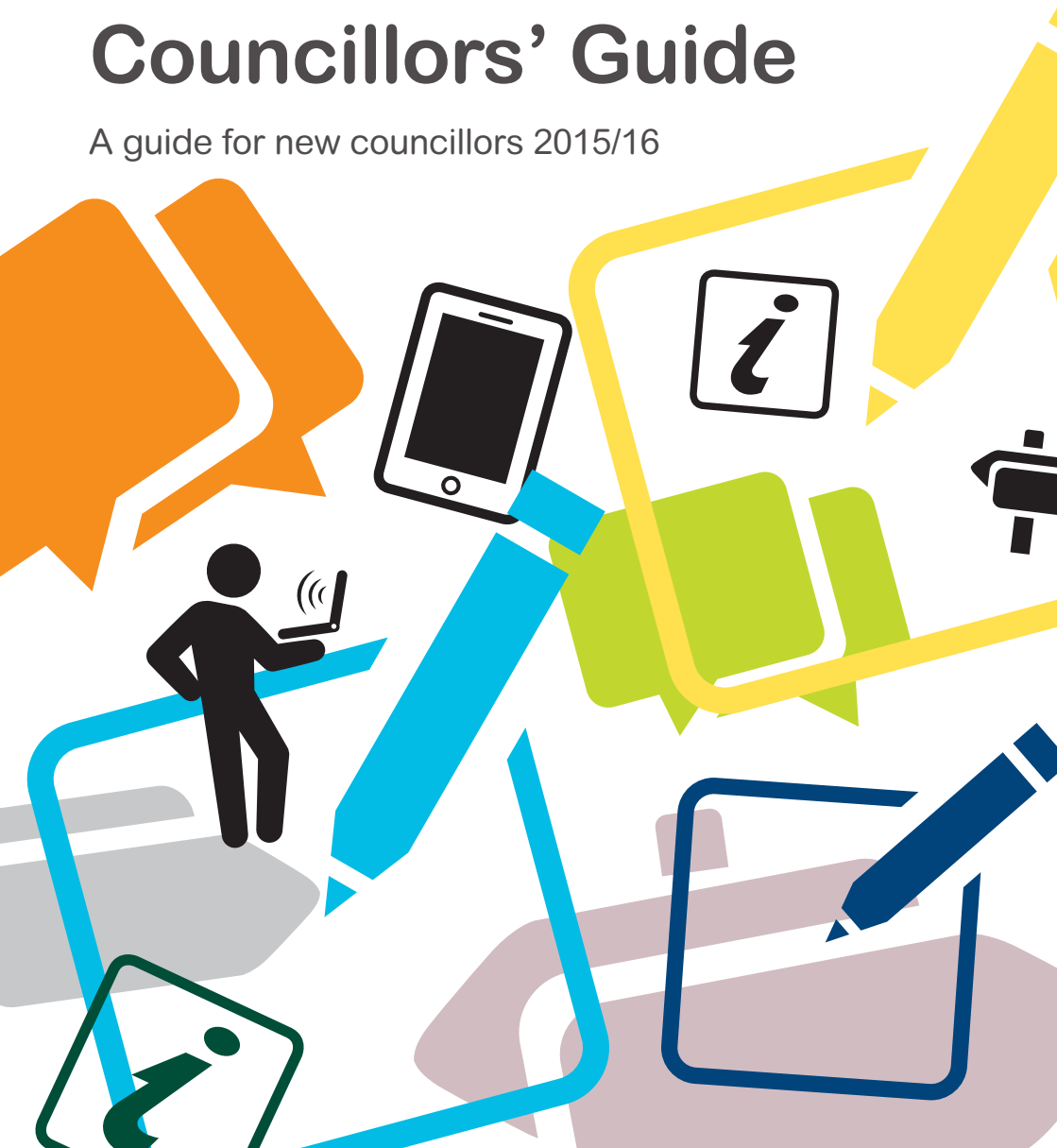


A guide for new councillors 2015/16

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Welcome to local government!

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. 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 in this guide about the areas in which you may become involved. You can find lots of further information on the LGA website: www.local.gov.uk

Foreword

On behalf of the LGA, I offer you my warmest congratulations on becoming a councillor. Taking office is one of the most important civic duties anyone can perform. Elected members hold a unique position and have the potential to make a real difference to people's lives.

You have entered local government at a time of unprecedented challenge and change, and at times you will face difficult decisions as demand for services increases and funding from central government falls. This guide offers practical advice on being a councillor and sets out the range of services the LGA can offer to help you in your role.

The LGA has over 400 member authorities, covering almost every part of England and Wales. They include county, district and metropolitan councils, English and Welsh unitary councils and London boroughs, along with fire and rescue authorities, national park authorities and town councils. Together they represent more than 50 million people and spend over £90 billion a year on local services.

The LGA is politically-led and cross-party, and works by consensus with and on behalf of councils to give local government a strong, credible voice nationally. We lobby and campaign in Westminster and Brussels on behalf of councils in England and Wales.

Local government is trusted by residents over national government and we firmly believe that councils and councillors are best placed to respond to the challenges, deliver excellent public services and lead communities to a secure future. As a councillor you will be at the forefront of these debates and I hope you find it an exciting and positive place to be.

Being elected as a councillor is only the start of your journey in local government. We are here to support you every step of the way, so please do make best use of this guide and of the services the LGA offers.



Councillor David Sparks OBE
Chair of the LGA

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1. 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 elected to one of our member councils, you automatically have access to the 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 a 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 centre 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 the local government sector.

Campaigning on your behalf

One of the LGA's key roles is to campaign on behalf of our members on issues 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.

In 2014 we launched the 'First 100 days' document, setting out our key asks of a new government. This major campaign followed on from the 2013 campaign 'Rewiring public services', which proposed new approaches to public service delivery in an environment of ever-reducing funding. Together, these two campaigns have transformed the debate about the future of public services and brought to the attention of national politicians the challenges faced locally by councils.

As councils continue to face tough times, it has never been more important 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.

In the last year more than 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.

Working closely with councils, we have secured some substantial funding 'wins' across the country, including:

- a landfill tax freeze in 2015/16, saving local authorities nearly £60 million
- an extra £4 million for the regions and £19 million for individual councils to support local implementation of the Care Act
- a £168 million 'pothole fund'
- agreement that councils will retain 100 per cent of business rates from fracking
- additional schools capacity funding of £2.35 billion for 2015-17
- an extra £270 million for flood defences over the next three years, £184 million for road repairs and £135 million for recovery schemes
- an additional £300 million in borrowing for the housing revenue account (15 councils have already been awarded £60 million from this initiative).

We have also:

- recovered over 95 per cent of the money councils had deposited with the failed Icelandic banks back in 2008, bringing the total sum retrieved to over £1 billion
- set up a municipal bonds agency to offer councils cheaper borrowing for capital projects than would otherwise be available
- established Public Sector Auditor Appointments Ltd to continue to deliver savings in excess of £100 million over two years in fees paid by councils to external auditors.

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

2. 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 local 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.

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.

Good communication and engagement is central to being an effective local representative. Working with local organisations, such as the parish or town council, is one way to keep in touch. Chapter 5 examines some ideas to help you become a more effective communicator.

Community leadership

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

Developing council policy

Councils need clear strategies and policies to enable them to achieve their vision for the area, make the best use of resources and deliver

services that meet the needs of local communities. As a local councillor you will contribute to the development of these policies and strategies, bringing the views and priorities of your local area to the debate. How you do this will depend on the committees and other forums you are appointed to. However, the council's policy framework must be signed off by full council, on which every councillor sits.

As a new councillor you may be appointed to the overview and scrutiny committee. For more information on what that entails see Chapter 8.

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 licenses 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.

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 next page). 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 and locally, and everyone appointed to work 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 local authorities, which are required to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by elected members. 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.

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 Sean Anstee

Conservative
Trafford Council

Prior to becoming Leader of Trafford Council, I spent 11 years working in banking. I live in Trafford with my partner Thomas and our dog Stanley. We enjoy travelling and have visited many far-flung places, but we also like spending time in the UK countryside.

I was first elected in 2008. I am opinionated and get very frustrated when organisations find reasons not to do something – my approach is to challenge that and ensure Trafford Council can thrive and work for the interests of local people in all that it does.

As Council Leader I have a portfolio responsibility for Reshaping Trafford, our programme to take the council to 2018 through continued austerity. The choice is whether you idly stand by through austerity or do something about it – I'd rather do something about it.

My biggest frustration is the pace and speed of decision making alongside the amount that needs to be achieved. Politics is addictive and I enjoy it immensely, although I try to keep Sunday to myself.

My 'top tips' for new councillors would be:

- settle in, be yourself and make a difference for your local residents.

3. 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 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. More recently, the Localism Act 2011 and 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, which means 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 are councils set up in 1974 covering large urban areas.
- London boroughs are unitary councils, although the Greater London Authority provides some services including fire, police, transport and strategic planning.
- Unitary authorities may cover a whole county, part of a county or a large town or city. For example, Cornwall Council, Nottingham City Council and Reading Borough Council are all unitary councils. Wales has unitary councils.

Combined authorities

- All the councils in an area can come together to form a combined authority. Initially they could take on transport and economic development functions, but some (so far Greater Manchester and Sheffield) are being granted additional powers if they establish a directly elected mayor.
- A number of other areas in England, both urban and rural, are considering establishing combined authorities.

Town, parish and community councils

In some areas, the most local tier of local government is a parish or town council (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.



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 I am proud of the regeneration master plan we have begun.

I am one of two deputy leaders of the council and cabinet member for housing, a topical and sometimes emotive subject. It's interesting to be able to formulate and influence policy. Juggling being a single mum with my council work is not easy, but I really enjoy my role.

My 'top tips' 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.

Who does what?

	Shire areas			Met areas	London	
	Unitary	County	District	Met district	Borough	GLA
Education	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Highways	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Transport planning	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Passenger transport	✓	✓		✓		✓
Social care	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Housing	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Libraries	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Leisure	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Environmental health	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Trading standards	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Waste collection	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Waste disposal	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Planning apps	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Strategic planning	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Local tax collection	✓		✓	✓	✓	

England has 27 counties split into 201 districts, 56 unitary authorities, 37 metropolitan districts, 32 London boroughs plus the City of London, 31 fire and rescue authorities and 10,000 parish and town councils. Wales has 22 unitary councils and 1,000 community councils.

How are decisions made?

Councils have obtained new powers over their executive governance arrangements allowing them to operate 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 resources. The cabinet meets regularly (weekly or fortnightly) so decisions are made quickly.

The cabinet may also be called the executive.

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

The LGA has produced a practical guide for councils considering changes to their governance arrangements. 'Rethinking governance' can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/nnrw649>



Councillor Bill Winlow

Liberal Democrat
Lancashire County Council

I have three grown-up children and three grandchildren. I enjoy travel and photography and am a Professor of Neuroscience, nominally retired but with still plenty of research interests and contacts.

As a councillor, I enjoy meeting people and trying to solve their problems or, better still, help them to solve their problems for themselves. I am particularly interested in environmental issues, one of which is fracking, as well as highways and transport.

I am the Liberal Democrat Group Leader, Chair of the new executive scrutiny committee and Chair of the main scrutiny committee. I find these scrutiny roles interesting as they have given my political group an influential position on the county council.

My three 'top tips' for a new councillor would be:

- be assiduous in doing your community casework, get good results wherever possible then tell them about it!
- knock on lots of doors throughout the year to keep in touch with your local community
- make friendships across party lines wherever possible so that you can influence others when the need arises.

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.

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.

Finally 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 the 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.

A vertical collage of various colorful icons arranged in a scattered pattern. The icons include: a purple speech bubble, a green arrow pointing right, a blue notepad with a pen, a purple book, a person holding a tablet, an orange speech bubble, a smartphone, a blue notepad with a pen, a yellow speech bubble, a green speech bubble, a person holding a tablet, a green arrow pointing right, a purple book, a blue notepad with a pen, a yellow speech bubble, a smartphone, a blue notepad with a pen, a green speech bubble, a person holding a tablet, a green arrow pointing right, and a purple book. The icons are scattered across the page, with some appearing multiple times in different colors and orientations.

A vertical collage of various colorful icons. The icons include: a purple speech bubble, a green arrow pointing right, a blue notepad with a pen, a purple book, a person holding a notepad, an orange speech bubble with an 'i' inside, a smartphone, an orange speech bubble, a green notepad with a pen, a yellow speech bubble, a green speech bubble, a person holding a notepad, a blue notepad with a pen, a green arrow pointing right, a person holding a notepad, and a purple book. The icons are arranged in a vertical line, with some overlapping.

[illegible]

A vertical collage of various colorful icons representing communication, technology, and business concepts. The icons include speech bubbles, people holding documents or pointing, smartphones, tablets, arrows, lightbulbs, and abstract shapes. The colors are vibrant, featuring shades of blue, green, yellow, orange, red, and purple. The icons are scattered throughout the page, creating a dynamic and modern visual background.



Councillor Helen Powell

Independent

South Kesteven District Council and Lincolnshire County Council

As I got to a stage in life where I had more time on my hands, I began to become involved with local issues, which led to me becoming a town councillor. I really enjoyed helping to find solutions to problems and found it very rewarding.

I embarked on some successful projects for the town, including a charity DVD about the heritage of our local area and developing a dance and drama class for the disabled.

When I was elected to the district council, the training sessions offered were useful and interesting. However, I found it hard to get used to the committee meeting system, which can take a long time to get anything decided. I am amazed at the issues we are tackling now and the extent to which we are planning ahead for the future of our area, and I enjoy working on projects that will enhance our communities.

My top tips are:

- shadow a councillor in the early days if that's possible to watch how they undertake the role
- make the most of the LGA political groups – I have found the Independent Group to be informative, helpful and encouraging.

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 employees 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 to the political group in control of the council (with the exception of political assistants). 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 authority 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.

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.

Supporting localism

The Localism Act 2011 introduced new freedoms and flexibilities for local government and new rights and powers for communities. These include:

- A general power of competence which gives local authorities the power to do anything that individuals generally may do, provided they are not precluded from doing so under any other legislation.
- The community right to bid allows extra time for parish councils, voluntary and community groups to prepare bids to buy assets of community value if they come up for sale. For example, some communities have used this to save a local pub from closure by buying and running it themselves.
- The community right to challenge, where certain groups can express an interest in running a council service. If this expression is accepted, it triggers a procurement process for the service.
- Planning reforms including statutory neighbourhood planning in England, involving communities

more directly in planning for their areas and a community right to build, giving communities the freedom to build new homes, shops, businesses or facilities without going through the normal planning application process.

For more information go to:
www.local.gov.uk/localism

Devolution

The LGA is calling for devolution to local areas, which can bring economic, political and social benefits to communities. A number of areas have already achieved significant breakthroughs through City Deals and Growth Deals with government. More recently, statutory groupings of councils called combined authorities have agreed 'devolution deals' through which central government devolves some specific powers and funding to local government. The LGA's devolution hub can provide details on what powers councils have already been given and what they are doing with these powers, as well as tools to help your council negotiate further devolution.

For more information, visit:
www.local.gov.uk/devolution

Improving local wellbeing

The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires public bodies, including councils, to consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the **'economic, social and environmental wellbeing'** of the area.

This could include anything from requiring contractors to buy supplies locally to choosing a bus company that offers to provide an additional dial-a-ride service or working with businesses that pledge to take on local apprentices. It could also mean working with local voluntary and community organisations to help them take on services previously delivered by the council or private sector.

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/equality-frameworks



Councillor Alice Bramall

Conservative
Milton Keynes Council

I work full-time in London but the company is very supportive of my role as a councillor. I live with my fiancé Tim, who is equally understanding of the long hours and addiction to emails.

I believe that Milton Keynes is the best place to live in the UK – it isn't just concrete cows and roundabouts! Coming to a local councillor can be a last resort for people and there is nothing more satisfying than helping them to resolve a problem or being their voice in the council chamber.

I am Chair of the Health and Adult Social Care committee so I help to determine what we scrutinise in that area. As a young female councillor it has taken some time to be taken seriously and not be overlooked. My age is often referred to in a derogatory fashion. However, I love the role and wouldn't change a thing about it.

My 'top tips' would be:

- don't be scared of speaking in the council chamber – the nerves go with practice
- when it gets tough, don't lose sight of the good you are doing
- enjoy it, but don't let it become your whole life – make time for friends and family.

4. 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 might include:

- induction and training
- access to space in the council's 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 individual political groups. If you are an independent member, your council may have an independent group office. The leader of the council and cabinet members are most likely to have access to dedicated support, along with the chairs of scrutiny in some authorities.

Induction and training

Most councils offer induction courses for new councillors to familiarise them with their new role and with 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 that 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 on the council, the way it works, its services and the local area.

Increasingly, council papers are provided electronically rather than in paper form. Many councils have good teleconferencing facilities that allow you to attend meetings remotely, or you may be able to join meetings via telephone or Skype.

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 the subject of a planning application. In some councils, the larger political groups may have a political assistant who can carry out research on their behalf.

Allowances

All councillors are entitled to a basic allowance for being a councillor. 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. Some 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 as a councillor 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.

HIGHLIGHTING POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

THE LGA DEVELOPMENT OFFER

Councillor development programmes

Inspiring local communities and creating a better future for the people and places we represent takes ambitious leadership, and effective political leadership is at the heart of healthy 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.

As a local politician, finding the time to reflect, build up your networks and challenge yourself can be tricky. The Highlighting Leadership development programmes provide opportunities to do just that, for those at the very beginning of their political careers through to experienced leaders, 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 more senior leadership positions. Examples include the popular Young Councillor's Weekender, which supports councillors to build networks with peers early on in their careers, and the Effective Scrutiny Programme – a development opportunity delivered in partnership with the Centre for Public Scrutiny for scrutiny committee chairs.

The Next Generation Programme offers ambitious and talented councillors an unparalleled party political development opportunity, developed within party political traditions and with party political experts.

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 on a specific theme such as demand management.

For councillors in leadership positions, including group leaders, portfolio holders, portfolio shadows and committee chairs, the highly regarded Leadership Academy delivers accredited leadership development opportunities all year round.

For more information go to:
www.local.gov.uk/councillor-development




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 member development. All nine UK regions have signed up to the charter and increasing numbers of councils are pledging to introduce it for their members.

The Member Development Charter and Charter Plus exist to 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 their experiences and learning.



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
elearning@local.gov.uk
to receive a user name and password.

5. 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.lgcomms.org.uk

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.

Know your residents, relate to their concerns, understand their ambitions and be their champion. Work with local community groups. Often they will be involved in campaigns of interest to the media that can help 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 (on paper or email)
- hold events and meetings
- hold surgeries, either in person or online – provide opportunities for local people to ask questions or raise concerns (for example, you could use Skype to carry out some surgeries)
- use social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube; make sure your content is accurate, informative, balanced and objective, and if in any doubt check your council's social media policy
- set up a basic website or blog; for those just starting out with this technology, the Knowledge Hub is a good place to get blogging: <https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/>

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 section of the population you want to connect with is 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: be aware that what you post now could be found in years to come.



6. 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 any charge for it.
2. All councils must comply with **requests for information** they hold unless an exemption from disclosure applies. Councils usually have up to 20 working days to respond to a request.

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 on a computer or on paper. Personal data includes a person's name, address, religion, ethnicity, trade union membership, political opinions, criminal convictions and physical or mental health.

The Act is underpinned by eight common-sense principles:

- that personal data is 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
- processed in line with the rights of individuals
- secured against accidental loss, destruction, damage, unauthorised or unlawful processing
- not transferred outside the EEC.

If you handle personal data in line with the spirit of these principles, you will go a long way towards ensuring that you comply with the law. However, this is a complex subject, so if in doubt talk to your council's data protection officer.

The Act requires every organisation processing personal data to notify the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) unless they are exempt. Notification costs £35 a year, and not doing so risks a fine of up to £5,000.

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 group 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 own ward/division casework and, if necessary, submit formal notification on the ICO website.

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

Open data

Central government has placed a strong emphasis on transparency and all councils are asked to publish data on expenditure and other performance information. Being open and transparent makes councils more accountable and helps them to assess the needs, demands and cost of services. Sharing, publishing and analysing data effectively helps to support accountability, improve service delivery and business opportunities and engage the local community.

Open data can also support innovation in public services. The 'making a difference with data' project (www.madwddata.org.uk) was set up to share understanding about open data and transparency.

It will show how information obtained from public organisations can be used by citizens to raise issues, campaign and influence decisions.

More information on how councils can publish open data can be found at: www.local.gov.uk/local-transparency

Using data

Data and statistics can show how things in your ward compare with the local or national situation. This can help councillors to understand their ward and develop strategies for improvement. Information that can be useful includes:

- education – the performance of local schools and colleges
- housing – the number and type of council properties within your ward, waiting lists, vacancies, re-let times and waiting times for repairs and maintenance
- environment – response times for fly-tipping incidents, standards in local food outlets, traffic congestion, pollution and missed bin collections

- safety – crime and anti-social behaviour statistics, the number and type of road traffic accidents or fire and rescue incidents
- facilities – use of libraries, leisure centres, parks and playing fields.

LG Inform, a service run by the LGA, can help you find up-to-date data about your local area and the performance of your council. And LG Inform Plus, also run by the LGA, can give you access to key information about your ward. See the following page for full details of this service.

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?

Our new and improved **LG Inform** service 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.



In addition, we now offer **LG Inform Plus** to complement LG Inform. This subscription service gives users the power to drill down from authority wide information to much smaller areas, such as wards and neighbourhoods.

www.local.gov.uk/lginformplus

7. 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 authority'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 2010 review set total public sector budgets until 2015, and a smaller 'spending round' in 2013 covered budgets for a further year to March 2016. By then, councils will have seen a reduction over five years of 40 per cent in their core funding from government.

Local authorities find out their individual funding assessment 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.

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 (two per cent in 2015/16). The result is binding, so councils must put in place a contingency budget, with a rise below the threshold, to be enacted in the event of a 'no' vote.

Business rates

Business rates are a tax levied on the owners of non-residential properties. Until 2013, business rates collected by councils were paid into a central pot to be redistributed to councils as grant funding. There was no connection between the amount of business rates a council collected and the level of funding it received. From April 2013, councils have been able to retain a portion of business rates raised locally – the 'local share'. Central government continues to set the maximum increase in the business rates multiplier and decide what share of business rates can be kept by councils (currently 50 per cent).

What this effectively means is that a council will receive more funding if it experiences real-terms growth in its local business rates base, and lose funding if it experiences a real-terms reduction. The system is designed to incentivise councils to promote local economic growth by rewarding them for every new business they help to put on the map.

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 resource
- 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 and the need to make savings. The budget will also include reserves and contingencies to manage risks.

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 that 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 go to:
www.local.gov.uk/finance



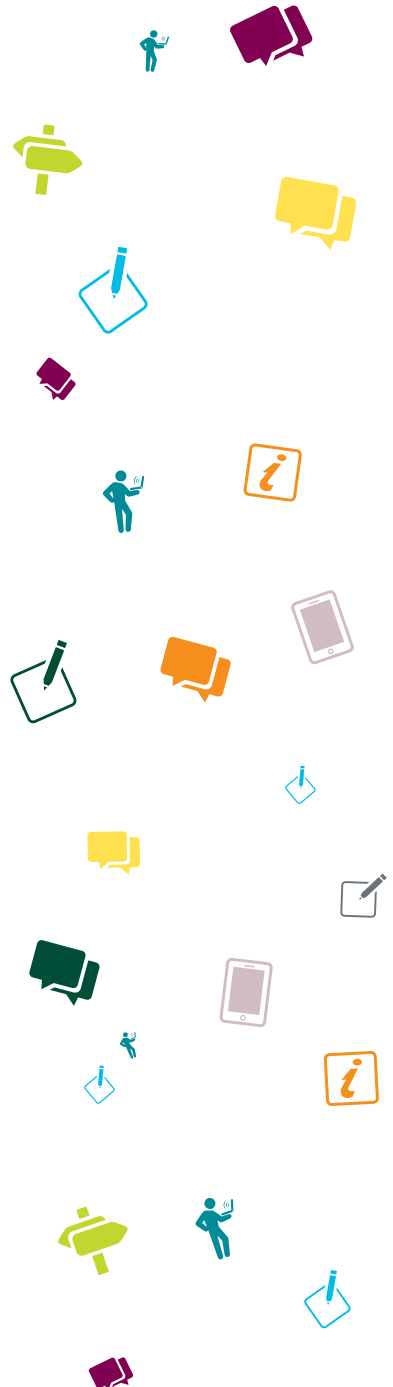
Council tax support

In 2013, council tax benefit, which had been administered by councils and funded by central government, was abolished. Now, the funding (minus an initial 10 per cent reduction and further year-on-year reductions in line with overall cuts) is paid directly to councils through settlement funding. Each billing authority must design its own council tax discount scheme, the intention being that councils have a direct financial stake in reducing the national benefits bill.

Authorities could choose to replicate the old council tax benefit system, absorbing the loss in funding themselves, or to pass on some or all of the funding reduction to claimants by increasing their council tax bills. The cost of the scheme is shared between all the bodies that levy council tax (local authorities, town and parish councils, fire and rescue authorities and police commissioners).

This change raised a number of issues that must be taken into account in budget setting and financial planning:

- councils must now bear the financial risk of any increase in claimants
- the entitlement of pensioners must be protected at its previous level
- early indications suggest that collection rates have decreased, particularly among those who previously paid nothing
- funding for council tax support is no longer identified as a separate grant but 'rolled up' within the overall funding settlement (which is generally cut year-on-year), so councils must either reduce their support to claimants every year or find savings elsewhere in their budget.



8. 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.

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.

Overview and scrutiny has some specific statutory powers – such as the scrutiny of health bodies and other partner organisations. For this reason, some councils operating a committee system have chosen to have an overview and scrutiny committee as part of their structure.

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.

The formal arrangements for scrutiny can vary depending on the type of authority and the governance model it operates under. In two-tier areas, the county council has some specific powers for scrutinising health issues. Although district councils don't have the same specific powers, they can use their scrutiny functions to explore health issues. Councils need to plan carefully the range of health scrutiny powers they delegate, as different arrangements may apply in different circumstances. Districts also take the lead responsibility for crime and disorder scrutiny in their areas.

Getting it right

Scrutiny has no formal powers to stop the cabinet 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.

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 their health and wellbeing. It enables councillors to scrutinise how local 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.

Further information

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 recent case studies, telephone 020 7187 7362 or email info@cfps.org.uk for advice. CfPS has produced a series of practice guides providing information and support to those seeking to understand more about how overview and scrutiny operates. They are at: www.cfps.org.uk/practiceguides

The Ombudsmen

Local Government Ombudsman

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) looks at complaints about most council services including planning, education, adults' 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 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 Ombudsmen, with the LGO managing the joint investigation.

For more information go to:
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 unfair treatment and poor service in relation to government departments, other public organisations and NHS-funded healthcare services. Complaints about a government department or service must be referred by an MP.

For more information go to:
www.ombudsman.org.uk

Housing Ombudsman Service

The Housing Ombudsman Scheme requires social landlords, such as housing associations and local authorities, to be members of an approved scheme. Private landlords may also join the scheme on a voluntary basis.

The Housing Ombudsman Service investigates complaints and resolves disputes involving members of the scheme. The Localism Act 2011 gives tenants of housing associations, local authorities and arms-length management organisations the right to ask for their complaints to be considered by a 'designated person' once the complaint has been through their landlord's complaints procedure. As a local councillor, you may be asked to be a designated person. You can try and resolve the complaint yourself or refer it straight to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

For more information go to:
www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

9. 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. Recent high-profile cases 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 that 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 that the council role in school improvement is changing. Schools are increasing expected to take responsibility for their own improvement and for helping other schools. A variety of 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, and many areas are facing a significant increase in demand for places.

Councils still have a significant role in ensuring fair school admissions and have duties in relation to home-to-school transport for some children and young people. They also maintain a major role in the local allocation of school funding.

The raising of the participation age means that young people must now continue in education, training or apprenticeships to the age of 18. Local authorities must secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people aged 16-19 and for those aged 20-24 with a learning difficulty assessment. 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 good relationships with partners to deliver this provision. Key local partners include schools, further education and work-based learning providers and neighbouring councils (to support young people learning or training in another local authority area).





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 became a councillor in 2012. I had studied politics at university and did some work experience with an MP, which allowed 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 within the party and campaigning before I was elected.

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.

My 'top tips' 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, not a punishment!

10. Adult social care and health

Adult social care

Adult social care and support is currently being reformed and councils are dealing with significant change, to a demanding timescale, against a backdrop of significant financial pressure.

Reform of care and support services has been several years in the making and has drawn on a number of sources including the Dilnot Commission (which examined how care and support should be paid for) and the Law Commission (which reviewed the range of laws and statutes covering care and support).

Under the Care Act 2014, all councils with social services responsibilities in England must be consistent in their assessment and eligibility criteria, as well as offering deferred payment agreements to help prevent people from having to sell their home to pay for care. A cap on the amount that people should contribute towards their care costs comes into place in April 2016.

The Care Act covers a number of issues including:

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

The LGA, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) and the Department of Health are working together on implementation of the Care Act. For more information, visit: www.local.gov.uk/care-support-reform

Service improvement

Local government leads its own approach to improvement in adult social care. The LGA coordinates a programme of support delivered through the Towards Excellence in Adult Social Care (TEASC) programme.

This includes bespoke support to councils and regions as well as national support with key priorities such as risk and use of resources.

The Transforming Care programme is working to support local areas to transform health and care services for people with learning disabilities or autism who also have mental health conditions or behaviours viewed as challenging. Councillors, as local leaders, have a key role in working with local health partners, and in representing service users and their families, to ensure that individuals can live fulfilling and safe lives in the community.

Further information can be found at: www.local.gov.uk/place-i-call-home

Safeguarding adults

All councillors share a responsibility in relation to safeguarding adults. As well as formal representation on safeguarding adults' boards, councillors may become aware of individual cases of abuse through their work with local residents which they need to raise. They can also to ask questions of the council, and other organisations, about the safety of adults in their area and the quality

of services being provided.

For more information on adult social care and safeguarding, visit: www.local.gov.uk/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 inequality – the gap between the healthiest and least healthy in society – is widening. This has led to major changes to the way service providers work together to identify health priorities and improve outcomes.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 introduced new powers and responsibilities for councils. All unitary and county councils must now:

- 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 which acts as the consumer champion and community voice on behalf of patients, carers and the community on health, adult social care and public health issues.

Health and wellbeing boards

Health and wellbeing boards bring together the political, professional, clinical and community leadership in an area to identify the key health challenges, agree priorities and drive integrated activity that improves 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 (CCGs) and Local Healthwatch.

Public health

In April 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 a new organisation called Public Health England. The reforms are seen as one of the most significant extensions of local government powers and duties in a generation. It also represents a unique opportunity to change the focus from treating sickness to actively promoting health and wellbeing.

Preventing illness and empowering people to stay well is not something health and care professionals can do alone; action from across all sections of the community is required. 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 led by the director of public health.

Other services such as housing, planning, leisure and children's services will also support work around public health issues.

For further information go to:
www.local.gov.uk/public-health

Transfer of 0-5's health

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

Unlike the previous public health transfer, it is only the commissioning that will transfer and not the workforce, which will still be employed by the provider organisations. The transfer joins up commissioning for 0-19 year olds (and up to 25 years for young people with special educational needs and 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, social care and wider council-led services and to focus on improving outcomes for children and young people.

Councillors and health

Councillors have an important role in identifying the 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 be 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/health

11. 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:

- ensuring that local people can learn the skills that they, and local businesses, need
- supporting growth and investment in new and existing businesses
- enhancing the quality of life for their communities
- improving infrastructure – for example through improved transport or broadband.

Councils are increasingly innovative in how they deliver services to help local economic growth and support businesses. Services such as environmental health, trading standards, licensing and building

control can encourage new business activity. Aligning housing, planning and transport strategies can create the conditions for businesses to grow.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) make up about 99.5 per cent of England's business base and local government has a critical role to play in supporting them. For example, some councils are joining up with lenders to provide flexible and cost-effective finance options for businesses; others are promoting apprenticeship schemes, marketing the strengths of the local economy or adopting business-friendly charters or concordats.

Local Enterprise Partnerships

Every council area is covered by a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) – a voluntary partnership of councils, other parts of the public sector and businesses. LEPs recognise that local economies do not follow council boundaries – for example, people travel to work in different areas. They have a strategic role in determining economic priorities and leading economic growth and job creation.

LEPs are taking on significant new responsibilities, as the Government has devolved decision-making over most of England's allocation of EU funds to them until 2020. It has also committed to negotiating 'growth deals' with every LEP on the basis of their strategic economic plans, which set out the long-term vision and investment plans for their area.

These growth deals, starting in 2015, are expected to have influence over other growth-related services such as skills provision, along with a share of a £2 billion local growth fund. In return, the Government will expect commitments from councils within LEPs regarding use of the proceeds of asset disposals and a means of collective decision-making by all local authorities within a LEP.

In many LEP areas councils are coming together to form 'combined authorities', which allow them to pool economic development and transport functions to support growth across a wider area. Combined authorities appear to be the favoured structure for further devolution of economic-related powers from central government to local areas.

For more information go to:
www.local.gov.uk/economy

Culture, heritage and sport

Culture, heritage, tourism and sport services are among the most used and highly valued of local services. Most are of a non-statutory (optional) nature so there is a great deal 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 or co-located with 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.

Welfare reform

The Government is implementing major reform of the welfare benefits system. Councils are working with Jobcentre Plus, and other key partners in the learning and skills sector and the voluntary and community sector to help deliver these reforms.

The Government's stated aim is to simplify the benefits system and improve work incentives. It is making significant changes to entitlement and to the way both in-work and out-of-work benefits are calculated and administered. This will generate estimated savings of more than £15 billion a year across the UK.

Councils have a central role in both implementing the reforms and managing 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 below.

Universal credit

Universal credit combines and simplifies most working-age benefits into one monthly payment per household. From 2013, it has been tested at a limited number of jobcentres and councils, but is now being gradually introduced in all local authority areas.

The roll out of Universal Credit to new single claimants should be complete by February 2016. Further ongoing expansion will include wider groups of claimants with the aim of embedding Universal Credit across Great Britain by the end of 2017.

Support for housing costs, which is normally paid directly to landlords as housing benefit, will instead be determined and provided to claimants as part of their Universal Credit payment. Responsibility for administering housing benefit will transfer from councils to the Department for Work and Pensions. However, councils will still administer pension credit which provides housing payments to older residents.

Councils and their local partners will continue to have a key role in helping people to make their Universal Credit claims, manage their finances and access housing and employment. Provision of this support tailored to individuals, together with access to other services relevant to claimants is called Universal Support delivered locally. In some areas councils have worked with the DWP and other partners to reconfigure services so that they can deliver this support from a single location to improve efficiency and customer experience.

The benefit cap

This places a cap on the total benefits for most households where no adult is in work, currently £500 week for families and £350 for single people, and was rolled out nationally in 2013. The greatest concentration of affected households is in London. It was first implemented as a reduction to housing benefit, administered by councils, but is now being applied as a cap on universal credit as this is introduced.

Removal of the spare room subsidy

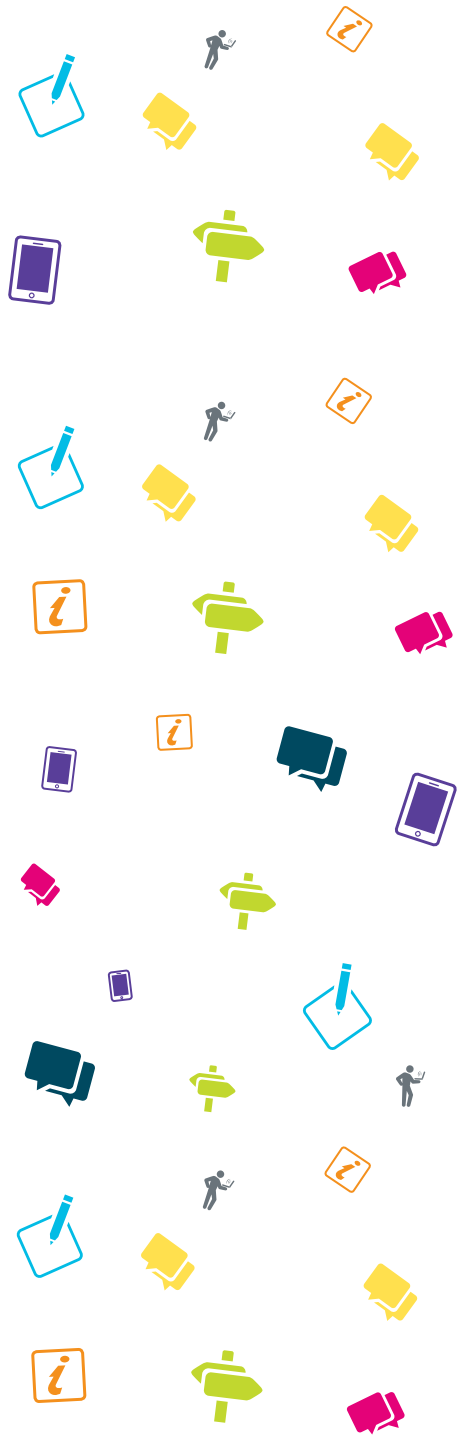
Unofficially referred to as the 'bedroom tax', this is also known as the social sector size criterion or the under-occupancy penalty. It applies to housing benefit recipients in social housing who are deemed to have a spare bedroom/s, with some exemptions. Housing benefit is reduced by 14 per cent for one spare room and 25 per cent for two or more. Councils have been given 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 which can be used to calculate housing benefit entitlement for those renting from a private landlord. In 2011 the Government revised it down from the 50th percentile to the 30th percentile of average local rents. Annual increases in local housing allowance have also been restricted.

In February's Local Government Finance Settlement, the Government announced £74 million for Local Welfare Assistance during 2015/16 to be provided to English county and unitary councils who administer the scheme locally. This funding was due to be cut completely. Local authorities therefore welcomed the announcement, although it represents a substantial overall reduction in the resources provided for this purpose when compared with the previous financial year.

Councils also provide assistance through local council tax support schemes, for more detail on this please see chapter 7.





Councillor Michael Deon-Burton

Independent

London Borough of Havering

The challenges you face as a councillor can be awesome, but they are put into perspective by comments from residents you have helped. It is a real pleasure to hear a resident say 'the future is now a little brighter' when you have intervened on their behalf to solve a dilemma or a perceived injustice.

It is a great honour to have the title 'Councillor' before your name. Hearing the word 'winner' following an election is just the start. It is my opinion that in no other arena, at such a grass-roots level, can an individual really affect the lives of those who often feel unheard or ignored, or can a singular or collective decision have the potential for such a positive effect on people's lives. Despite the hours worked, the rewards are priceless.

My 'top tips' are:

- grow a 'second skin' quickly as you find your way through your new responsibilities and the political life of the council – don't be daunted
- remember that your views are just as valid as any on your council
- take the time to gather all the facts before making a decision.

12. Councils and the environment

Planning

As a councillor, you are likely to become involved in planning at some point. Planning is led by the Local Plan, a strategic framework outlining how the local area should develop. Some councillors sit on the planning committee which deals with planning applications, balancing the economic, environmental and social impacts of new development to achieve the ambitions set out in the Local Plan.

Planning decisions can impact on housing, job creation, climate change, investment, infrastructure and the quality of people's lives. They are often 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 and councillors to help them understand and respond to planning reform and improve the service to their customers. As PAS is a grant-funded programme, most of the support is offered free of charge.

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

The Local Plan

This is written by the council in consultation with community groups, the voluntary sector, businesses, neighbouring councils and organisations such as the Environment Agency. It sets out the council's approach to development in the area and is used as the basis for planning decisions. It must include certain topics required by national policy but the local interpretation, and the weight placed on these, will vary.

The Local Plan must be 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

Often called development management, this is the part of planning that most people are familiar with and is the main way of implementing the Local Plan. Decisions are made in two main ways. Officers can determine some (usually straightforward) applications, leaving the planning committee to focus on strategic or controversial applications.

As a councillor you may be lobbied by individuals or groups in relation to local planning applications. If you are not on the planning committee, you can ask to address it as the local councillor when it considers the 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 do not 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 own housing stock directly or through an arms-length management organisation. Others may have transferred their stock and 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 and 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 frequency of collection and the services offered, and 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 gas emissions by 2050 in order to mitigate the potential impacts of a changing climate, such as increased flood risk and heatwaves. In 2013, the Government launched a national adaptation programme.

‘Climate Local’ is the LGA’s initiative to help councils take local action to reduce carbon emissions and build resilience to the changing climate. In signing up to it, councils commit to addressing local risks and opportunities, such as helping residents to save money on their energy bills or reducing excess winter deaths.

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 assess their local risks and 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 ensuring healthier communities. Embedding resilience as part of effective long-term planning for a changing climate is an integral part of ensuring business continuity, safeguarding people and places, protecting and enhancing the natural environment and contributing to a resilient economy.

A range of resources designed 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 (LLFA), 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 the LGA's flood risk portal: 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. Their role includes:

- transport planning
- maintaining highways and managing traffic
- supporting public transport
- 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 authorities.

In London, the Highways Agency manages motorways, Transport for London manages trunk roads and local authorities manage the local network.

Transport planning

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.

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 for councils. 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 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.





Councillor viewpoint

Councillor Hanna Zuchowska

Liberal Democrat

London Borough of Sutton

I'm a full-time Parliamentary Researcher to a Lib Dem MP. What motivated me to become a councillor was a desire to shape my local community. The real catalyst, however, was a recognition that it was really possible to drive positive change. I had been involved in a campaign to save the A&E and maternity units at a local hospital. We knocked on doors, collected signatures and organised public meetings. Eventually, the review was scrapped. As a community we had made our voices heard and the feeling of being part of such positive change was great – I was hooked. Now, the biggest challenge my council faces is the amount of savings we need to find. We are being creative about how we deliver services, but some hard choices will have to be made to protect front-line services. I find it important to have a robust routine in place for doing certain things (such as casework and

campaigning) and to reserve time for yourself and your family. My three 'top tips' would be: get to know the officers, explore online tools that can help you to be organised, and go and speak to residents as much as possible.

13. 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 services are delivered in four different ways. In some counties, 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. In London, the fire and rescue service is governed by the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, a functional body of the Greater London Authority.

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

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 these services an important role in facilitating economic growth, maintaining consumer confidence and supporting the high standards that make an area attractive to tourism.

The LGA has developed 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/community-safety/-/journal_content/56/10180/5483225/ARTICLE

Licensing

Councils are responsible for issuing more than 150 different types of licence, consents, permits and registrations covering a diverse range of trades and activities.

The most high-profile council licensing permits the sale of alcohol and oversees local taxis and betting shops. Councillors have a very specific role in licensing through the work of licensing committees.

Licensing exists to protect consumers and businesses. Done well, it supports local economic development in a way that manages the risk of potentially dangerous or irresponsible activities harming individuals, businesses and communities. It provides assurances to residents about the businesses they engage with and boosts consumer confidence in an area.

In 2014 the LGA launched 'Rewiring Licensing', a campaign for full reform of the licensing framework to deliver a de-regulatory approach that frees up business and council time while maintaining important safeguards for local communities and businesses. Since then, a number of councils have begun piloting new approaches to licensing. In 2014 the Government called on councils to work to implement a single, online licensing application process from 2018. The LGA is working with councils and government departments to support this reform.

For more information, visit:
www.local.gov.uk/regulatory-services-and-licensing

The voluntary and community sector

The term 'voluntary and community sector' (VCS) includes voluntary and community organisations, national and local charities, tenants' and residents' organisations, faith organisations and other community groups that are largely volunteer-led. It can also include housing associations, social enterprises and cooperatives that are non-governmental, value-driven and principally reinvest their financial surplus in social, environmental or cultural objectives.

Working with this sector is a significant part of every councillor's role. They are important partners because they:

- deliver services and contribute to the quality of life in an area
- represent the views of community interest groups, including vulnerable and marginalised people
- build and sustain stronger communities through the social

networks and community action they generate.

VCS organisations vary greatly in size, capacity and influence. They often represent a particular perspective or section of the community. For this reason, you should ensure that you are able to listen to a range of groups.

Historically, most councils gave grants to local VCS organisations, either to cover their core costs or contribute to a particular aspect of their work. Councils can also commission them to deliver specific outcomes or services. In recent years, financial pressures and the need to demonstrate value for public money mean that many councils have moved away from giving grants and are instead commissioning voluntary or community groups to deliver certain activities or services.

More information is available from:

National Council for Voluntary Organisations www.ncvo.org.uk

National Association for Voluntary and Community Action www.navca.org.uk

Social Enterprise UK
www.socialenterprise.org.uk

14. Improvement and innovation

Efficiency and productivity

Improvement, efficiency and productivity

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

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 (see pages 28-31)
- challenge from one's peers (see below)
- performance comparison with others (see page 37)
- our Productivity and Commissioning programme (see below).

For more information about the approach to sector-led improvement in local government please go to: <http://www.local.gov.uk/sector-led-improvement>

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 health check, a budget challenge and tools to allow councils to assess their own financial position and consider opportunities and threats to their financial strategy.

The Productivity and Commissioning programme includes a range of initiatives designed to help councils reshape their services and increase efficiency. These range from the Productivity Expert programme (which provides funding to enable individual councils to engage an expert to help deliver efficiency savings) to broader programmes with groups of authorities, such as the Health and Social Care Integration project, helping councils to advance their efficiency and transformation agendas in health and social care.

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.

The LGA's evaluation of sector-led improvement shows that councils value the support being provided and believe it has been helpful to their improvement journey. To find out more, go to: www.local.gov.uk/sector-led-improvement

Peer challenge

A peer challenge allows councils to review and transform their services and deal with performance issues. It is voluntary and tailored to the needs of an individual council. Every council is entitled to one free-of-charge corporate peer challenge; county and unitary councils may also qualify for a children's safeguarding peer challenge.

A corporate peer challenge includes:

- a challenge team, agreed with the council, including experienced councillors and officers
- a pre-visit, up to one week on site, end-of-week feedback and a final written report
- a review shaped to focus on the council's own priorities.

Recent peer challenges have focused on:

- how joint working between two councils can improve service delivery and efficiency
- new ways of working, service delivery and relationships with citizens/partners
- corporate priorities such as regeneration and economic development.

For more information visit: www.local.gov.uk/peer-challenge

Cost-saving questions for newly elected councillors to ask

1. Given the budget reductions required by all councils, how clearly articulated and understood is the political vision for the future role, size and shape of your council?
2. Is there an overall plan for delivering the savings or generating the income required to balance the budget in the long term?
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, and does this allow 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?
6. Does the council have a politically supported shared services strategy to reduce management, support and back office costs while protecting front-line services?
7. 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 there plans to use them to generate income?
8. Does the council actively commission services to ensure they are of the type and quality that people want and need at a reasonable cost?
9. Does the council manage its contracts with outside suppliers to maximise the 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?
12. Are there plans to provide increased access to services and information online and by smartphone to enable more customers to self-serve, foster community participation and increase business opportunities?

For more information visit:
www.local.gov.uk/productivity

15. 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 might 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 pages, accessed from the main home page, with links to major 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
- community safety
- culture, tourism and sport
- economy and transport
- environment, planning and housing
- finance
- health, adult social care and ageing
- welfare reform
- localism
- workforce
- European and international.

First is a monthly magazine for LGA members. Firstonline can be found on the website and includes a section devoted to councillor comment and opinion:

www.local.gov.uk/first-blogs

The LGA's Twitter handle is @LGAcomms which provides timely 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 Labour Group:

@LGA_Labour

Liberal Democrat LGA Office:

@libdemlocalgov

LGA Independent Group:

@LGA_Independent

Other handles of interest include the District Council Network (@districtcouncil) County Councils Network (@CCNOffice) and Centre for Public Scrutiny (@CfPScrutiny).

Councillor viewpoints

Councillor viewpoints

Councillor Saima Ashraf,
London Borough of Barking
and Dagenham

Councillor Amanda Chadderton,
Oldham Council

Councillor Bill Winlow,
Lancashire County Council

Councillor Hanna Zuchowska,
London Borough of Sutton

Councillor Sean Anstee,
Trafford Council

Councillor Alice Bramall,
Milton Keynes Council

Councillor Michael Deon Burton,
London Borough of Havering

Councillor Helen Powell,
South Kesteven District Council/
Lincolnshire County Council

The information contained in this guide was believed to be correct at the time of going to press. 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, plans and intentions refer to their status prior to the May 2015 General Election.

The Councillor's Guide 2015/16 is available to download free of charge from the LGA website: www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-2015/16

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 the resources range from e-learning modules, self-guided workbooks and training events.

Find out more at: www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-2015/16





Local Government Association

Local Government House
Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000

Fax 020 7664 3030

Email info@local.gov.uk

www.local.gov.uk

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For a copy in Braille, larger print or audio,
please contact us on 020 7664 3000.
We consider requests on an individual basis.