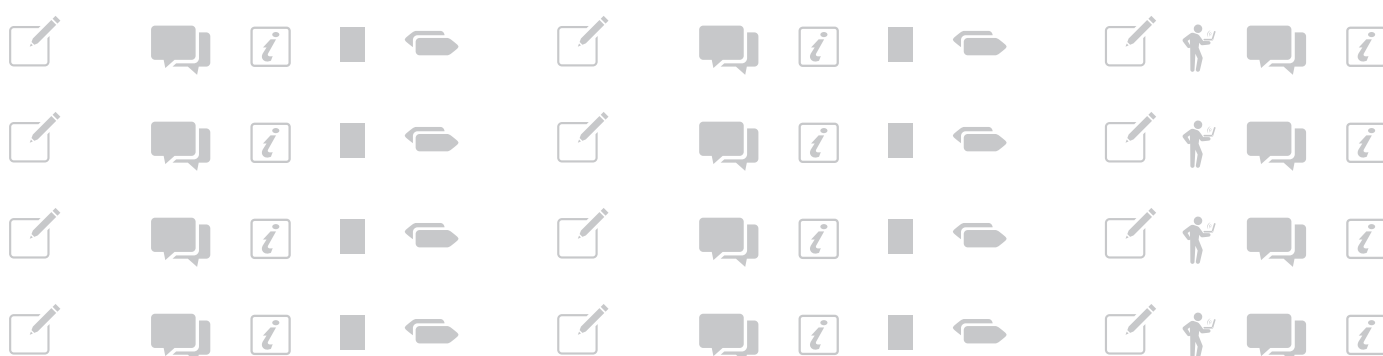


Finding your way



A guide for new councillors 2013/14

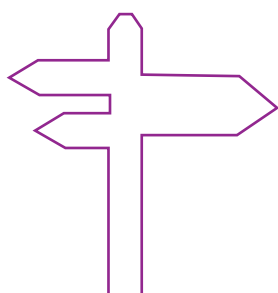


Welcome to local government!

This Councillors' Guide, produced by the Local Government Association (LGA), is designed to provide you with all the information that as a new councillor you need to know. It explores some of the key issues and challenges facing local government today and includes useful hints and tips from experienced councillors.

Whether you have a few hours to spare or just 10 minutes, you will find useful information in the guide about the areas in which you may become involved.

You can find further information on the LGA website, and take part in online discussions on particular topics via the LGA Knowledge Hub. For further details on both of these, go to page 47.



Foreword

On behalf of the Local Government Association can I offer you my warmest congratulations on becoming a councillor. Taking office is one of the most important civic duties a citizen can perform and I hope that this guide will help you as you represent your community, advocate on behalf of residents and work with your fellow councillors.

Becoming a councillor can be a daunting process and I want to assure you that the LGA is here to help and on your side. We are a membership body with 412 member authorities that cover every part of England and Wales. Our members represent more than 50 million people and spend around £113 billion a year on local services. They include county councils, metropolitan district councils, English unitary authorities, London boroughs and shire district councils, along with fire authorities, police authorities, national park authorities and passenger transport authorities.

This guide will provide you with practical advice about being a councillor and will also tell you about the range of services the LGA has to help you settle into your role, connect with colleagues and best support your residents.

You could not have chosen a more challenging, or exciting, time to enter local government. As a sector we face tremendously difficult decisions for our residents as demand for services rise, as our funding from central government falls.

The LGA is of the view it is local government that has the answers to the key questions being posed nationally about funding, the future of public services and how rising demand can be addressed in a time of austerity.

Councils and councillors like you are central to these answers and will be the ones who are able to lead communities to a new secure future. As a new councillor you are now at the forefront of this debate and the LGA will be here to support you.

Please make best use of this guide and all of the services the LGA offers; from events to how to link in with our four political group offices. Becoming a councillor is only the start of your journey in local government and we will be here with you every step of the way.



Councillor Sir Merrick Cockell
Chairman of the LGA

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Welcome to the LGA – the national voice of local government

The Local Government Association (LGA) works with councils in England and Wales to support, promote and improve local government. As a councillor elected to one of the LGA's member councils, you automatically have access to the services that the LGA provides.

We are politically-led and cross-party and we work with and on behalf of councils to give local government a strong, credible voice with national government. We lobby and campaign in Westminster and in Brussels on behalf of councils in England and Wales.

One politically-led membership body gives local government the capacity to:

- pick up emerging government thinking and ensure that local government views are heard in 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.

The LGA, campaigning on your behalf

One of the key roles of the LGA is to campaign on behalf of our members on those issues councils have identified as priorities. We have campaigned on a wide range of issues from local government funding to securing the changes needed to ensure the future of the social care system.

In 2012/13 the LGA has worked closely with the sector to secure some substantial wins. For example, following our successful legal challenge in October 2011, a further £109 million has been repaid to councils by the failed Icelandic banks since April 2012, bringing total recoveries so far to over £700 million. We also made sure an extra £436 million of the total £2.66 billion public health funding in 2013/14 was allocated to councils.

As councils continue to face tough times it has never been more important for us to speak with one, strong voice. Since early 2013 we've been listening to councils' key concerns for the future through a series of regional roadshow events to try and involve and engage as many people as possible.

Although the challenges faced by individual councils vary, some consistent themes have emerged which affect us all. As a result we are launching a bold new campaign at our annual conference in July.



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

2. The councillor's role

Being a councillor is one of the most rewarding forms of public service. As a democratically elected local representative, you have a unique and privileged position – and the potential to really make a real difference to people's lives.

However, being a good councillor is hard work. Every day, you will be expected to balance the needs and interests of your local area, your residents and voters, community groups, local businesses, your political party and the council. All will make legitimate demands on you time – on top of your personal commitments to your family, friends and workplace.

As a councillor, you will have many different roles to balance. First and foremost, you will represent your ward, engaging with residents and groups of on a wide range of different issues and taking on an important community leadership role. At the council, you will contribute to the development of policies and strategies, including its budget setting and you may be involved in scrutinising council decisions or taking decisions on planning or licensing applications.

Representing the local area

The 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 will need to build strong relationships and encourage local people to make their views known, and to engage with you and with the council.

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

- respond to their queries and investigate their concerns (known as 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 and working with local organisations, such as the local parish or town council, is one way to keep in touch. Chapter 5 examines some of the ways you can 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 and to find ways to work 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 achieve their vision for the area, to make the best use of resources and to deliver services that meet the needs of local people. As a local councillor, you will contribute to the development of those policies and strategies, bringing the views and priorities of your local area to the debate. How and where you do this will depend on the committees and other forums that 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 council's 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 areas such as planning applications and applications for 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 party/group whip. Most councils arrange special training for these roles.

Code of Conduct and Standards

Under the Localism Act all standards matters became the responsibility of local authorities. Local authorities are required to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members.

As elected members you will be required to adhere to your council's agreed Code of Conduct for elected members. Each council adopts its own code; however these must be based on the Committee on Standards in Public Life's seven principles of public life. These were established by the Nolan Committee, set up in 1995 to look at how to improve ethical standards in public life and are often referred to as the 'Nolan' principles.

The principles of public life apply to anyone who works as a public office-holder. This includes all those who are elected or appointed to public office, nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in the civil service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), and in the health, education, social and care services. All public office-holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources. The principles also have application to all those in other sectors delivering public services.

Elected members are also required to register any disclosable pecuniary interests of themselves or a spouse or civil partner who they live with, within 28 days of taking up office. It is a criminal offence if a councillor fails, 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 so doing.
Honesty	Holders of public office should be truthful.
Leadership	Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.



Councillor Sarah Stamp

Conservative

St Edmundsbury Borough Council

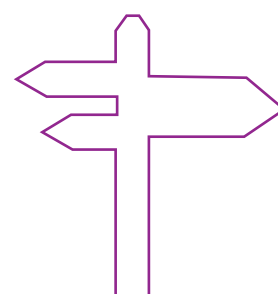
When I was first considering becoming a councillor, it quickly became obvious that women, and particularly those with young families like me, are severely under-represented in local government. At 36 I am considerably younger than most of my colleagues and can often bring a different viewpoint to discussions. To start with I was quiet in meetings, but it didn't take long for my confidence to grow.

The hours are flexible and mostly fit in well with family life. My children are always very proud to be invited to civic events, but they also love donning high-visibility jackets and taking part in community litter picks. It's teaching them a real sense of community ownership.

By far the most rewarding thing is the feeling that I am genuinely making a difference in my community. Listening to residents' problems and often resolving them is really satisfying. I say 'often' because the complexity of some issues means that there is no simple solution, which can be frustrating. However, by communicating well and being available, I can reassure people that someone is on their side and they have been listened to – even if the outcome is not what they wanted.

Three pieces of advice I would give to new councillors are:

- always allow yourself time to read through papers and prepare properly for meetings
- listen to and learn from your more experienced colleagues
- become involved in the local community.



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 and from libraries to 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 all works will help you to best 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 700 services to their local residents. Most are **mandatory**, which means that 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. Others leave councils with discretion over the type and level of service they provide.

Other services are **discretionary**, which means the council can choose whether or not to provide them. 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 that it's 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 rather baffling array of arrangements across the country 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.

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 unitary councils set up in 1974 and 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. Their names vary – for example Cornwall Council, Nottingham City Council and Reading Borough Council are all unitary councils. Wales also has unitary councils.

And to add to the confusion, some county councils are responsible for fire and rescue services while other areas have separate combined fire and rescue services.

Town, parish and community councils

In some areas, the final tier of local government is a parish or town council (or a community council in Wales). These councils 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 tier of local authority – so a county councillor may also be a district councillor and a parish councillor.

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



Councillor Arun Photay Conservative Wolverhampton City Council

My top tip would be: don't be afraid to ask, because there is no such thing as a daft question.

I work in the private sector, so when I was first elected I found processes in the council to be slower and not always as efficient. However, the directors and staff are extremely helpful and knowledgeable. Their support enables me to deal with residents' issues promptly while learning from them myself.

I am a great advocate for getting young professionals and young parents more involved in local government. Unfortunately, some of the most important meetings are held during the day, which can make it difficult for them. Although progress is being made, some councils have a long way to go before they are fully inclusive of their communities.

Shortly after being elected, I received a telephone call at 11.00pm. Someone had threatened a local resident and they felt too afraid and intimidated to contact the police. I calmed them down and explained the importance of getting help from the police, then contacted the police on their behalf. This was one of my first experiences of being a councillor, and the satisfaction I got from helping someone was truly immeasurable.

If you have a real passion to do good for the people of your ward and your local area, then you will not go far wrong as a councillor.

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	✓		✓	✓	✓	

How are decisions made?

Councils can organise their decision-making process in different ways, options available are as follows:

- leader and cabinet
- executive mayor and cabinet
- committee system
- prescribed arrangement.

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 might be single or cross-party.

A small number of councils have opted 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 be slower to reach decisions.



Councillor Sam Phripp

Liberal Democrat
Mendip District Council

My hometown of Frome lies in the most north-eastern corner of Somerset, and it's the view of many that it suffers by being remote from our centres of government. I stood for council because the area was getting a raw deal and deserves better.

One of the big things I've tried to do is to be as approachable as possible. Years of grey-suit government have got us nowhere, so I've gone out of my way to make sure that people know who I am and that they can contact me any time.

People have been surprised to get emails back from me after midnight, happy that they can report a litter problem in the fruit and veg aisle at ASDA and bemused that I'd take notes on a pothole while ordering a drink in a nightclub.

Meetings are probably about 40 per cent of what I do. They need to happen, and I enjoy them, but I believe that the job of a good councillor is to put the message across about what the council is doing and how they can get involved. It's about empowering people, not bogging them down in paperwork and proposals.

If I can help people to realise that their councillor is a helpful human being, rather than another suited clone, then I'll have achieved point one of my ever-growing 'to do' list.

The Localism Act 2011 introduced provision for councils to propose alternative models of governance (**‘prescribed arrangements’**) which will be accepted by the Secretary of State if they meet certain criteria.

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 for 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 policy framework are proposed by the mayor and can only be overturned or amended by the council with a two-thirds majority.

Councils that do not opt for the committee system must also establish **overview and scrutiny** arrangements, through which non-cabinet councillors can scrutinise decisions. Overview and scrutiny 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. It will include:

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

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

Agendas and minutes

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

Defamation and privilege

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



Councillor Helen Powell

Independent
South Kesteven District Council

As I got to a stage of life where I had more time on my hands, I began to become involved with local issues. This led to me becoming a town councillor.

I really enjoyed helping to find solutions to problems and found it very rewarding to help the public. 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 to us 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. It would have been useful to shadow another councillor in the early days to watch how they undertook the role.

Since being under the wing of the LGA Independent Group, everything has been so much more informative, helpful, encouraging and fulfilling. I feel I'm making a difference. We have really useful monthly supper clubs where we exchange ideas, hear about new policies, help each other with campaigns and meet new councillors and supporters.

I am amazed at the issues we are tackling now and the extent to which we are planning ahead for the future of our towns. I really enjoy working on projects that will enhance our communities.

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 direct to the public – for example teachers, social workers, care assistants and refuse collectors (although increasingly these staff may be employed by an outside organisation contracted by the council). Support staff ensure that front-line services and the democratic process can operate smoothly – for example through administrative, finance, legal and IT support.

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 local authority must appoint three key officers:

1. A head of the paid staff – usually the **chief executive**, 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 is to monitor the financial affairs of the council.

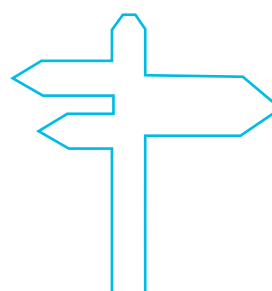
All three posts are protected by statute. If councillors wish to dismiss the post-holders they need to convince an independent enquiry.

The senior management team will head up the main functions or departments of the authority. Good member/officer relationships are important to a well-run 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.

Top tips

Key to good councillor/officer relations are:

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





The Localism Act

The Localism Act 2011 is intended to devolve more decision-making powers from central government into the hands of individuals, communities and councils. It enables councils and communities to work together to address local priorities.

The Act introduced new freedoms and flexibilities for local government and new rights and powers for communities and individuals. Some key measures of the Localism Act are as follows:

- **A General Power of Competence.** Under the Power a local authority has power to do anything that individuals of full legal capacity may do. This gives authorities the power to take reasonable action if they need to 'for the benefit of the authority or persons resident or present in its area'. It is hoped that the Power will give local authorities the opportunity to develop new and innovative business models in ways that were previously disallowed. It is further hoped that it will increase confidence, promote innovation and creativity.

- 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.
- The **community right to challenge**, where voluntary and community groups, parish councils or two or more members of local authority staff can express an interest in running a council service.
- The **community right to bid**, providing 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 more information go to:
www.local.gov.uk/localism

**Councillor Tom Leimdorfer**

Green Party

North Somerset Council

My background was in education, as a science teacher and secondary head teacher. I then worked for a council and for the charity Mencap. My knowledge of education and community care was a help when I became a councillor, but it still left a huge learning curve in all other aspects.

Working with the parish council was of first importance for me. I had to steer a controversial affordable housing scheme through, getting it modified and accepted by neighbours.

Residents with issues will not wait until you gain experience. Advocacy and mediation techniques were invaluable tools. It is important to engage with people but never to promise anything we have no power to deliver. Casework can be time consuming and it is tempting to keep 'signposting' people to other services, but getting a good result for a ward member is the most satisfying aspect of the job and well worth hours of work.

The sheer volume of papers can be overwhelming, so it's useful to learn how to prioritise what to read in detail and what to skim. Knowing the council procedures and working closely with your community are two essential elements to bring results.

Politics is inevitably frustrating. However, as someone who came to England as an orphan teenage refugee from Hungary in 1956, serving the local community of my adoptive land is a huge privilege.



Equality and community cohesion

At the heart of the Equality Act is the **public sector equality duty**, which aims to embed equality considerations into the day-to-day work of all public bodies in order to tackle discrimination and inequality. This duty requires public bodies to 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 have to 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 Amina Lone Labour Manchester City Council

I am a single parent of four children and have been a councillor for two years. It has been the single biggest learning curve of my life, after having children. The current economic, political and cultural climate makes this a particularly challenging time to be involved in local government.

I wish someone had told me the real truth about the personal sacrifices you make – the evening meetings, bureaucracy and endless campaigning. I'm glad I have learnt that perseverance, working as a team and seeing the difference you can make in an individual's life can be so rewarding.

My advice would be to take it easy in the first year, watch, listen and learn from those more experienced than you. Build a small team of trusted colleagues you can share confidences with. Work as a team with officers and use their expertise and resources to support your community.

Most importantly, don't be afraid to ask questions and push boundaries, especially if you're told 'that's the way it's always been done'. Individuals who show leadership, strength and are hard-working are needed as councillors and community advocates more than ever.

Enjoy it, and learn and grow at every opportunity, because there is nothing comparable to it. It's a bit like giving birth to a child: once you have done it, it changes you forever.

4. Support for councillors

Councils provide support to councillors in their role as democratically elected representatives, although the level and type of support will vary from council to council. Typically it will include:

- induction and training
- office accommodation, such as members' rooms and space to hold meetings
- administrative support
- office equipment such as mobile phone, computer, printer
- access to media advice
- research support.

Some support is provided for all councillors, whilst some is provided via the individual political groups. If you are an Independent Member, and do not belong to a political group, your council may have an Independent Group Office. The Leader of the Council and members of the cabinet are most likely to have access to dedicated support, along with chairs of scrutiny in some councils.

Induction and training

Most councils offer induction courses for new councillors to familiarise them with their new role and with how the council works. Your induction should introduce you to the people who you need to know – both members and officers – to do your job effectively and show you how and where to access the information you 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 help build your knowledge in a particular service area,

such as education, adult social care, housing or planning – or develop your skills – for example in 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

Much 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 its internal intranet, will contain lots of information on the council, the way it works, its services and on the local area.

Increasingly, council papers are provided electronically rather than in paper form, to give councillors rapid access to information and to cut down on the mountains of paper that councils traditionally produce. Many councils have good teleconferencing facilities that allow you to attend meetings remotely, or they may allow you to join meetings via telephone or Skype.

Your council may provide you with a computer or a tablet, or they may give you access through your own equipment.

Officers have a duty to ensure that councillors have access to the information that they need in order to make well-informed decisions. They may do this by producing factual reports, making presentations or arranging visits – for example to allow

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 access to the services of a political assistant who can carry out research on behalf of the group.

Allowances

All councillors are entitled to a basic allowance for being a councillor. Councillors with additional roles may also receive a special responsibility allowance (or SRA) which reflects the level of responsibility and the 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 and other caring responsibilities, travel and subsistence, or offer access to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Allowances are all 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 – may be deducted before calculating the tax to be paid.

Councillor development: support from the LGA

The LGA is committed to supporting and developing councillors throughout their careers – from newly elected members to experienced local leaders. We offer a comprehensive programme of support,¹ including:

Young councillors' weekend

An opportunity for young councillors to build valuable networks with their peers early in their careers and to develop leadership and other skills.

Local leadership

Activities and initiatives to support councillors as leaders of their communities, including a useful learning toolkit for councillors – the Political Skills Framework toolkit 2012.

Next generation

A prestigious political leadership programme for ambitious councillors, developed with party political experts and designed to help councillors rise to their own current and future political challenges.

Leadership Academy

The Leadership Academy offers development opportunities for councillors in leadership positions. There is also a series of stand-alone focused programmes providing themed learning opportunities for councillors in portfolio areas such as planning or older people's services.

BAME weekender

An event designed specifically for councillors from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, providing a useful networking and leadership development opportunity.



To see all the opportunities currently available, visit: www.local.gov.uk/councillor-development

¹ Programme may be subject to change

5. Communication

To be a good councillor, you also need to be a good communicator.

Listen as well as promote – communication is a two-way process

As their 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. Key stakeholders include:

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

Make the most of available help

Speak to your council or party's communications people if you're not sure of anything, or need advice.

- If you've got newsworthy items, speak to your communications people first to get their input and advice about how best to represent them.
- There are usually guidelines that set out the roles and responsibilities of a council's communications and media officers. For example, they can't write or send out press releases on behalf of individual councillors. Their job is to represent the council from a corporate point of view, reflecting the

policy decisions made. However this can be a great help in promoting council work you've been involved with.

- Find out what methods of communication are available to you, what they're for and who the audience is. For example, council and party websites, newsletters/ magazines, e-newsletters, social media channels, and focus groups.

Develop an effective relationship with the local media

Get to know key media contacts covering your ward, and build up trust. If you have a story of interest, let them know in advance so that they can plan the coverage. Don't forget to let your council/party communications people know too!

- **On the record** – commenting on the record means a journalist can report and quote what an individual is saying and may use their name.
- **Off the record** – commenting off the record means that, if you have a good relationship, it is unlikely a journalist will directly report what you have said. (Most will abide by this convention.)
- **Non-attributable** – providing a non-attributable quote means a journalist can use the information but shouldn't name the source.
- **If in doubt, say nothing!** Make sure that the journalist understands the basis on which you are talking.

- **Build up the relationship** – do this and you'll find that local media reporters will come to you for news and views and you will be seen as a valuable and credible source of news.
- **Understand what makes a good news story** – something that is Topical, Relevant, Unusual, Trouble, Human (TRUTH).

Meet people where they are – on and off line

Good communications needn't cost a lot – sometimes just the price of a cup of coffee.

- Visit local meeting places, for example cafés, local shops, outside the school gate.
- Newsletters (on paper or by email)
- Events/meetings
- Surgeries in person, or online – offer opportunities for local people to come and ask questions or raise concerns. Councillor David Harrington of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council uses Skype to carry out some of his surgeries. (Follow him on Twitter: @cllrharrington)
- Social media – there are lots of opportunities to push out communications, as well as listen to people and respond via social networking sites. For example Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube.
- Blogs and websites – for the more technically savvy, it's fairly easy to set up a basic website or blog yourself. For those just starting out, the LGA's Knowledge Hub is a good place to get blogging.

Develop your public voice – and understand who's watching

Whether you're involved in a conversation on Twitter, or in the pub, it's important to remember who might read or hear what you say and what impact that might have.

- Be aware of how your public voice comes across.
- Behave online as you would in person.
- Make sure written copy is in plain English, accurate and relevant to your audience.



Find out more about using different communications channels and developing your approach to communications in the Knowledge Hub: <https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk>

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 creates 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 the 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 that you make and the actions that 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 (DPA) is designed to safeguard personal data and regulate how it is processed. Personal data is information about an identifiable living person. Processing means obtaining, recording or holding the information or data or carrying out any operation on the information. This definition is very wide and it is difficult to

think of anything you can do with personal information that will not be processing.

The Act is underpinned by eight common-sense principles. The primary obligation is that personal data must be processed lawfully and fairly and shall not be processed unless certain requirements are met. If you handle personal data in line with the spirit of those principles, then 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 data protection officer or contact the Information Commissioner's Office.

The Act requires every organisation processing personal data to register with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) unless they are exempt. Registration costs £35 a year and failure to notify risks a fine of up to £5000.

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 the Council's Notification.
2. As a member of a political party canvassing for votes, electioneering and working for the party. This is normally covered by the party's Notification but please check. **However**, if you are not a member of a political group will have to notify the ICO yourself if you wish to process personal data in this way.
3. As a local councillor, carrying out casework in your ward/division. In this case you are the data controller and are required to notify the ICO yourself.

Councillors holding personal data must keep it secure. This is particularly important when the data is of a sensitive nature such as ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation or political allegiance.

- Further advice on the implications of the Freedom of Information or Data Protection Acts can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website: www.ico.gov.uk

Open data

The Government has placed a strong emphasis on transparency and all councils have been asked to publish data on expenditure, as well as other accountability and performance information.

Open data can support innovation and improvement in public services. The 'making a difference with data' project (www.madwdata.org.uk) was set up to spread understanding about open data and transparency. It will show how information obtained from organisations such as the police, NHS and councils can be used by citizens to raise issues, campaign and influence decisions.

LG Inform

Local Government Inform (LG Inform) is an online data and benchmarking tool developed by the LGA in partnership with the local government sector. It provides councils and fire and rescue services with free access to over 1,800 items of relevant performance and contextual data. As a councillor, you can use LG Inform to compare the performance of your own council with others and share these results with colleagues and the public.



For more information, visit www.local.gov.uk/about-lginform, or contact LGInform@local.gov.uk



Using data

Data and statistics can be useful in showing 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 you may find useful to look at includes:

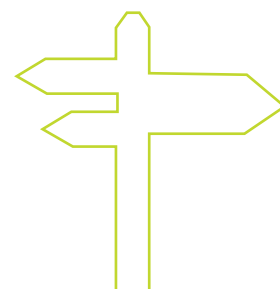
education: the performance of local schools and colleges

housing: the number and type of council properties within the 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, the number and type of fire and rescue incidents

facilities: use of libraries, leisure centres, parks and playing fields.



7. Local government finance

Local government finance has a well-deserved reputation for being complicated and 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 understand the basics.

Local authority spending in England falls into three main areas:

- spending on capital projects such as roads or school buildings
- revenue spending on council housing, and
- revenue spending on all other areas – mainly on pay and other costs of running services.

Central government plans public spending on a multi-year basis through Spending Reviews. The last review was in October 2010 and set total public sector budgets until March 2015. It included significant cuts for councils, with an overall reduction in core funding of one third, in real terms, over four years. A spending review in June 2013 examines public spending plans for one year only 2015/16.

Local authorities have historically found out their individual grant allocations for the next financial year through the Local Government Finance Settlement, which is published in December, although multi-year settlements have offered some predictability.

Once the settlement has been approved by Parliament in February, councils know the level of government funding they will get. They can then make final decisions on how much they will spend in the coming year, and decide on the amount of council tax they need to raise to cover the shortfall between their spending needs and their

expected income from grant, fees and charges.

Councils must now hold a local referendum if they want to raise council tax above a threshold set by central government (two per cent in 2013).

Finance reforms

April 2013 saw a watershed moment, with the most significant reforms to local government finance in decades. Until then, business rates collected by councils were paid into a central pot to be redistributed as part of the formula grant. There was no connection between the amount of business rate funding a council collected and the level of funding they received.

The Local Government Finance Act 2012 allows councils to retain a portion of their business rate growth. Central government will continue to set the maximum increase in the business rates multiplier (the 'pence in the pound') and will decide on what share of business rates can be kept by councils.

Budgets

Revenue and capital budgets cover all the resources of the council – money, employees, services, buildings and so on. They represent the fundamental tools that councillors use to make their policies and strategies come alive. For this reason, it is important that all councillors take an interest in the budget process.

Budget planning, setting, scrutinising and monitoring can be a time-consuming exercise. A sound budget enables councils to

deliver on their responsibilities and priorities. The budget reflects a combination of the political choices of the party in control, duties set out in statute and, increasingly, the need to reduce spending.

The budget process enables councillors to:

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

Generally, the ruling group or coalition will present a set of budget proposals to full council, following consultation with officers and local residents. All councillors have a critical role to play in monitoring the budgets throughout the year and ensuring they are spent on delivering the council's policies and strategies.

The budget cycle

The budget year runs from April to March. The budget cycle is largely driven by the need to set **council tax**, which must be done annually. As a result, budgets are agreed on an annual basis, although the council will also have medium-term financial plans that look three to five years into the future.

The four main stages of the budgeting process councillors must 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 is received from a range of sources and spent on services that benefit local people. Most revenue comes from:

- business rates – both the 'local share' and the 'central share' (revenue support grant)
- additional revenue support grant
- specific government grants (some are 'ring fenced', such as the dedicated schools grant)
- fees and charges for council services (such as planning applications, parking and leisure facilities)
- council tax.

Revenue expenditure is money councils can spend on day-to-day things such as salaries, electricity and printing – things that 'get used up' and have no resale value.

Capital expenditure is money spent on the:

- acquisition, reclamation, enhancement or laying out of land
- acquisition, construction, preparation, enhancement or replacement of roads, buildings and other structures

- acquisition, installation or replacement of movable or unmovable plant, machinery, apparatus, vehicles and vessels.

Councils cannot, as a rule, use capital resources to fund their revenue expenses. This means that if a council sells an asset such as a building, it is not able to use the proceeds to pay for staff salaries or local services, unless the government has given it explicit permission to do so.



Hot topic: Community Budgets

Community Budgets were piloted in four different areas and twelve neighbourhoods during 2012, and based on the findings are being rolled out more widely during 2013/14. They offer a way of responding to one of the key challenges for the public sector – how to find radical new solutions that deliver better value for money and better services more tailored to local needs.

Community Budgets can be applied to a geographical area or to the services provided to a certain client group – for example troubled families. They are based on the principle that if all the providers of public services in an area work together to plan, deliver and fund those services, they can deliver better and more responsive services at less cost to the taxpayer by:

- reducing waste and duplication
- making better use of resources –
by pooling budgets, knowledge, assets and voluntary effort
- removing central rules and regulations
- giving people greater control over their local services.

With councils taking a lead role, community budgets give local public service partners the freedom to work together to redesign services around user needs.



For more information to: www.local.gov.uk/community-budgets

8. Holding the council to account

Overview and scrutiny

Overview and scrutiny is 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. It also ensures that all councillors can take part in the development of council policy.

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.

Since 2012, councils have been able to move to a committee system for decision-making. Councils that choose this option don't have to operate an overview and scrutiny committee. However, councils that operate executive arrangements (with a cabinet or an elected mayor) must continue to have at least one.

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

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

Formal duties

The formal duties of scrutiny vary depending on the type of authority. In two-tier areas, only counties are responsible for scrutinising the health service, while the districts/boroughs take on lead responsibility for crime and disorder scrutiny in their areas.

All councils have a range of scrutiny powers to hold partner organisations to account, and scrutiny can investigate any issues which members believe are affecting the local authority area, or its residents, to discuss proposals and to make recommendations.

Getting it right

Scrutiny has no formal powers to stop the cabinet doing something (or to make it do something), but it's 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 also 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” of services.

Health scrutiny is one of the most important ways that councils can respond to the concerns of their 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. The Francis enquiry’s report into deaths at Mid-Staffordshire Hospital found that health scrutiny had been ineffective in identifying failures and poor care. This should be a catalyst for councils to recognise its important role – not only in holding to account acute trusts and other health bodies, but in bringing about change to improve health and reduce health inequalities.

Further information

The Centre for Public Scrutiny 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. The ‘library’ section includes a range of recent case studies. There is a helpdesk telephone line on 020 7187 7362 and you can email info@cfps.org.uk for scrutiny advice.

Housing Ombudsman Service

The Localism Act 2011 transferred the housing functions of the Local Government Ombudsman to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) from April 2013. The remit of the HOS has been extended to cover the tenants of local authority housing as well as those of registered providers of social housing.

Tenants of registered providers can request that their complaints be considered by a ‘designated person’ once they complete their landlord’s internal procedure. Such a person can be an MP, a local councillor or a recognised Tenant Panel. The designated person may help resolve the complaint directly, refer the complaint to the ombudsman, or decline to do either. In the latter case, the complainant can approach the ombudsman for its consideration of their complaint.



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

Local Government Ombudsman

The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints from the public about the administrative actions of councils. It also covers school admissions appeal panels and adult social care providers. It's free to use, and the ombudsman must investigate complaints in a fair and independent way, without taking sides.

Each council has its own systems for handling complaints, and whenever possible they will want a complaint to be resolved locally. However, if the complainant is not happy with the council's response, they may ask their councillor what to do next.

Whether the councillor agrees with their complaint or not, they should explain how the person can complain to the Local Government Ombudsman. If asked to do so, a councillor can refer the complaint on behalf of the person, and the ombudsman will consider councillors' comments on the complaints referred.

The ombudsman does not regulate councils or overturn properly taken council decisions. Its job is to examine the administrative processes involved and, where things have gone wrong, obtain redress for people who have suffered injustice. Where the ombudsman finds flaws, he or she will ask the council to review its procedures to avoid similar complaints arising in the future. In this way, complaints to the ombudsman can help a council to improve its services.



For more information, including case studies, visit the Local Government Ombudsman website: www.lgo.org.uk

9. Children's and adults' services

Children's services

The provision of children's services is going through a period of major reform and change, with some significant policies being developed.

Among the issues currently attracting the attention of councillors working in this area are:

- the role of councils in **education** and the increasing number of academies
- **school funding**
- major reform of **special educational needs** and provision for pupils with disabilities
- a Government focus on **adoption** and adoption scorecards
- a growing number of **looked after children**
- child sexual **exploitation**
- a new **Ofsted** inspection framework
- **sector-led improvement**
- **early years** funding
- raising the **participation age** for compulsory education and training
- the impact of **health reforms** on children
- **youth unemployment** and re-engaging young people.

As with other services, there are significant pressures on funding and a consequent drive for increased productivity. This in turn has led to a need to identify new ways of providing children's services, better commissioning and a shift to prevention and early intervention.

Priority areas

The LGA's Children and Young People Board currently has a work programme focusing on:

- promoting growth and prosperity, including tackling child poverty
- ensuring children's health is seen as an important part of the transfer of public health to local government (see chapter 9)
- ensuring councils are fully supported to address any issues that come out of public sector reform
- supporting the council's role in education.



For more detail on the work of the Board, on the issues facing children's services and on the support and guidance available to councillors working in this area go to www.local.gov.uk/children-and-young-people

Adult social care

Around 1.75 million adults in England rely on care arranged for them by councils. By 2030, people aged over 50 will comprise almost half the adult population. The number of adults needing care and support is set to grow rapidly over the coming decades.

Adult social care constitutes the biggest area of discretionary spending for county and unitary councils. Each council sets the level of need that establishes whether a person is eligible to receive care, and a financial assessment then decides how much they should contribute to its cost. Most councils then commission services rather than providing them directly.

Many of those cared for will be people who are self-funders, people who use their own money to fund the support that suits them best. Councils can help them to make the best decisions by ensuring that effective advice and information is available.

Funding and reform

With a rapidly ageing population, reform of adult social care is one of the most important public policy debates of the moment. A white paper on the issue, 'Caring for our future', was published in 2012. It drew on a number of sources – including the Dilnot Commission, which examined the funding of care and support.

The white paper featured six themes the Government believes have the greatest potential for improving the care system:

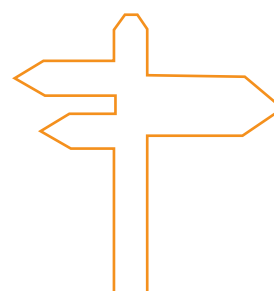
- quality and workforce
- personalisation
- shaping local care services
- prevention
- integration
- role of financial services.

How to fund care of an ageing population in a way that is sustainable is one of today's most hotly debated topics. Alongside this is the transformation of the way that care is delivered, with a move towards more personalised support for people and their carers, to enable them retain to or regain their independence for as long as possible.

The shift to a proactive and preventative way of working means ensuring that universal services – including information, advice and advocacy – are easy to find and available to everyone. That calls for a cross-council response involving not only social services but also housing, community and leisure services. In two tier areas, this means greater joined up working not only between departments, but also across different councils.



For more information go to:
www.local.gov.uk/adult-social-care



10. Councils and health

Social, economic and environmental conditions – including the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age – influence the health of individuals and population. Improving the health and wellbeing of citizens has long been a role that is shared by local government and the National Health Service (NHS). Traditionally, the NHS has provided medical and clinical care, whilst councils have been responsible for social care – such as residential and home-based care, day centres, transport schemes like dial-a-ride and meals on wheels.

However, health inequality – the gap between the healthiest and least healthy in society – is widening. This has led to major changes in the way that health and social care is provided as part of a major strategy to address health inequalities based around six policy objectives:

1. giving every child the best start in life
2. enabling all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
3. creating fair employment and good work for all
4. ensuring a healthy standard of living for all
5. creating and developing sustainable places and communities
6. strengthening the role and impact of ill-health prevention.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 introduced major new powers and responsibilities for councils and transferred

many public health services and staff to local government. New responsibilities range from the schools weighing and measuring programme to fluoridation of water, sexual health and dental public health. Directors of public health are now employed by local authorities and appointed jointly with Public Health England. All unitary and county councils now have statutory duties to improve health outcomes and address health inequalities, and must:

- set up health and wellbeing boards
- develop joint strategic needs assessments and joint health and wellbeing strategies
- promote integration of health, social care and other services to improve health outcomes
- procure Local Healthwatch, a new patient and public involvement body for health and care services.

These changes are part of a much wider set of proposals that will put most of the



Health and wellbeing boards

Health and wellbeing boards are now a statutory committee of the council, and as a minimum must include at least one councillor along with the directors of adult social care, children's service and public health, representatives of local clinical commissioning groups and a representative from Local Healthwatch. The LGA has provided support to shadow health and wellbeing boards and will continue to develop and refine a specific sector-led offer to health and wellbeing boards.

NHS budget into the hands of **clinical commissioning groups** (CCGs). Led by GPs, they will commission local health services from health providers in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors.



Local Healthwatch

Local Healthwatch will speak on behalf of patients, carers and the community on health, adult social care and public health issues and act as the consumer and citizen champion for health and care services in the area. It will link into local overview and scrutiny arrangements.

Read more in our supporting publications:

'Establishing Local Healthwatch: introduction and the local authority role'

'Local Healthwatch and community leadership: the role of non-executive councillors'

'Involving Local Healthwatch: the role of chairs and members of health and wellbeing boards'

Councillors and health

Councillors have an important role in identifying the health and wellbeing priorities for their communities. Some will occupy key positions on the new 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.



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



Councillor Michael Payne

Labour

Gedling Borough Council

As deputy leader of the council, my days are often busy and always incredibly varied. Facing a new challenge every day is part of what makes being a councillor so interesting. Learning so many new skills in order to meet these challenges head-on is what makes the role so rewarding.

My time is split into thirds between ward casework/keeping in touch with my constituents; work relating to my cabinet roles; and building relationships with partner organisations and businesses. Effective time management is without doubt one of the most important skills a councillor needs.

My two ward colleagues are from the same party as me, so we've split the ward into three areas to share the workload. Having a good relationship with your fellow ward councillors is crucial and it's important to keep in touch with them.

When I was elected I thought the public would expect councillors to know everything. They don't. Legislation is constantly changing, local issues come and go and there's just too much to know. So don't be afraid to ask for help, either from officers or more experienced councillors.

When I was elected I set myself a goal of getting a new footpath with street lights in a neglected part of my ward. Four months later I achieved it. The amount of thanks and recognition I received for that is what makes being a councillor so great.

11. Councils and the economy

The effects of the economic downturn on local jobs and businesses are a major concern for councils. In many parts of the country, businesses are struggling to stay afloat, unemployment – especially youth unemployment – is growing and people are finding it increasingly difficult to feed and clothe their families.

Although economic development is not a statutory duty, councils play a vital role in supporting their local economies and driving growth. They do this 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 help businesses to develop. 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. Local government has a critical role to play in supporting them to survive and grow. 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 and adopting business-friendly charters or concordats.

One potential area of growth and employment is in the low carbon sector. The low carbon economy in the UK is already worth £122 billion. The sector employed 900,000 people by 2012, with another 400,000 jobs predicted by 2014/15.

Local Economic Partnerships

Every council area is covered by a Local Economic Partnership (or LEP) – a voluntary partnership of councils, other parts of the public sector and businesses. LEPs recognise that local economies don't follow council boundaries – for example, people travel to work in different areas. They have a strategic role in determining the economic priorities and leading economic growth and job creation. The Government has indicated that more funding and powers will be devolved to them in the future. Most councils are active partners in the local LEP, although not all are represented on the board.

Welfare reform

The Government has embarked on a process of reforming the way that the welfare system operates. The reforms seek to simplify the benefits and tax credits system and encourage people into work by ensuring that work always pays. This is one of the most politically contentious set of reforms for many years, with many councillors across all parties expressing grave concerns over the potential impact on their local communities, and in particular the most vulnerable people in those communities. Councils are at the forefront of delivering the reforms, but to do so successfully must work in close collaboration with partners such as Job Centre Plus, learning and skills training

providers and the voluntary and community sector.

The reforms introduce a new system of **universal credit**, due to be rolled out across England by 2017. Universal credit brings together unemployment benefits, tax credits and housing benefit and includes an overall benefits cap. Of particular concern to many councils is the expectation that at least 80 per cent of universal credit applications or changes will take place online.

Other measures that affect councils include:

- responsibility for administering council tax benefit transferred to councils – along with a 10 per cent reduction in the funding to do so. Councils must deliver **local council tax support schemes** that protect older claimants and other vulnerable people
- reforms to disability living allowance through the introduction of the personal independence payment
- changes to the local housing allowance limit eligibility for housing benefit and introduce maximum payments for people living in private sector housing
- replacement of community care grants and crisis loans with local welfare assistance funded by a grant to top tier authorities.



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



Councillor Julie Smith

Liberal Democrat
Cambridge City Council

In 2012 I returned to the executive of the council after a couple of years on the back-benches. My previous portfolio was arts and recreation, quite high profile and occasionally very sensitive: your idea of great children's play equipment may be someone else's idea of desecration of a green open space.

My current role could scarcely be more different: customer services and resources. I used to think this sounded dull, but I couldn't have been more wrong. The portfolio covers a wide range of back office functions – HR, legal, accountancy, IT and so on – as well as the council's commercial property portfolio, markets, tourism, our customer services centre, and revenues and benefits.

There are lots of meetings, usually with officers. Come budget time, they are all seeking to persuade me of the merits of their proposed bids and savings. Much of the work is internal and not very newsworthy. However, revenues and benefits inevitably affect a lot of residents.

I have been involved in politics for almost as long as I can remember: I studied it, I now teach it and in my 'spare time' I practise it. I'm lucky that my day job as an academic gives me the flexibility to attend meetings. Life is never dull, but a few more hours in the day would mean more sleep and fewer diary clashes.

12. Councils and the environment

Planning

As a new councillor you may be appointed to the council's planning committee.

Planning is not just about dealing with planning applications – it is about balancing the economic, environmental and social impacts of new development. The decisions that you make as a councillor can impact on housing, job creation, climate change, investment, infrastructure and the quality of people's lives. This is why planning is often controversial and why finding the right balance between several often conflicting perspectives is so challenging.

There are two main aspects – writing and implementing a plan, and dealing with planning applications. Underpinning both of these areas is the need for community involvement.

The Local Plan

The Local Plan is written by the council in consultation with other council services, community groups, the voluntary sector, businesses, neighbouring councils and organisations such as the Environment Agency. This is known as the duty to cooperate. The sets out the council's approach to development in the area, and is used as the basis for planning decisions. National policy requires the plan to include certain topics, but the local interpretation, and weight placed on these, will vary.

The Local Plan must be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate. If agreed then the 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.

Planning applications

Often called development management or development control, this is the part of planning that most people are familiar with. It is one of the main ways of implementing the Local Plan.

Applications must be decided in accordance with planning policies and other relevant considerations. Decisions are made in two main ways – officers can determine some (usually straightforward) planning applications, leaving the planning committee more time to focus on the strategic or controversial applications.

As a councillor you may be lobbied by individuals or groups in relation to applications in your ward or division. If you are not on the Planning Committee, you can ask to address the committee as the local councillor when they consider the application. If you are on the Planning 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 more information on councillors' involvement on planning proposals.



For further information, visit the Planning Advisory Service website: www.pas.gov.uk

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, which include increased flood risk and heat waves. In 2012 the Government published the first UK climate change risk assessment, now being used to develop a national programme.

Climate Local is the LGA's initiative to help councils take local action to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to the changing climate. In choosing to sign up to it, councils commit to addressing the risks and pursuing the opportunities presented by a changing climate.

Extreme weather can have a major impact on council services and property. In recent years drought, snow, heatwave and flooding have affected many parks and buildings and caused significant damage to roads and bridges, and created challenges in maintaining essential services like 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 risk management strategies. A range of resources designed to help councils understand the business case and take action on climate change are available on the LGA website.



For more information visit
www.local.gov.uk/climate-change



Hot topic: Flooding

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

Did you know...

- in the UK today, around six million properties are exposed to some degree of flood risk
- damage to properties and contents due to river and tidal flooding costs about £1.3 billion a year.

Unitary and county councils were given responsibility for local flood risk management in 2011. 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
- approving, adopting and maintaining sustainable drainage systems on new developments.



Gloucestershire County Council has produced a flood guide offering practical advice to residents and businesses:

www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/flooding

Further information on flooding and flood risk management can be found at the LGA's flood risk portal:
www.local.gov.uk/floodportal



The Green Deal

The **Green Deal** represents the most significant change in funding for domestic energy efficiency for many years. Councils like Newcastle and Birmingham are developing new models for upgrading their housing stock that allow councils to cut emissions and address fuel poverty even in these financially challenging times, drawing on Green Deal the Energy Company Obligation (ECO).

Councils can invest in renewable energy in their own buildings or in partnership with communities, creating extra income streams for other services and creating clean power. Some councils have entered into arrangements with energy service companies to deliver preferential rates to local communities and businesses. A range of funding is available for renewable energy development, including feed-in tariffs and the renewable heat incentive.



Councillor Julie Morris

Liberal Democrat

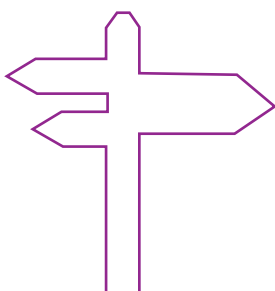
Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

It may seem easier to represent your residents when your party is in control of the council, but there is plenty that can be done for them in opposition too.

When you challenge majority party policies, you have to make sure that your arguments are clear and truly representative of residents' views. Keep residents up-to-date on issues that may affect them and let them know you are at their service.

The methods we use to keep our residents informed and engaged are tried and tested. We publish a regular newsletter, liaise with the local press, keep our website up-to-date and hold surgeries and consultations. If, as a new member, you feel that you're not getting a response with these techniques, don't give up. It may just take some time for residents to feel comfortable with you.

One example of the contact we have with our residents was when the council had a choice of two traffic-calming schemes. We targeted 200 households along the proposed route prior to the release of the official council documents. By delivering tick-box questionnaires in person and asking people to place the completed forms sticking out of their letterboxes, we got a great response. As well as gathering opinions on the traffic scheme, we collected useful data for our next campaign.



13. Safer, stronger communities

Police and crime commissioners

From November 2012, all areas outside London have had 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. The PCCs 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 police and crime commissioner is scrutinised by a **police and crime panel**. In London, the panel is a committee of the Greater London Assembly. Elsewhere in England, councils are responsible for setting up these panels. In Wales, although the Home Office has responsibility for setting up the panel, local authorities have taken the lead in doing so.

Police and crime panels must scrutinise the PCCs' 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 20. Where there are more than 10 councils in a police force area, each appoints one councillor to the panel. Where there are less than 10 councils, each council provides one councillor and the councils then decide how to allocate the remaining places. 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 authorities

Fire and rescue services can be delivered in three 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. In large cities, responsibility falls to the metropolitan fire authorities.

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 FRA by their councils. County councils will also have a portfolio holder leading on fire and rescue services.

www.local.gov.uk/fire-and-rescue-services

The voluntary and community sector

The term 'voluntary and community sector' (or 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 co-operatives 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.

Voluntary and community sector 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 some voluntary and community organisations, either to cover their core costs or contribute to a particular aspect of their work. Councils can also commission them to deliver specific services or outcomes. 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-vol.org.uk
- National Association for Voluntary and Community Action:
www.navca.org.uk



Hot topic: Social enterprise

Social enterprises are businesses that operate for a social purpose. They can include community development trusts, housing associations and worker-owned co-operatives.

They vary greatly in size and motivation, from multinational organisations to local community groups. There are some 55,000 social enterprises in the UK, with an annual turnover of more than £27 billion. They account for 5 per cent of all businesses with employees and contribute almost 1 per cent of annual GDP to the UK economy.



The LGA's publication 'Social enterprise, mutual, cooperative and collective ownership models: a practical guide' can be found at www.local.gov.uk/workforce-local-government

(select 'new models of delivery')

14. Improvement and innovation

Local government is the most efficient part of the public sector. Councils demonstrate on a daily basis that they are keen to develop new and innovative approaches to service delivery in response to the significant cuts in public spending over recent years, combined with an increased demand for services.

Each council is responsible for its own performance and improvement and councils collectively for the performance of the whole local government sector. The LGA has put together a seven-point offer to help councils to improve and to support them to develop innovative new approaches.



Find out more at:
www.local.gov.uk/support1

Increasing productivity

At a time of immense budget pressure – and with the prospect of further cuts to come – councils face their greatest challenge yet to reshape services in a way that meets the needs of local residents. As a new councillor, you are in a unique position to be able to look with fresh eyes at what your council does and how it does it.



Peer challenge

A peer challenge is just one part of the LGA's improvement work. It allows councils to review and transform their services, improve performance and deal with performance issues. It is voluntary in nature 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 written report within two weeks
- a review that is shaped to focus on the councils 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

Productivity 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. Does the council have a robust people management strategy? It should:
 - equip staff to work efficiently and productively across services, organisations and places
 - ensure effective employment policies and practices that support new ways of working such as commissioning, collaboration and partnership/outsourcing arrangements.
3. Is the council able to 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 for the council?
5. Have all potential savings been identified and agreed for the next three 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, and are there plans use them to them to generate income?
8. Is the council working with a full range of social care providers, including the voluntary and community sector to effectively but sensitively reduce demand on high-cost children's and adult social care services provided directly by the council?
9. Has the council re-negotiated its large contracts to reduce their cost?
10. What is the council doing to generate income?



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

15. Where to find out more

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 for **email bulletins** – handy digests of the latest news, analysis and best practice, or **on-the-day briefings** – summaries of important events and developments that affect local government produced on the day that they emerge. Topics might include the budget, the Queen's speech or new legislation.

The LGA's four **political group offices** each have their own pages, accessed from the main home page, with links to major events, publications and activities from a party political perspective. And for independent councillors, or for councillors from some of the smaller political groups, the Independent Group web pages provide a wealth of information that you may find helpful.

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 and localism
- health, adult social care and ageing
- workforce
- European and international

First is a bi-weekly magazine produced 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

Knowledge Hub <https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk>

Knowledge Hub is the LGA's professional social network which helps people in local government connect and share information online in a secure environment.

Whether it's being a member of a group or making personal connections with other councillors, Knowledge Hub helps you find, share and discuss information that's relevant to you, your work and your community.

You can:

- join groups to take part in discussions
- connect with other members and share learning and good practice
- use search to find the information you need
- receive email updates on what interests you
- publish your own blogs and share with a wider audience via social media.

If you have previously registered with other LGA online services you should be able to sign into Knowledge Hub with the same username and password.

If not, registering for an account just takes a few minutes and once you've signed in, you can find more information for councillors here: <https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/web/findingyourway>

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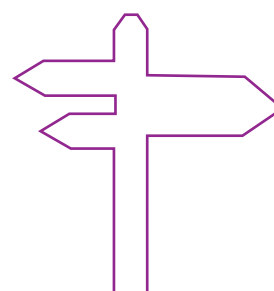
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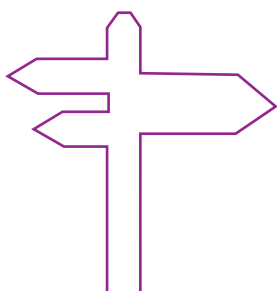
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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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References to government, government policy, plans and intentions, refer to their status in May 2013.

Some councillors quoted in the text may no longer hold the offices ascribed to them.



'Finding your way: A guide for new councillors 2013/14' is available free of charge to download from the LGA website:
www.local.gov.uk/councillor-development

You can also find more information, signposting links and opportunities for discussion in the 'Finding your way' Knowledge Hub group:
<https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/web/findingyourway>



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