

The Independent Group

On a successful road



The Independent Group is the most diverse group of councillors, and therefore the most representative of the public. We are also generally most in touch with and committed to our communities, and that is what gets us elected. Therein resides our strength and the reason we have such a powerful contribution to make. We dare to be different and work together to be most effective.

Independent Group voices are much needed, listening, considering carefully and speaking up for our communities, our councils and our country. The LGA forms the vehicle for you to achieve more with your residents, getting national support and negotiating with government.

The success of our work in supporting Independent Group members, helping raise skills, profile and reputation is demonstrated in remarkable year on year election success, for all those able to receive support from us. There is a clear move away from the central parties towards our members who focus on representing local people.



Marianne and Independent Group members at an East Midlands seminar

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Introduction

Marianne Overton MBE
Leader of the Independent Group
Vice Chairman of the Local Government Association (LGA)
Lincolnshire County Council and North Kesteven District Council



Key role for Independent Group Members

Do you think the recent election landslide demonstrates a seismic change in our local democracy? I do. Local government is about delivering services in a fair and democratically accountable way, but also about leading successful, cohesive communities, working closely with residents. That requires close connection to the communities and a willingness to focus on local needs and aspirations. In this new political landscape, we need a different, more collaborative kind of leadership, and that is where our members are uniquely well suited.

There are twelve councils led by Independent Group Members and another fifteen councils in no overall control where many more Independent members take critical roles, as Council Leaders, in administration or in a counterbalancing opposition. We dare to be different, and working together we are most effective.

As funding is reduced and radical changes proposed, such as the Williams report in Wales, councils are seeking ever more innovative ways of keeping basic services and keeping our communities on side.

The LGA's proposals of "Rewiring" Local Government is focussed on being more Independent from central Government, both financially and legally, with a greater devolution of power and money. This is continuing and I have included your contributions in the recent document, "The First 100 days", as far as possible.

Success to date

‣ Raising our profile

Our members have responded brilliantly with commitment and increasing talent and success. More members than ever before are attending and speaking up at conferences, parliamentary briefings and select committees, in the press and through the LGA, bringing a sound common-sense approach. We are in touch with their communities and representing them well. We are working to get the BBC political policy guidelines improved to give better coverage to Independent Group members.

› **A credible and effective voice**

To raise our effectiveness at the LGA we are increasing the information through conferences, briefings and newsletters, offering monthly training, regional events and increasing the number of accredited peers. The result – well informed and skilled, our members have played increasingly useful roles in their communities and their councils. They have worked with and attracted others. A massive 5,624 of our members stood in the recent May elections, a third of all candidates, with outstanding success.

› **Election success – the acid test**

Hot on the heels of success last year where our proportionality at the LGA went up by a third, the pattern was repeated this May. In the seats where we stood, all of our groups showed massive increases, doubling overall, whilst the two parties in power fell dramatically. The three “big” parties lost control in Councils across the country, often giving Independent group members a key role. Councils in Independent Group member leadership continue to demonstrate successful, fair and accountable local governance, driven by the needs of their communities.

What next?

- **Recruitment and retention:** We have developed two new projects, our own “Next Generation” skills programme and we captured the grants for people with disabilities standing for election. Our training and support is highly valued. We encourage networks to seek and support a range of good candidates, both men and women to enhance our reputation in government.
- **Showcase** our work at conferences and work with the media to demonstrate the talent and successes of our members to enhance our reputation.
- Increase the **influence** of our members in the decision-making process in councils across the country and in national government.
- Keep ourselves **skilled and well informed** by discussions to keep our direction in tune with what our residents and councillors require.
- Speak, vote and more importantly think about what our **residents** need and set about achieving it through work at local and national levels.
- Push for a proper share of **funding** for local government and real local power, without the strings that currently undermine it. At the same time we need to adjust to cope with less.
- **Take a lead in shaping Local Government** drawing on the ideas and discussions of the membership. We have gained Public health and Better Care with appropriate funding; can we also bring yet more services under the umbrella of local democracy?

Thanks

Thanks to Peter Reeve, my Deputy and to the Independent Group Executive Committee whose excellent attendance and contributions helped drive a very successful year. Our regional Chairmen have supported Councillors in their areas and worked with us to organise a number of successful conferences around the country, tailored to local needs, aspirations and reshaping local government. Many of you will know Maggie Sullivan, Head of the Independent Group office, supported by Vanessa Chagas. With our expanding workload, we have an additional staff member, Noleen Rosen - a huge thank you for their outstanding work.

Thank you to Stuart Drummond, our National Lead Peer and our three regional peers, Tony Clarke, Graham Brown and Colin Mann for their excellent service.

Thank you to Cllr Hugh Evans, Leader of the Independent Group and Dyfed Edwards, Leader of Plaid Cymru on the Welsh Local Government Association. I had the pleasure of attending the Welsh conference recently.

Our thanks to Independent Group nominated LGA Vice Presidents in 2013-2014 who are listed below:

- Lord Alton
- Lord Bichard
- Baroness Greengross
- Baroness Howarth
- Lord Ouseley
- Lord Adebawale
- Lord Laming
- Earl of Lytton
- Keith Taylor MEP

We look forward to working with our Vice Presidents in 2014-2015 who will be confirmed at the LGA General Assembly in July.

Thank you to the members of the Independent Group from right across England and Wales who represent us on LGA Boards, Committees, Panels and Special Interest Groups, developing and tackling government legislation.

My work as part of the LGA is listed in the annual report and, taken together with your contributions, makes impressive reading. Our Independent conferences and regional events have been the fertile ground for developing consensus for me to take forward on your behalf.

The Independent Group at the Local Government Association extends a warm welcome to all Independent Group members. Since your council is in membership of the LGA, you have the facilities and our small but growing staff team to support your work as a Councillor and a route to directly influence national government, helping them keep their feet on the ground as they make laws that affect our residents.

I have travelled widely around the country in this past year to listen, represent your views and do my best to support and inspire our Independent Group Councillors. Thank you for the warm welcome. Thanks to each of you, members of the 2,500 strong team of Independent Group Councillors who have given your talent, skills and time to Local Government and to our residents. This work matters to each one of the millions of people our councils serve every day. We are seeing unprecedented changes in local government. The mettle and determination of our listening Councillors is needed now and in the future.

Good luck and best wishes in all that you do for our communities. Thank you.



Feel free to contact me if you want to talk anything through or check out the website:
www.independentvoice.org.uk 01400 273323

Group Budget Report 2013-2014



**Councillor Bob Dutton OBE, Wrexham
Group Treasurer**

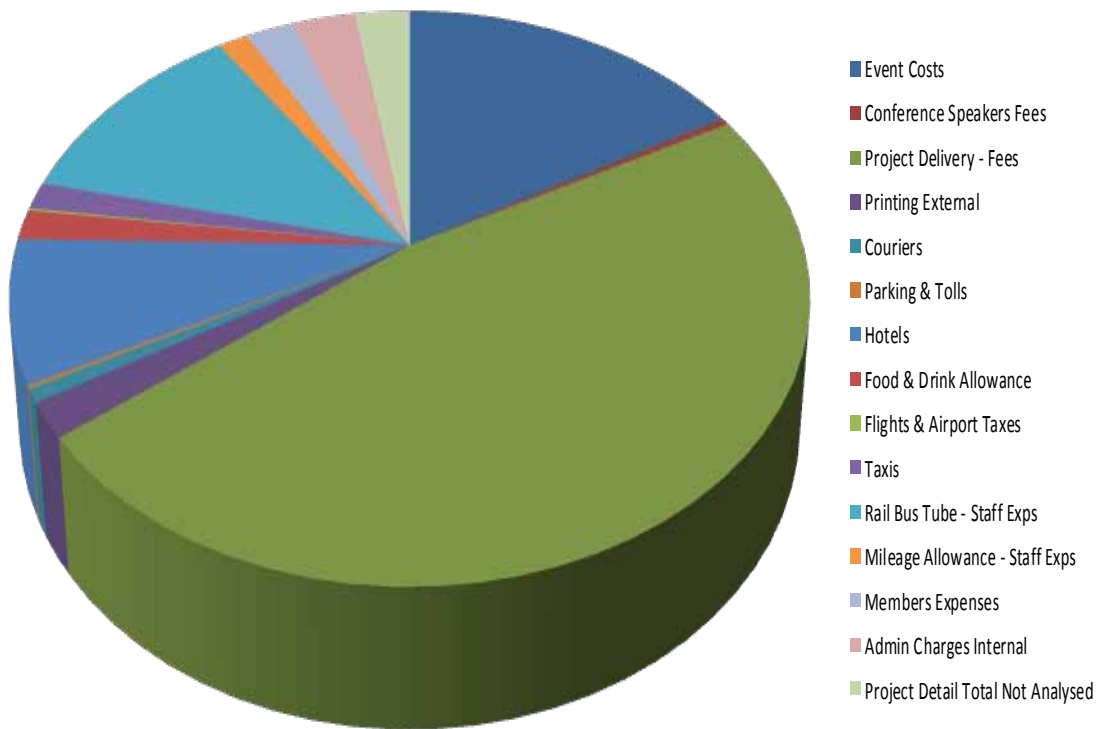
Summary of expenditure in 2013-2014

- Budget for the year including salaries and lay activity £122,650
- Total expenditure including salaries and lay activity £102,814

2013-2014 Activity Budget

The Group spent £14,853.19 against a total activity budget of £14,028 for the year. The slight over-spend was accounted for by additional capacity on the Group's salary line resulting from staffing changes during the year. The Group has achieved a substantial amount of activity out of what was a relatively modest budget overall: including 5 regional and one county meeting, monthly information and development seminars and two annual conferences. The budget has supported the print and production of the Group's Annual Report to Members and attendance at numerous external meetings with government ministers, officials, and other Local Government Associations in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales to enhance the collective profile of local government and the vital work it undertakes. Our Group Lead Members have been supported to raise their profile by attendance at numerous events. In addition we have ensured that we managed our budget in a way which supports the LGA's drive to keep costs down overall.

Graph of key areas of spend in 2013-2014



2014-2015 Budget

Our activity budget for 2014-2015 has been set at £17,246 reflecting cuts to political group budgets across the piece in respect of a review of finances following the recent review of LGA Governance Structures.

The group will also benefit from additional funding allocated specifically for new leadership training programmes and a bursary element. The amount available to us for this aspect of our work is £23,360, the majority of which will fund a new, Independent Group Next Generation Programme. The Government Equalities Office has granted us £20,000 to carry out our Access to Elected Office for Disabled People project. We are committed to holding an extra Independent Group Conference in Wales in 2014 for Independent Group members, as well as the traditional annual group conference in London in November.

A full financial statement is provided at Annex A of the annual report



Councillor Hugh Evans OBE
Leader Denbighshire Council

Leader of the WLGA Independent Group

At last the sun is out and summer becomes a reality, this is simply not the case for the future of local government and local democracy in Wales, as the black clouds of future settlements and the impact of the Williams Report begin to become a reality.

Since I became a Councillor in 2004, local government has been expected to make savings which were manageable, i.e. 1%. In recent years however, and since the election of the latest government in Wales in 2011, this expectancy has accelerated, for instance for the whole of the last term of Council, Denbighshire made savings of £18M and for the first two years of this term alone we are looking at £17M; the government will say it's the settlement from Westminster, I would say it's an intention to undermine our role and damage our reputation with the public.

The Welsh Government seems to expect more with less and it's time to make a stand. There is an expectation that we will improve our performance, deliver their policies and increase the satisfaction rates of our residents. I do not believe that this is possible and while the councillors affiliated to the national parties take a back seat and go with the flow it is up to independent councillors to stand up and become the voice of localism. There is an opportunity here to raise our profile as the drivers of community issues and defenders of residents' expectations. As UKIP found a gap in European issues due to the lack of clarity from national parties, similar could be said at a local level and this the opportunity which could benefit independent councillors.

This second challenge is the impending response to the Williams Report from the First Minister. Whilst I agree with the Welsh Government commissioning a review of the governance arrangement for public services I am disappointed with the response so far. There is great uncertainty, for staff and service planning as it is unclear what the timeline is for implementation, and more importantly the cost of delivering the recommendations in the report. Councillors with more experience than me still talk of the problems that arose with the re-organisation in 1995! Many times I have heard ministers within the Welsh Government say that the present structure of local government is not sustainable, and that is right if our funding is taken away; however by having a weaker local government union it will strengthen the relevance of the Senedd. Is this the real agenda!

My main concern with the Williams Report is that it takes the democratic process and accountability further away from the residents, which in turn challenges the independent principle of being close to our communities. My guess is that it won't happen until there are clear manifesto pledges from main parties for the 2016 Welsh Assembly Government elections, the question is should we as independents have a position on this?

Independent Group Representative Reports

The Independent Group appoints representatives to all Local Government Group Member Structures, to outside organisations and to European and International Bodies. Reports from our representatives follow below:

LGA Governance 2014-2015

An LGA General Meeting in January 2014 made changes to the organisation's governance structures. It introduced two new Boards more or less immediately: City Regions and People and Places. From September 2014 the governance structures at the LGA will be as follows:

- Leadership Board
- LGA Executive
- Councillors' Forum

Programme Boards

- Children and Young People
- City Regions
- Community Safety Board (which will take on overall responsibility for fire and rescue)
- Community Wellbeing
- Culture Tourism and Sport
- A combined Environment and Housing and Economy and Transport Board
- Improvement and Innovation
- People and Places
- Resources (which will consider local government resources in the round: finance, workforce and the economic elements of European and International work). Other Boards will consider policy concerning Europe and internationally as appropriate to their terms of reference.

Committees

Fire Service Management Committee

Commissions

- Fire Commission
- The Urban and Rural Commissions have been disbanded under new governance arrangements but will continue to have annual conferences.

The County Councils Network and District Councils Network will continue

The Independent Group will continue to appoint to a number of outside bodies.



**Councillor Apu Bagchi, Bedford Borough Council
Deputy Chair**

It has been very busy year for the Board. Mr Gove and his Department for Education (DfE) team kept us busy and well occupied. The Board met a number of times during the year and on two occasions we had full discussions with Ministers as well as the Chief Inspector of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills.(OFSTED).

The LGA played a very active role in helping to influence the Children and Families Act during its passage through Parliament. We have been able to secure an amendment to the legislation to prevent the Secretary of State from using a power to remove all local authorities from adopter recruitment and assessment. We also successfully campaigned for improving the appeals procedures in the future.

With regards to Children's Improvement during 2013-14 the CYP Board has overseen the following work:

- the appointment of 9 Children's Improvement Associates to work with our Principal Advisers in each of the regions in order to provide best support to councils
- a quarterly meeting with stakeholders at a national level – comprised of representatives of the LGA, the Society for Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)
- a leadership academy for lead members for children services ; nearly 50 elected members attended three events during 2013-14 and three more are planned for this year
- In the case of School Places – the LGA lobbied for additional funding and three-year budgets to make school place planning meaningful. The Government announced 3-year budgets in the last Spending Review and allocated an additional £2.35 billion of basic need funding to allow councils to make sure there are enough school places locally. The councils need to cater for more than 400,000 new places for the coming year.
- The Board continued the successful Hidden Talents campaign calling for greater levers for councils to support youth participation in work and learning. We have launched a 'How to Guide' supporting local authorities to improve the way they track the participation of young people and support re-engagement.
- The Board has published an online child sexual exploitation (CSE) awareness raising toolkit for councillors, which was viewed by 1500 visitors during the first month alone.
- We have worked with the Adoption Leadership Board to drive a 15% rise in the number of children adopted and a 34% increase in the number of approved adopters over the past year alone.

The Board is facing huge challenges in the coming year in terms of child protection, Special Educational Need (SEN) provision, OFSTED single inspection frame work, role of councils in school improvement and so on. It has been very worthwhile to represent the Independent Group perspective to the Board. I was very much supported by my colleague Helen Powell who joined the Board last year - this has been the very first year we secured one more place on the Board. I was impressed by the level of support from the LGA Officers and as always the Independent Group office team have been tremendous!



**Executive Mayor George Ferguson CBE, Bristol
Vice Chair**

The City Regions Board held a successful inaugural meeting on April 7, featuring a lively discussion with the Rt. Hon Greg Clark MP, Minister of State for Cities and Constitution. The Minister spoke about the increasing consensus around returning powers to cities but acknowledged that government policies have been slow to reflect that. He urged members to continue to evidence the case that every place is different with its own history, challenges and opportunities and demonstrating why Whitehall's default approach of imposing national solutions will not work; instead, local solutions tailored to local circumstances are needed.

The Board agreed to sponsor the City Growth Commission (CGC) which is examining how a fundamental devolutionary shift from the centre to cities could help drive growth in the UK. The Commission is chaired by Jim O'Neill, the retiring Chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management, and features a number of significant voices from the business community as well as experts on local government and economic growth among its Commissioners. The Commission will be releasing reports on skills and infrastructure over the summer, with its final set of recommendations due to be launched at the end of October.

The Board also agreed an ambitious work programme focused on three key themes: devolution and public service reform; skills, employment and welfare reform; and trade and investment policy. Over the next year, the City Regions Board will have an important role to play in championing the case for devolution by forming a clear evidence base which demonstrates that the social and economic issues facing English city regions now and in the future can only be effectively tackled by devolving funding and powers, ultimately resulting in both national and local prosperity.

To develop our work on employment, skills and welfare, the LGA has commissioned the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion to deliver a series of research reports. These will explore whether the current national employment and skills system can deliver for a growing economy which has increasingly diverse sub regional economic and social characteristics. Eleven areas – a mix of cities and counties – have been invited by the Chairs of the Cities and People and Places Boards to be involved in the development of this work.



**Councillor Gillian Ford, Havering
Deputy Chair**

It has been another busy year for the Community Health and Wellbeing Board with discussions including the implementation of the Care Bill, transfer of 0-5's public health to local authorities in 2015, Winterbourne, dementia and mental health.

There have been numerous roundtables, conferences and external meetings. Lord Lipsey requested LGA input into the impact of financial advice on local government as outlined in the Care Bill. The challenge around advice has recently been discussed with the care home sector and the pressures surrounding the cost of care. We still have concerns over the allocated budget for implementing the Care Bill; lobbying continues.

Since the launch of the Prime Minister's Dementia Challenge, the pace of recognition has increased. Working with the Alzheimer's Society, Dementia Action Alliance, membership of the PM's Dementia Friendly Communities Champion Group and attendance at a number of all party parliamentary group discussions, a Banking Charter has been developed with a Technology Charter due to be launched shortly. Work starts in earnest on finalising a British Standards Institute (BSI) for dementia over the next couple of months and the LGA has launched a video to encourage local authorities to become Dementia Friends and communities.

Healthwatch launched their first annual report, which was analysed and discussed with stakeholders including the Children's Commissioner, Dr Maggie Atkins. Health and Wellbeing Boards need to ensure children's services are not marginalised by focusing on adult health and social care.

The LGA and Public Health England held their first Annual Conference, which was a huge success. Public health colleagues welcomed the integrated approach and the opportunity to learn more about local authority governance and the challenges they face.

A large number of reports, publications and co-signed documents have been scrutinised and agreed over the past year including the Mental Health Concordat, Safeguarding, Health Visitor service specification, challenges and opportunities of integration and Winterbourne.

Health and Wellbeing Peer Reviews have been successful, with consideration being given to the inclusion of obesity. A Health & Wellbeing Chairs' Leadership Academy has been developed and launches in June.

The Integrated Care Plan morphed into the Better Care Fund with local authorities exceeding the savings expected through local integrated plans. Going forward, integrated service delivery needs to step up a gear with the reconfiguration of local services. This is a challenge for shared Trusts, multiple Clinical Commissioning Groups, cross boundary services, the implementation of the Care Bill and politicians.

STOP PRESS:

Councillor Ford who has worked as a Dementia Friend, has now been accredited as a Dementia Champion. Congratulations Gillian!



**Councillor Geoff Knight, Lancaster
Deputy Chair**

The CTS Board have discussed many important issues this year. Too many to list in my annual report therefore I have summarised the main points below.

English Heritage (EH)

In March 2015 EH will become a self-funding charity. I've met with senior EH representatives and received the following assurances.

- This transfer will enable EH to remain in public ownership
- EH will now have the freedom to generate income to safeguard its Collection.
- EH will become self-financing and no longer require tax-payer support.
- EH's "National Heritage Protection Service" will remain unaffected.

I requested the Board include joint working Case Studies and confirmed with EH that urgent repairs to all our historic sites have been programmed in prior to the transfer.

Public Libraries and Welfare Reform

Due to the rollout of Universal Credit (UC) we have discussed libraries' role in the provision of broadband service and welfare advice.

- 8 million adults without internet access (4 million live in social housing)
- Everyone in receipt of benefits will require an e-mail address to access UC
- The resource implications of this will have to be recognised by central government as Public Libraries may soon become the front-line of welfare advice.

Superfast Broadband Rollout (SBR)

Throughout the year I've raised concerns about the Rural Broadband Programme and Rural Communities Fund:

- British Telecom (BT) is the sole provider – they do not have a competitor to drive down costs.
- A lack of transparency in BT's costs is placing councils at a disadvantage during contractual negotiation.
- BT will end up owning assets (which they would eventually have to rollout at their own expense). BT assets created with £1.2 billion of public money.
- The Office of the Communications Regulator (OFCOM) require BT to allow competitors to access BT's infrastructure. BT has set its wholesale price so high that it is unprofitable for alternative suppliers.
- BT's dominance is strengthened. Broadband customers require an active BT landline – tying new customers into a combined phone and broadband package.

Officers are to hold exploratory talks with BT regarding strengthening local partnership with councils and I have suggested BT may wish to consider giving something back to the community in return for this generous public subsidy.

Arts Council (ACE)

I have raised concerns with the Chairman of the Arts Council for England (ACE) that ACE appear to be prioritising funding on new projects leaving established arts programmes to sink or swim. More than 90% of ACE funding is spent in London. I've reminded the Chairman that Provincial Arts venues rely very heavily on ACE funding.

Visitor Economy

The UK Tourism Industry is again lacking a single coherent voice. The industry is divided into sectors each representing its own specific interests. I have asked the Board to seize the opportunity and be that single coherent voice.

I've queried whether Air Passenger Duty (APD) is having a detrimental effect on inbound tourism

I've suggested the Board support a reduction in Tourism VAT from 20% to 5% (a success story in France since its introduction 2 years ago).



**Councillor Mike Haines, Teignbridge
Deputy Chair**

For the first time, as a result of election success, we had 2 of our group on the Board and I would like to thank Jason Kitcat for his input and support over the past year. Colleagues will be aware that due to governance changes the Economy & Transport Board will soon cease to exist. My concern has been that new governance structures may have led to an imbalance between urban and rural voices on the economy, and that Local Government continues to speak as one. However, the new arrangements have satisfied the larger cities and given rural and smaller councils the opportunity to have their issues clearly defined within the new structures at the LGA.

The Secretary of State for Transport, Patrick McLoughlin, attended the November meeting of the Board. There was excellent discussion across the various transport sectors on issues including investment, funding, growth and collaborative working.

The UK economy grew by 0.8% in the first quarter of 2014, the fifth consecutive period of growth. It is impossible to know how much of this recovery is due to the actions of local authorities but I believe we have made a significant contribution.

The second wave of city deals has seen agreement reached by most of the 20, and the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) have submitted their draft SEPs (Strategic Economic Plan).

Local Government plans are joined up locally and founded on local partnerships, but there are still major concerns about government departments' ability to join up their own budgets outside the usual Whitehall silos. At last year's conference, Lord Heseltine asked us to take up this cause.

The Street-works Taskforce launched a joint statement of 'What Good Looks Like' in February. It is designed to help councils and utilities improve the quality, reduce the impact of street-works and ensure better communication between those affected. Across the wider highway network following this winter, the total cost of road repairs has now risen to an estimated £12bn.

I have continued to represent the Board on the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) 'Future High Streets Forum' (chaired by Brandon Lewis) and on the working group on retail markets. A report on parking is due to be considered by the Forum on 8th July. On another aspect of the parking debate, the LGA is calling for the Government to convene a working group of councils, charities, road safety campaigners and motoring groups to rewrite the current statutory parking guidance and revise the rules on the use of Closed Circuit Television (CCT).

In November I gave oral evidence to the Transport Select Committee on winter resilience, this was following the St. Jude's storm, but before the transport disruption suffered particularly in the South West in February.

My appointment as a member of the Independent Approvals Panel for Business in the Community's 'CommunityMark' has continued.



**Councillor Andrew Cooper, Kirklees
Deputy Chair**

I successfully got the issue of Fracking on the agenda of the Environment and Housing Board. However, the scope of our discussions on the subject was in the main limited as to how to make maximise the funding on offer from Government. Discussion on the contentious benefits of Fracking to address fuel poverty and its impact on the local and global environment were not extensive. Given that both Kirklees and Sheffield Councils had passed motions objecting to Fracking on their land I had hoped for a more robust line on this very live issue.

As one of the Lead Members on the Environment and Housing Board we have had regular quarterly meetings with Greg Barker MP the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) Minister where I have usually raised issues about the inadequacies of the Green Deal and ideas on how to improve the Energy Company Obligation (ECO). In April severe cuts were made by Government to ECO resulting in over a quarter of a million insulation jobs not going forward. I contributed to LGA's critical response to these proposals using the knowledge I have from working in the energy efficiency sector.

On planning policy the Environment and Housing Board gave strong representations to government on their mistaken view that Councils significantly slowed up the Planning process. We also gave evidence regarding building standards and I contributed to energy efficiency elements.

When provision of affordable housing has been raised on the board I have been consistent in pointing out the need for more social rented housing and the need to abolish the Right to Buy to maintain public provision and tenure choice for prospective householders. The Autumn Statement gave yet more incentives to encourage the Right to Buy which is compounding the problem of a diminishing stock of Council Housing in my opinion.

Government continued to drag its feet on the introduction of Sustainable Urban Drainage systems for new developments and our concerns as a Board were expressed. With the flooding events earlier in the year this just added to the concerns we had regarding this area of work.

I have jointly chaired the Climate Local Steering Group which aims to highlight and share best practice on Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation.



**Councillor Clarence Barrett,
Chairman**

It has been both a privilege and challenge to chair this important Board over the last year.

Over the year, LGA lobbying in Whitehall and Brussels secured devolved spending decisions for £5.3 billion of EU structural and investment fund (ESIF) to Local Enterprise Partnerships Areas (LEPs) to deliver growth and jobs.

A Shadow National Growth Board was established to put in place management and delivery arrangements for the ESIF, bringing together Ministers and officials and stakeholders. The LGA delegation was led by Sir Merrick Cockell and was successful in establishing greater clarity and influence for local partners in managing, monitoring and delivering the programme.

Other areas of work included:

- Public procurement rules which will benefit councils through simplified processes
- Improvements to state aid rules governing regional airports
- A positive dialogue over proposed EU data protection rules and EU civil documents
- Flexible approach to the proposed local transport plans, congestion charges and to limit the maximum length of proposed 'mega trucks'
- Influencing the European Commission drafting of waste legislation

The Board also considered the Congress of the Council of Europe 'peer review' of local democracy in the UK. While the report expressed satisfaction with the UK in general, there were notes of concern regarding the financial resources of local authorities, their limiting tax raising powers and their dependence on government grants. It also underlined the need to address ambiguities in the law relating to the right of self-government and the limitation of local authorities' discretion to manage local affairs. One of the recommendations made by Congress is that the Government takes measures to reduce the financial burden on local authorities. With further cuts down the line, we await a response!

On International work, we worked with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) to support a funding programme aimed at strengthening local government in south Asia and southern and western Africa. Furthermore, since completing an ambitious Pan-African peer review programme with United Cities & Local Government in Africa, I am pleased to see that demand for British peer support has grown.

The new structure of the LGA has meant that the E&I Board will no longer exist, however all elements of its work programme will be absorbed into the LGA Executive and relevant Boards.

It has been a pleasure to work with colleagues across the LGA structure on this Board, which was very ably supported by excellent officers, and I look forward to seeing the good work continue in the new structure.



**Councillor Shirley Flint, North Kesteven
Deputy Chair**

Having previously served a year as Deputy Chair of the LGA European and International board, September 2013 saw me changing to become Deputy Chair of the Improvement and Innovation board.

From the outset, this board appeared to have more relevance to my role as a District Councillor, and this has been confirmed as the months have gone by. It has been fascinating to see how innovative some councils have been to deal with the massive cuts from central government, which are really starting to bite more each year, and will continue to do so. It is also true to say that some councils have been less quick in starting the process, and are struggling now to balance the books.

I was given the lead responsibility for productivity, which has covered areas such as procurement and income generation. I am particularly interested in income generation as a means to minimise cuts to council services, and redundancies. I represented the LGA at an event in Manchester on June 5th, giving a presentation on income generation. I have met with officers at my own authority to look at productivity in general, and waste in particular.

Every second month, there has been a meeting of the Performance Support Panel (PSP) which reviews the particular issues some councils are facing reference service delivery, including child protection, financial issues and governance. Again, it has been really interesting to review the pace of improvement across councils.

Having been a member of a peer challenge team at Torridge in June 2013, I was keen to extend my knowledge into other areas of council work should a future opportunity arise to take part in another Peer Challenge. In March this year I attended a two day Planning Advisory Service (PAS) seminar in London, which looked at planning for peer mentors, and also how planning can generate income, and/or how planning departments can be more efficiently run.

Overall, this last year has been very challenging, but in a very good way. I have a real interest in the work of the Improvement and Innovation Board, and feel I have found 'my place'. I would love to have the opportunity to serve another year on this board where I would look at extending my work on productivity, and produce reports on other areas of this extensive subject.

Thank you to the Independent Group for giving me the chance to promote the experience and capability the group can bring.



Executive Mayor Tony Egginton, Mansfield

Firstly may I thank you for your nomination to the above Board and I would like to bring conference delegates up to speed with the progress made since its first meeting in April 2014. This board replaces both the Urban and Rural Commissions and I would like to summarise the reasons for its inception. Non-metropolitan areas account for about half of England's Gross Value Added (GVA). This means that their economic contribution and growth potential is just as significant for the nation as that of the cities. Their mix of businesses, and the challenges in areas of less dense population, of more diffuse transport networks, of market towns, green belts and small cities, are, however different, and so is the pattern of governance. Different challenges – both economic and administrative – need different solutions. The LGA's boards should reflect both the metropolitan and non-metropolitan agendas, hence the establishment of the board which it was felt should include in its work programme a number of themes.

It was decided at the first meeting that the focus would concentrate on four key issues:

- Planning and infrastructure to support growth, which would be Councillor Watts's remit.
- Welfare, employment and skills allocated to me.
- Housing allocated to Councillor Kidd
- Public service transformation to Councillor Hodge who is also the Chairman of the Board.

An independent Commission on Economic Growth and public services in non – metropolitan England has been formed, is chaired by Sir John Peace and has been tasked by the LGA to seek ways to stimulate growth regionally, create new jobs and help people live their lives better. Their work will involve in particular looking at the impact of recent shifts in policy, towards a more decentralised approach to supporting growth through LEPs and place based growth deals; devolving elements of public funding and encouraging innovation and better integration in public services at a local level and assessing how these policies ought to develop over the rest of the decade.

The Commission will aim to gather evidence and produce an interim report by this summer and make recommendations in a final report by the autumn.

There is a meeting scheduled prior to conference and I will be only too pleased to bring delegates up to date.



**Councillor Philip Evans, Conwy
Deputy Chair**

This was my second year as a Deputy Chair and I attended all the Board meetings and all except one of the Lead members' meetings. This is a large Board – 18 members – and it has been interesting to meet a broad cross-section of councillors from a wide geographical area. I have also served concurrently as a director of the Local Authorities Co-ordinator of Regulatory Services (LACoRS) until its dissolution earlier in the year. Following the municipal elections in May 2013, the Independent Group was entitled to an additional member and I was joined by Cllr Colin Mann, Plaid Cymru, from Caerphilly. I am most grateful to Colin for the support he has given me and for his valuable input at the board meetings.

The main work of the SSCB is commenting on and trying to influence legislation as it passes through its various stages. It has been rewarding to see we have had positive outcomes in many instances all of which will be of benefit to local government. Examples include changes to the Modern Anti-Slavery Bill; Deregulation Bill; the new Anti-social behaviour provision and the Consumer Rights Bill. We have considered various issues during the year, one topic in particular – Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) – overlapped with the Community Well-Being Board and we are very grateful to Cllr Gillian Ford (Deputy Chair of that Board) for taking the lead for the Independent Group on this subject affecting as it does many young females in ethnic minority groups.

A major piece of work the Board dealt with was the proposals for licensing reform and the publication of the document “Open for Business”. Whilst I had some particular concerns that “licensing” was seen as embracing all local government regulatory functions e.g. including certain highways' responsibilities, these seem to have been accommodated in the final document.

We had visits and presentations by Lord Taylor of Holbeach, a Home Office Minister and Lord Currie, the Chair designate of the Competition and Markets Authority.

During the year, I acted as a facilitator at a Licensing Workshop put on for the benefit of councillors in the North West of England and North Wales. These Workshops take place at various locations around the country and are of considerable benefit to those serving on Licensing Committees.

In February, Cllr. Mehboob Khan stepped down as Chair of the Board. I found Mehboob to be a most effective Chair, operating in an inclusive way and having an excellent grasp of the subjects we covered.

Following the new governance arrangements agreed by the LGA, from 1st September 2014, the Board will be restyled “Community Safety Board” and will assume overall responsibility for fire with the Fire Services Management Committee reporting to it.

I have been greatly encouraged in my role by the Group Officers whose advice and guidance is invaluable. I am also very grateful to Maggie and her colleagues in the Group Office for their help and support at all times.

Workforce Board (WFB) and pay and negotiations



**Councillor Linda Van Den Hende, Havering
Deputy Chair**

The Workforce Board (WFB), National Employers for Local Government Services (NJC), the National Employers of Teachers (NEOST) and the Fire and Rescue National Employers (NJC) have met regularly over the year and discussed a wide range of employer/ee based issues. Some of these areas have been challenging and it has been welcome that whilst discussions are wide ranging and reflect different viewpoints, a significant measure of agreement is reached. As ever the main areas of debate have centred on pay and terms of reference of our various groups of employees for which we have responsibility. Changes to pension schemes have been a significant feature and whilst some changes to Regulations have been introduced after much negotiation, there are still some areas to finalise.

Negotiations are always difficult against shrinking budgets and much of the discussions are of necessity confidential, however I consider that the contribution our Group makes during debate is considered to be of value, often reflecting a different view and drawing on our own experiences. Whilst areas of negotiations at this time remain confidential a short summary of the main areas is set out below.

Local Government NJC

As expected the Trade Unions tabled a claim for a significant increase to pay for all grades. They perhaps anticipated that the Government would propose an increase to the National Minimum Wage and sought to set their claim above that level. A series of national roadshows were led by the LGA with Member input to seek a view on affordability for a pay increase for 2014. There was general agreement that a pay award should be made but within a 1% envelope. Following careful discussions and negotiations an offer was made which although very slightly above the 1% overall, was weighted to the first six pay points. The offer for those was well above 1% and above the new minimum wage which operates from October 2014. The Trade Unions have rejected the offer and are balloting for industrial action. A similar offer was made to the Craft Workers, without them making a claim and this has led to a request for a meeting. Discussions are ongoing in respect of claims from Chief Executives and Chief Officers.

Teachers (NEOST)

The first set of outcomes from the revised arrangement to Teachers Pay are not yet available so it is difficult to judge what issues may arise. Clearly the intention of the new arrangements is to be a performance led approach and it is anticipated the first year experience will expose any concerns. Teachers' pension arrangements are changing with further consultation on administration funding and employee contribution rates amongst other things. Consultation runs until 18th July 2014.

Fire and Rescue Services NJC

There remains the ongoing dispute with central government regarding the changes proposed to the Fire and Rescue service pension scheme. Although some progress has been made there remains the outstanding issue of full pension for firefighters who may be unable to reach the required fitness level. Some work is being undertaken jointly on fitness standards, although this has as yet not reached any conclusion. I have been invited to, and attended two meetings so far on the issue of retained firefighter pensions where there could be additional costs to the pension scheme as a

result of retained firefighters having the right to join the pension scheme retrospectively and accrue benefits. The size of any additional cost will not be known in full until well into 2015. There is a meeting later in June where we anticipate a pay claim will come from the Fire Brigade Union. In addition a meeting to consider a claim from senior fire officers is taking place in June.

Social Work Careers Task and Finish Group

A joint group made up from Members of the WFB and the Children and Young Peoples Board has been convened to examine ways to recruit and retain social workers for both Children's and, by implication, Adults. There is an acute shortage of experienced social workers, although no apparent shortage of people in training. Work is at an early stage, however I am a member of the group and we have set out an ambitious agenda. Officers are currently undertaking a mapping exercise to capture existing good practice. Work on refreshing the Employer Standards is being undertaken by the LGA in close collaboration with the College of Social Work. No time scale has yet been set for this group as we await the mapping exercise.

I have been grateful for the very professional support and information provided from the Workforce Team under Sarah Messenger.



**Alderman Matthew Richardson, City of London
Deputy Chair**

This year I have been the Independent Group representative on the Finance Panel. Since my last report I have attended five meetings of the panel. The purpose of the panel is to review and consider ways in which local government is funded and ways in which that funding can be maximised. The panel is comprised of a number of elected officials from all types of local authorities and thus a general consensus view of the finance problems can be reached. This Panel is being disbanded at the end of this session of the LGA to be replaced with the Resources Board.

This year, as last year, has been depressing in the way that central government has ignored local government. Last year I suggested that I and the panel felt like King Cnut, trying to hold back the tide. This year the feeling is more like the classical myth of Cassandra, cursed by the Gods with the ability to see the future but unable to convince anyone of the truth of her visions. The Finance Panel has seen the future, and it is bleak. All the figures point to the fact that these cuts are unsustainable but for some reason nobody, least of all DCLG, is listening. At every turn it seems like the DCLG do not have the regard for local government that they ought to.

This year has not been a great year for local government funding and although many authorities have found a way to make savings in their budgets mandated by central government cuts there is a sense that the blood has come out of the stone. Funding for some councils makes them near unsustainable. The lack of success of schemes like Universal Credit has definitely started to give central government pause for thought but they are not yet listening fully.

The LGA is making some progress in being heard and programmes like the “Any Council” and “Any Household” setting out the funding position are clever ways of getting the incredibly pedestrian message of local government funding over in a way that is, at least, not wholly unpalatable to the general public. The Local Government Finance Commission is a step in the right direction for getting a hard hitting look at finance in a relatively neutral way.

I reiterate the view of my last report which was that the solution is simply to keep battling, so long as the LGA continues to produce high quality evidence based reports on the problems, and solutions, for local government then we are doing our job and when the problems that are predicted start to occur it will be easy for the LGA to start taking a more leading position in remedying those problems. The most recent spending review submissions are an excellent example. Sadly I fear that once again central government will continue to ignore and shift its problems onto local government. It is this dynamic that makes the work of the LGA so vital.

Did you know..

There has been a 40% real terms cut in government funding to local authorities during the life of this Parliament.

And..

Local Government has delivered £10bn in savings since the start of this Parliament but another estimated £10bn is to come before the end of the decade.

Committees

Audit Committee



Alderman Ian Luder CBE
Deputy Chair

It has again been my privilege to represent the Group on the LGA Audit Committee, and I have now completed my third year in that role.

In the new slimmed down version of the LGA, the Audit Committee only meets on two occasions, November and June, although each of the sessions are fairly chunky. Each of the groups has one representative on the committee, which for the past three years has been chaired by Labour.

I would make one general observation. When I joined the Committee three years ago, its remit was “Audit and Scrutiny” and it met approximately quarterly. The scrutiny function was transferred to the Resources Panel for 2012-13 but the Resources Panel was disbanded last summer, and the Leadership Board assumed direct responsibility for the finances of the LGA and subsidiaries.

Both meetings of the Audit Committee had 100% attendance.

- The Audit Committee produces a succinct summary of its work, which we settled at our June meeting, and which is published in the pack for the Annual Assembly. I am therefore not repeating the detail in this report, but would highlight four key issues:
- The external auditors have given an unqualified Opinion on the accounts, which for the third year consolidate all the subsidiaries of the LGA
- The internal auditors, (a function which is externalised) completed all their planned work, and the Head of Internal Audit has given an Opinion in which he stated that “...The LGA has adequate and effective management, control and governance processes to manage the achievement of its objectives” which is clearly satisfactory
- There were no instances of fraud or corruption reported, discovered or investigated
- One of the key risks of the LGA has been in the field of its pension liabilities, particularly with regard to the scheme with West Sussex County Council, in which scheme there were only 4 remaining staff. Since the year end, those staff, former staff and current pensioners within that scheme have been transferred, along with the relevant assets, to the Merseyside scheme, which

together with the London Borough of Camden scheme, house all the rest of LGA staff, This avoids the risk that had those four staff left the LGA, the LGA share of the deficit within the West Sussex scheme would have been payable immediately. The deficits within the remaining two schemes are being settled over 22 and 15 years respectively.

Although far from the glare of publicity, the Audit Committee is a fascinating body on which to serve, and I wish my successor well.

Commissions

Fire Commission



Councillor Philip Howson, East Sussex
Deputy Chair

The Fire Services Management Committee and the Fire Commission have had a busy programme of work this year, including looking at future funding, reform linked to the Knight Review, Futuring (other environmental and societal changes impacting on the delivery of services), planning for risk: what does good look like, Blue Light Interoperability, sprinklers, Retained Firefighters' pensions, Sector response to Coroners' recommendations arising from incidents in high rise blocks of flats, national negotiations and communications. I have enjoyed meeting other Independent Group members and thank those appointed to the LGA Fire Commission for their contributions.

Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme (ESMCP), Summary and Overview – June 2014

Current Provision: All three emergency services currently utilise the Airwave radio system based upon a private Tetra network. This has been in place since 2009 and has provided reliable, good quality wide area communications. However the dedicated private network is an expensive approach and Tetra is now being superseded by other technologies in particular Fourth Generation Long Term Evolution (4G LTE).

Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP): Airwave contracts expire across Police, Fire and Ambulance services from 2016 to 2020. The ESMCP Programme has been underway since 2011 and is now in the procurement phase with considerable response from industry to the Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire in recent weeks. The three emergency services (3ES) have been heavily involved in development of the requirements for the system and these will form an integral part of the next stage of procurement – the Invitation to Tender. The new network which will be provided by the Programme will be known as the Emergency Services Network (ESN).

The Programme is seeking to provide a wide area communications system that is cheaper than the current provision, provides increased flexibility and makes use of newer technologies. The requirements will also seek to ensure that over the life of the contract services are able to take advantage of developments and, in the longer term, to utilise ESN to work more efficiently. The key

improvement required over Airwave is the provision of mobile broadband data capabilities, data transmission being a particular weakness of the current system.

Timeline: Tenders and technology proposals will be evaluated during autumn 2014, Full Business Case approval and contract award is expected in spring 2015. At this time it is expected that service commencement will be from late 2016 with first services going live shortly afterwards.

Transition to ESN: Plans currently see services transferring to ESN on a regional basis but a key requirement is that full national coverage will be an essential prerequisite before any service moves over to the new network. Initial stages of the transition will be to connect all service control rooms prior to vehicle installations.

Risks: There are a number of risks which are associated with this programme and which Fire and Rescue representatives, through the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) have under review. These include whether the innovative technologies likely to be proposed are suitably mature, whether the time between contract mobilisation and services going live will be sufficient for the contractor to implement the necessary national coverage and also whether the necessary prioritisation for 3ES users will be available on the commercial networks which will be key to cost savings. However at this time, other than a requirement for ESN to be cheaper, there is no specific financial data and no guarantee around the provision being cheaper for all of simply for the UK taxpayer as a whole.

Programme Governance: Fire and Rescue services are well represented on the Programme through CFOA. Chief Fire Officer Dave Webb, Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) represents services on the Steering Group. Acting Chief Officer Darryl Keen, Hertfordshire FRS represents services on the Programme Board and is the Fire Business Change Lead whilst there is a small team of three officers embedded within the Programme working through CFOA. Coordination with DCLG is managed through the Fire Customer Group with regional representatives. I also sit on the Customer Group.



**Councillor Bertie Mackay, Warwick
Deputy Chair**

The purpose of the Rural Commission was to:

- provide the forum in which rural authorities can discuss matters of common concern and exchange good practice and experience
- ensure the LGA takes into account the needs, priorities and aspirations of rural authorities in formulating and promoting its policies
- help the LGA to promote the role and interests of rural authorities and the ability of those authorities to meet the needs of the communities they serve

The Rural Commission and Conference took place on 3 and 4 September 2013 at the Hilton Warwick/Stratford-Upon-Avon, focussing on the theme of rural growth and public service reform.

Plenary session: Rewiring Public Services

Cllr Andrew Lewer, Vice-Chairman of the LGA introduced the Rewiring Public Services campaign, which was launched at the LGA Annual Conference 2013. The campaign aims to stimulate debate about the changes needed to ensure public services meet the future needs and aspirations of communities.

The current model of local government in England is particularly centralised and unsustainable. The black hole between the costs of public services and funding for public services is widening and the impact on residents is particularly felt in rural areas, where there are higher costs for delivering services. The campaign aims to put citizens at the forefront of decisions. There are 10 proposals to rejuvenate democracy, work to prevent problems, boost economic growth and create stronger communities.

Welfare Reform

Rose Doran, LGA Officer outlined the government's welfare reform agenda, which is one of the most extensive reform programmes for some time. The majority of savings in the reforms come from down-ratings, rather than the high profile benefits such as the 'bedroom tax'. The reforms change people's relationship with the benefit system and the state and Universal Credit is the vessel for many of the reforms. A key message from local to central government is that government must understand the impact on communities as well as local government's role in the welfare reform agenda, particularly as a key partner who can bring together a diverse range of service providers.

Nicoya Palastanga, Universal Credit Pilot Project Manager from West Lindsey District Council reflected her experience of the West Lindsey Universal Credit pilot. For rural areas, there are particular issues which need addressing in the rollout of Universal Credit, for example, the move to digitally access benefits will impact those rural areas with poor broadband service.

One way West Lindsey District Council is working to make Universal Credit successful is by inviting the job centre to move into the council building in order to work more closely together, as well as helping to remove the stigma for people visiting the job centre. The council is working more closely with the Credit Union and the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) offering an intensive support service

with local legal and financial organisations to help people improve their budgeting skills and alleviate financial issues. The council is also addressing access to broadband by donating old computers to be set up in community areas for people to use to claim benefits, as well as job search.

The Universal Credit Pilot authorities held open days and Nicoya encouraged members to attend these to find out more.

Infrastructure planning and delivery

- This workshop explored the tools available to councils planning for infrastructure, including the Community Infrastructure Levy.

Growth deals

- This workshop provided an opportunity to hear how councils from Wave 1 and 2 City Deals prepared proposals and their learning from the process so far.

Fuel poverty

- This workshop explored how councils and their partners are working to help rural residents overcome fuel poverty, including bulk fuel buying.

At an Extraordinary Meeting of the LGA General Assembly held in January 2014 the Rural Commission was disbanded.

I was delighted that the Rural Commission came to Warwick District. The meeting was well attended and Owen Patterson was the Principal Speaker as indeed he had been the previous year. There were lively discussions and the evening outing to Royal Leamington Spa was well received. The Vice Chairman of Warwick District Council, Councillor Clare Sawdon, welcomed the delegates who split into two groups. One group toured the Jephson Gardens with its award-winning reputation; the second group studied the Art gallery. Both were impressive.

There was excellent co-operation between the LGA team and the Cultural team of Warwick District Council. I personally found the LGA team extremely helpful with valuable advice.

All good things come to an end and, while the January meeting felt like a farewell, the *raison d'être* of the governance changes are understandable. I have thoroughly enjoyed my spell as the Independent Group Vice-Chairman and I am grateful for a rewarding experience.

The purpose of the Commission was to provide the forum in which urban authorities can discuss matters of common concern and exchange good practice and experience, to assist the LGA to take into account the needs, priorities and aspirations of urban authorities in formulating and promoting its policies, and to help the LGA to promote the role and interests of urban authorities and the ability of those authorities to meet the needs of the communities they serve.



**Executive Mayor George Ferguson, Bristol
Vice Chair**

An extraordinary meeting of LGA General Assembly in January agreed to disband the Urban Commission whose work will be incorporated into the terms of reference and work programme of a new Cities Board. The Urban Commission's last meeting was held on 8th October 2013. The Urban Commission will continue to hold an annual conference.

Work in hand with the Urban Commission in 2013-2014

Local Economic Growth

A presentation from Neil McInroy, Chief Executive at the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) a UK based research organisation dedicated to issues of local growth and development. He discussed Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and the importance of the role that local government has in leading economic growth.

Local Government Finance

Councillor Melvyn Caplan, Vice-Chair of the LGA Finance Panel, addressed the Commission on this subject and highlighted the further difficulties they would be facing with further reductions in funding and the allocation of 35% of the New Homes Bonus to LEPs. He informed members of the work the LGA has been doing to influence government on local government finance issues, including:

- Lobbying on health and social care integration.
- Lobbying government about community budgets.
- Making the case for councils to have a role in the universal credit scheme.
- The launch of Rewiring Public Services.
- Lobbying at party conferences.

The LGA's work with cities

Councillor David Sparks OBE updated the Commission on the ongoing governance review and the consequences for the LGA's work with cities. Councillor Sparks explained that the LGA's governance review is considering how all LGA boards, panels and commissions might change to better serve members.

The common features in the two models proposed by the governance review are the development of a city board/city regions board and a counterpart dealing with rural areas. Instead of the current centralist board structure whereby the LGA produces a business plan and the board operates in accordance with that, the city board will be responsive to emerging issues and events.

Councillor Sparks spoke about Rewiring Public Services and the need to replace the Barnett Formula so that local government is better placed to regenerate communities and fill the vacuum of further devolution.

The Commission ran the following Workshops:

- What next for transport devolution?
- Meeting housing needs
- Emerging practice in financing local economic growth and regeneration



Councillor Keith Ross OBE, West Somerset

I must start by saying that we had an extraordinarily busy year delivering services to Local and Central government under the able chairmanship of Alderman Sir David Wootton. This was amid a large turnover in senior staff which has now all been replaced to carry on working on efficiency and cost reduction processes for the public sector. Work we do with local government is partly funded with an ever reducing Revenue Support Grant (RSG) which is pass-ported via the LGA. What we do for central government departments is paid for work and at year end we had a surplus of £1.675m on a turnover of £9,626m. Out of this the board was confident that we could repay £600k of loan stock to our principals, HM Treasury and the LGA. Interestingly, when I was in Marianne's shoes I was part of the team that arranged the loan in order to keep LP as a viable part of the sector, a decision that has seen the sound growth of the business.

We have continued to support the Welsh Government with programmes around waste and education. We had hoped to enlist a Welsh Board Member but this offer was declined by the Welsh Government. We will continue to work with them, particularly on their waste programme.

In England we have supported local government in a variety of waste programmes particularly around recycling and residual disposal on behalf of the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Efficiency was and remains a key area for instance supporting departments on re-negotiation of Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts.

Assurance Reviews have been carried out helping to ensure that ideas and proposals for future service delivery are seen to be best practice. We have access to Associates with relevant experience when necessary, itself being an efficient way of providing support on demand.

Going forward we have agreements in place totalling £8.49m including help for DCLG Enterprise Zones Homelessness

DECC

Re-Fit (retro-fitting solar panels on council buildings) LED street lighting

HOME OFFICE

Custody Suite review.

The Department for Transport (DfT)

- A14 upgrade in Northamptonshire
- The new Runcorn Bridge in Merseyside

LP has seen an opportunity to work with the emerging LEPs, helping them to deliver support for growth projects across the nation. We have had conversations with the LEP Network and hoped that we could even host the network but at present the individual LEPs seem content with a looser arrangement.

Members worked with the LGA working up my idea of re-introducing Municipal Bonds as an alternative source of funding councils' capital needs. This work has been accepted by the LGA and going forward I hope to see excess funds of LAs and the Local Government Pension Scheme to be re-invested in new developments such as schools and highway projects at a lower cost compared to the commercial market or the Public Works' Loan Board (PWLB).

Altogether, I can say we have had an excellent year and we are going forward with rosy prospects.



Councillor Roger Dennison, Lancaster

It has been my privilege to serve on the above board for 2 years. The learning curve has been quite steep.

The trust is managed by the Churches, Charities and Local Authorities (CCLA) which provides both financial and property management services to LAMIT.

This year, major changes have occurred following European legislation on financial services providers. The Trust is covered by the Alternative Investment Fund Managers Directive (AIFMD). This will require a significant separation of responsibilities and the appointment of a separate Depositary. i.e., likely to be a major clearing bank, together with separate auditing requirements and a significant change in the role of LGA appointed Board Members. The picture is not wholly clear as implementation is staged, and full guidance is awaited, and all processes require the approval of the Financial Conduct Authority [FCA] the UK Regulator. We, as board members, will need to agree and approve for implementation ALL the above changes.

Full implementation is estimated for late July 2014. So there you have it, a busy year ahead!

European and International appointments

UK Delegation to the Committee of the Regions



Councillor Linda Gillham, Runnymede

This has been a very busy year but it has given me opportunities to spend some time linking the work we do in Brussels with the business of a local Councillor.

Firstly the EU Commission produced a Green Paper on a “European strategy on Plastic Waste in the Environment” calling for a “reflection” of the policy challenges relating to plastic waste. I was appointed Rapporteur for an Opinion on the Green Paper to offer the views of the Local and Regional Authorities in the 28 Member States for whom collecting plastic waste is a mandatory activity although it is performed in many different ways. Plastic poses two specific challenges, it is cheap and very often regarded merely as the packaging for commodities with a short life, water bottles, plastic bags, shampoo bottles and food containers and quickly discarded as waste. Secondly some types of plastic are very durable and just fragment in the environment or in the sea leaving plastic litter for years.

The RIO +20 Summit highlighted the damage done to the marine environment by the growing problem of plastic waste accumulating in the seas. Much of this is washed off the land in storm surges. Plastic is produced as a result of raw materials, fossil fuels and a complex procedure and is recyclable but at present most of the plastic waste collected from the doorstep still ends up in landfill. Some Member States have reduced landfill to less than 10% but all too often the plastic is sent to Energy from Waste plants. I argued it is time to move plastic up the waste hierarchy, recycle it properly and ensure that new plastic products contain a significant percentage of recyclate. The opportunities this offers to new economic activities, jobs and a resource efficient Europe should not be missed.

This opinion was well received and I then went on to a follow up opinion on plastic bags. The Commission felt it was time to change the directive to push countries into introducing a small charge for lightweight plastic bags. Wales and Ireland and several others have successfully introduced this and reduced the consumption of bags by 80% almost overnight. I called for the 5p charge to be given to Local Authorities to spend on clearing up the environment or donating it to local voluntary groups prepared to do litter picks. This legislation is currently making its way through the European Parliament and I hope we will soon see a huge reduction in the number of bags we use and a ban on “free bags” introduced.

I was also proud to be able to sponsor a study visit of the Environment and Climate Change Committee to Swansea University in April. The members saw projects on renewable energy from tidal, solar and from algae funded by European Grants. Some of these proposals are about to be implemented in Swansea Bay producing electricity locally. We also saw a huge regeneration scheme to convert old steel works into a Wetland Centre which has cleaned up a much polluted site and restored the original marine marsh and bird habitat. It has been a rewarding year following proposals from the Commission through to proposed legislation and being able to put forward the views of local councils but also taking into account the plastic producers, recyclers and views of local and municipal authorities throughout Europe.



**Councillor Liz Harvey, Herefordshire
Congress of Council of Europe**

The Congress was established to promote local democracy, encourage good governance and protect human rights and the rule of law throughout the European continent, beyond the EU to include Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the Caucasus. This is largely achieved by peer review of individual countries, as is familiar in UK local government, and by exchanging good practice and research. The UK has a delegation of 24 members and 24 alternates, mostly English councillors nominated by the LGA; the LGA provides the UK Secretariat.

UK peer review

The highlight for the LGA in 2013-14 has undoubtedly been the preparation and adoption of the Congress Peer Review on how the UK respects the undertakings that it made when ratifying the European Charter for Local Self-Government.

Whilst the Congress report found several areas of improvement since the only previous report in 1998, the new review has some significant areas of concern, particularly as regards the financial resources of local authorities in England, the Barnett formula, councils' limited tax-raising powers and their dependence on government grants. As such, the review suggests that the UK does not meet the Charter's standards on local finance. The report also stresses that the position of English councils is far worse than councils in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Finally, the review also underlines that there are ambiguities that need to be addressed in areas such as the lack of recognition in law of the right to local self-government, and the limitation of local authorities' discretion to manage local affairs through the intervention by various ministries of central government.

Whereas the UK Delegation to Congress unanimously supported the review, the UK Government has flatly rejected every single recommendation, the first time that this has happened. Meeting on 12 June 2014, the LGA Executive endorsed the views of the Congress and undertook to follow them up through the UK political parties and Parliament.

The full report (200 pages) is available on the Congress website:

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CG%2826%2910PROV&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=CACC9A&BackColorLogged=EFEA9C>

Other activities

Although peer reviews are the core business of the Congress, together with observation of local elections (notably in Ukraine), it has also undertaken work on several policy issues fields during 2013-14, including:

- Comparisons and local good-practice in responding to the economic crisis
- Access of migrants to labour markets
- Combatting political extremism at the local and regional level
- Implementing human rights at the local level

- Involving young people in local politics; voting at 16
- Good practice in boosting youth employment through education and training
- The role of local councillors
- Digital media and urban
- Right of local authorities to be consulted by other levels of government

In terms of ongoing work, special mention should be made of the report being prepared by an English Member comparing the role, status, terms and conditions of local councillors across Europe.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

District Councils Network (DCN)



Executive Mayor Tony Egginton, Mansfield

I believe that this “one voice” of the District Councils in the LGA has been extremely effective under the Chairmanship of Councillor Neil Clarke.

I feel the monthly update from the Chairman is a tool that keeps members up to date on the progress with regard to the work programme and more importantly the DCN manifesto 2014-2016 which illustrates how District Council are the most efficient, valued and trusted part of Local Government?

I feel the biggest problem that we all suffer is how to get the planning system” to work better, which was one of the themes at the April meeting. The meeting considered the challenges of implementing the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and how the system could be improved to assist members to get their local plans in place more quickly and effectively, but more importantly with more success.

The main issues covered were:

- Duty to co-operate
- Meeting housing needs across housing market areas
- Filling the void created after the removal of regional plans
- Creating more cohesive links with Local Enterprise Partnerships
- The nature and weight of evidence called for when preparing local plans

I personally feel that we should be learning from both the success and failure of Local Plans with the Inspectorate; to assist our members in formulating or indeed re-submitting their Local Plan which will be the “Plan of Plans” in enabling members to move forward.

1. Out of the work programme and many hours of debate the DCN have come up with five priorities to work in partnership with the next government.
2. Allow us to become financially independent by giving us access to additional sources of

self-generating funding by expanding the New Homes Bonus to include infrastructure, and removing the Housing Revenue Account Cap, so we have more resources to invest in our communities and critical infrastructure.

3. Streamline the planning system so we can respond more quickly to appropriate and responsible development.
4. Make District Councils the default provider of choice for delivering Universal Credit, so we can integrate benefits with support provided by partners, such as debt advice to help address the barriers that prevent people getting back into work.
5. Commit to issuing local government settlements across whole Parliament terms to give us budgetary certainty.
6. Expand the criteria for the Troubled Families Programme, so that we can work with more families who have multiple problems.
7. Develop a financial framework that takes full account of the role District Councils play and our upfront contributions in the savings achieved.



Councillor Chris Townsend, Mole Valley and Surrey

The County Councils Network (CCN) represents 36 English local authorities that serve counties. CCN membership includes both upper tier and unitary authorities who together have over 2,500 councillors and serve 23 million people (46% of the population) across 85% of England.

CCN develops policy, shares best practice and makes representations to government on behalf of this significant proportion of the country outside the big conurbations. CCN is a member-led organisation which works on an inclusive and all party basis and seeks to make representations to government which can be supported by all member authorities.

Major issues have been the various 'growth deals' that may happen, LEPs and their value, as well as working with the LGA on issues surrounding councillor access to the local government pension scheme and issues with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) relating to councillor expenses.

The CCN Board will be liaising closely with the Independent Commission on Economic Growth and the future of public services in 'non-metropolitan' England. The Commission met for the first time recently and will be gathering evidence through a variety of means over the coming months, including a call for evidence. That call for evidence on "what should ambitious growth deals for counties look like" was followed by a Round Table session at Portcullis House. The County All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Chairman Henry Smith MP welcomed a range of witnesses, including a number of CCN Chief Executives and Leaders to the session which was facilitated by Shared Intelligence. Participants included representatives from the Association of Directors, Environment, Planning and Transport and the Chief Economic Development Officers' Society (ADEPT/CEDOS), the District Councils' Network (DCN), CCN, Cheshire West and Chester, Cumbria, Derbyshire, Essex, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Surrey. Future meetings have also been arranged with the Chairman of the APPG, Henry Smith MP to enable Officers and Members of the APPG to discuss emerging themes and to shape the final report. The CCN will continue to engage closely with the Commission as this work progresses.

CCN completed a survey of CCN member councils' Leaders into their attitude towards LEPs. The findings informed a report which was published on 6 May 2014. That CCN survey of predominantly Tory county council heads revealed that Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are regarded as unaccountable and opaque and as duplicating the work of both local authorities and, in some areas, each other. These insights will be fed into the CCN's work on economic growth over the months ahead.

CCN has continued to raise the issue of the impact of HMRC's treatment of Councillors' mileage allowances for tax purposes through all possible channels. In particular it has been pointed out that Councillors are not commuters who choose where to live in relation to their work, but are elected to represent the constituencies where they live however far they are from the Council Office, and that some County Councillors have as much as a one hundred and eighty mile round trip journey between their home and the Council Office.

Ministers have also been reminded that the government has recently made clear its view that Councillors “are not and should not be employees of the council dependent on the municipal payroll”, but are “volunteers undertaking public service”, and that it is manifestly unfair for Government to treat Councillors as volunteers when it suits them and as employees for tax purposes.

Since it was announced as part of the Local Finance Settlement in December 2013, CCN has argued against the proposals to end the Local Welfare Provision Grant from 2015-16. They have written again to both DCLG and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to re-state CCN's opposition to the proposed change, to highlight the impact on county communities, and to remind the Government that such a change would be in breach of the new burdens funding principle. Many CCN member councils are currently evaluating the impact of schemes after the first year of implementation, and considering options for 2015-16 and beyond in the light of the proposed removal of funding. The CCN Team are working with officers to draw together this information to support further advocacy and are particularly interested in the impact on community care funds that allow people to move out of residential into other settings, as well as the ‘crisis loan’ element.

There have been many media references to the CCN and its work this last year and it is moving forward on a number of other issues which make membership stimulating as well as challenging.



Councillor Alan Seldon, Herefordshire

The CfPS continues to be very active on a number of fronts, many of which you will be able to discuss with their team on their stand at the LGA's Summer Conference and Exhibition in July. Scrutiny is seen as a luxury by some authorities but it is up to members to stress it is a statutory function under the Cabinet and Leader model of governance. Effective Scrutiny leads to good decision making.

Areas of concern around the Health Service continue to occupy a lot of thought. I have taken part in a web conference jointly hosted by the CfPS and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) who, in my view, are making great efforts to do the job they have been given with barely adequate resources. Issues reverberate from the Mid Staffordshire scandal and the Frances Report. There are repeated incidences where people who export issues within health structures appear to be victimised or discredited. The CfPS is at the forefront of ensuring that these issues remain at the top of the health agenda.

There is also work taking place to ensure that authorities are aware of their responsibilities for education. In the age of Free Schools and Academies, some Local Authority Education (LEA) departments have diminished in size in line with the number of schools under their control. However, local authorities (LAs) are still responsible for safeguarding and performance. In some LAs this has led to a total reorganisation of the LEA department in order to adapt to the new era. It will be interesting to see what happens when the first batch of free schools come under the scrutiny of OfSteD inspections. The answer as to who will pick up the pieces when a free school or academy fails will also be in the press soon.

Reports from our National and Regional Lead Member Peers

Stuart Drummond
National Lead Peer
Regional Lead Peer for North West,
Yorkshire & Humberside and the North West



We have made great efforts to engage across all regions this year, with greater degrees of engagement in some areas than others. We would be particularly pleased to build greater communication with colleagues in the North East going forward.

North Yorkshire and Humber has also been somewhat quiet although Richmondshire District Council is led by Independent Councillors. I have supported some colleagues in the region authority going forward towards what we hope is substantial success in next year's local elections. Again, it would be good to see the regional network here take greater shape.

The North West is more active. A regional network meets regularly and many Councillors are actively engaged with the LGA. I have worked directly with the Wigan Independent Network (WIN) to help them develop their opposition profile. It is working well although the dynamics may change following the election. A couple of District Councils are now in no overall control and potentially in need of support from LGA.

Nationally, once again the number of Independent members involved in peer reviews over the year has been very low. Lead group members argue the case for more peer work at every opportunity. Recent elections have left a number of Councils with Independents holding the balance of power which may present more opportunity for Independent peer support. The group has strengthened its pool of accredited peers recently and are preparing to offer flexible support where needed.

The Next Generation training program for future leaders amongst Independent Councillors is being finalised and should be launched at the LGA conference. A programme of support for prospective Councillors with disabilities is in the early stages of being developed.

Reports from our National and Regional Lead Member Peers



**Councillor Graham Brown, Powys
Regional Lead Member Peer for the far South West and Wales**

The last twelve months have, I believe, seen a strengthening of the role of Regional Lead Peers as their role in the Independent Group structure has continued to be “hands on” with Councils and Councillors but the strategic and operational role has also been strengthened.

Dealing with the “hands on” approach first, the year has again shown the wide range of issues facing Councils and Councillors. Unsurprisingly, a recurring theme is how Councils take forward restructuring and governance issues necessitated by budget constraints and efficiency savings. These changes can impose pressures on the relationship between Officers and Members be it where members see a different way forward to officers or where members can be agreeing job losses affecting officers and the staff with whom they may have had dealings over many years. This issue in itself can affect morale of members and workforce and is an area where there is likely to be a demand for increased support.

The use of Social Media continues to be an area where individual members, whether justified or not, find themselves subject to complaints and guidelines/guidance, is never straight forward. These, and other issues, continue to reflect that on the whole all Councils and Councillors face similar challenges and risks irrespective of whether they are mainly rural or urban authorities. All Regional Lead Peers cover geographically large areas and we acknowledge the importance of personal visits to authorities. Not only does this help build the relationship with the Peer but it also helps us to get a better understanding of the areas and the issues.

Other than the work with individual Councillors and Councils, I am involved in making arrangements for the first ever Conference for Independent Councillors in Wales. It became apparent from talking to various members from around the Principality that there was a desire to have such an event and Councillor Marianne Overton, Leader of the Independent Group within the LGA is also very keen to see such an event and help build the relationship with Welsh Councillors. Wales has a very high proportion of Independent Councillors but being mainly based in rural unitary authorities, there is no network amongst the Councillors and, with no regional meetings and no party machine, it is important that we try to establish closer links amongst the Independents in Wales.

With regards to the increasingly strategic role of Regional Lead Peers, the new system is beginning to become more structured and I attended a Regional Meeting of Lead Peers, attended by the Lead Peers from all political groups, together with the Regional LGA Officers. This was an extremely useful meeting where issues and proposals were discussed and it also gave the Regional Lead Peers the opportunity to meet each other in a forum where our role and challenges were the common factors, rather than political stances.

With regards to the Independent Group itself the year has seen the Political Improvement Sub Committee strengthening and it gives a forum where the Regional Lead Peers and Lead Members meet regularly and our views and findings are fed into the Executive by the Leader, Councillor Marianne Overton. Secondly, the Independent Group has arranged a number of member seminars and Councillor Overton involves the Regional Lead Peers by asking us to facilitate sessions during the course of these seminars. I have found this innovation to be particularly effective as a means

for the Lead Peers, not only to impart knowledge but to find out first-hand the concerns and issues facing our members.

As I said in last year's report being an Independent Councillor raises its own particular challenges, not least the fact that we do not have a party political machine to support us – no local office, no party workers, no party researchers etc.. This can lead to a sense of isolation and this is where I would urge everyone to please make use of your LGA Independent Group Office and contact our Officers Maggie, Vanessa and Noleen, to seek any advice and support you may need – the accredited Peer network and the LGA are there to support and help and I would ask that you take advantage of the support that is on offer.

Reports from our National and Regional Lead Member Peers



Tony Clarke
Regional Lead Peer for the South East, East of England and East Midlands

A working knowledge of the 1925 Performing Animals regulations (Local Authorities) is not a prerequisite for becoming an LGA Regional Lead Peer but is sure does help!

A request from a councillor on the Green Party's excellent councillors' email tree for help with the rules related to performing peacocks in an art insulation in a Council building was one of the more unusual queries answered during the last 12 months, but by no means the most complicated! It has also helped me this year to know that a SPOC is not a Star Trek navigator missing an K, but a "Single Point Of Contact" order used against Councillors restricting their contact with the Council through one officer, in my mind through a failure of some Councils to come to terms with LGA Independent Group Councillors who refuse to concur (rightly so) with requests for information going through the "usual channels"

As the size of the Independent Group at the LGA increases then so do the number of questions and requests for support, not surprisingly the high number of new Councillors elected and the formation of new independent groups will lead to expected calls for advice on issues such as proportionality and committee places, rights to access documentation and support and accommodation for new groups, but requests for input from Peers does not end with providing the often simple answers to technical questions, the role is far more generic and all-embracing than that, and providing support for such a varied group of Councillors demands both flexibility and innovation.

Peers also regularly input to the LGA's training events held either in London or out in the regions at local events, but not all Councillors can access such events and seminars, so the other rather interesting part of the last 12 months work has been to rewrite the rules on "Councillor Training" - want a public speaking course for your group of three on the Council away from the pressures of the Town Hall? Fine we will do it in your kitchen? Need some help with how to construct Council Motions but struggling for time? No problem we will provide it by distant learning through email. Advise on press releases down the phone? Bring it on. Our Councillors are responding to ever growing demands on their time and our job as Peers is not just to provide good advice and essential support, it is to do so in whatever shape or form suits the particular circumstances of the individual or group.

All of the above add colour and variety to the role, they provide the challenge we all look for as Councillors when lending our minds to the resolution of people's problems, and the sharing of knowledge and experiences across Councils using Peers as the conduit is of huge advantage to the growing numbers of Independent Group Councillors across the Country.

The last 12 months as a Regional Lead Peer have, without a shadow of a doubt been a complete pleasure, the work is varied, interesting and extremely rewarding and I take this opportunity to thank all those Councillors I have worked with during that period for putting up with my strange ways and for expanding my own knowledge even further.

Reports from our National and Regional Lead Member Peers



Councillor Colin Mann, Caerphilly
Regional Lead Peer for London, Wessex and the West Midlands

My work as a Peer dates from September 2013. My area covers the West Midlands, Wessex and the London Boroughs. Three other colleagues cover the rest of England and Wales – not a vast resource for the support that is needed!

The LGA Independent Group includes every councillor who is not Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat so the make-up of the group is complicated, to say the least. The group includes, amongst others, Green Party members, UKIP, Plaid Cymru and other smaller groups but the vast majority are elected as Independents or with links to Residents' Associations and Community Groups, or single issue Groups.

Being an Independent Councillor brings its own issues and problems and the support that other Councillors get from being in a group is not always available to an Independent councillor, especially when there are very few Independents on a council.

I have attended group Regional meetings in the West Midlands, the South West/Wessex and London and the South East. These meetings are very valuable and much appreciated for those able to attend. As well as being able to listen to experts on a variety of subjects the opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss issues with colleagues is invaluable. One thing that is often demonstrated is that the type of issues we all face are very similar, regardless of the type of council or locality.

The south-east seminar recently considered the seemingly incessant demand for more housing and the huge issue of commuting. It seems that 'affordable' housing is an issue wherever you go.

The south-west seminar had a very interesting talk and discussion about flooding. This was very topical at the time due to the fact that severe flooding issues in Somerset and elsewhere were ongoing.

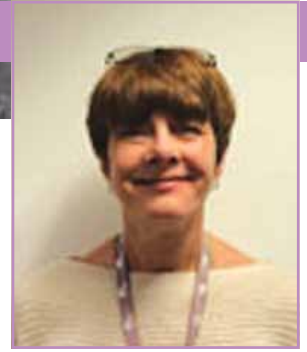
I have emailed all Group Leaders and Deputy Leaders of Independent groups. I have had a number of contacts, either by email or phone, with those who have responded to my emails – to give advice on individual issues. I can only assume that colleagues who have not yet replied are managing well at the present time. Obviously, it is not possible to go into detail where individual issues are concerned.

I have also attended two meetings of an Independent Group in the West Midlands who are preparing a programme for next year's election. I believe that this will be an increasing theme for existing Councillors and new candidates as we countdown to 2015. Early preparation is essential for success!

I have also contributed to various seminars and other group events, on a variety of themes, mainly held in Local Government House. Lead peers also discuss issues with LGA Regional Officers, plus Maggie and Vanessa, in an attempt to anticipate topics coming down the line.

Any councillor is welcome to contact myself and colleagues directly or via Maggie in the office.

If you would like to know more about becoming an accredited Peer, contact the Head of Group Office, Maggie Sullivan on 020 7664 3206 – email maggie.sullivan@local.gov.uk.



Head of Office, Maggie Sullivan

Last year we reported a very busy programme of work and that trend continues as Independent Group numbers rise to their largest ever. We are very pleased to welcome Noleen Rosen as an additional full time member of staff in the office. Vanessa Chagas has continued to provide exceptional levels of support. Thanks to Noleen and Vanessa whose contributions exceed job descriptions.

Our work programme has grown with the advent of monthly information and development seminars. Two new flagship projects: Access to Elected Office for Disabled People and Next Generation are exciting and will give our group members new opportunities.

We were able to support 5 regional and one county meeting in 2013-2014, securing a wide range of influential and expert speakers. Our Group Annual Conference in November attracted the highest attendance ever, and featured the, now, well enshrined Speakers' Corner. Once again we were able to invite students and academics from De Montfort University to enable the students to understand what local government entails on the ground.

Our member peers have been busier as ever, reflecting the rising profile of councillors' outside of the three largest political parties, gaining more influence on the leadership of councils or as increasingly effective opposition groups. The Independent Group Political Improvement Sub Committee has been occupied with a changing and expanding work programme.

Group Lead Members visit the office regularly as part of their attendance on respective LGA member structures and office staff have benefited from hearing about their contributions.

Group elections for the Leader, Deputy Leader and Treasurer of the Group in June 2013 saw more members voting than in previous rounds of elections. Our thanks go to Zoë Glacken, an LGA Officer and NGDP Graduate who took on the role of Returning Officer with superb attention to detail.

We welcome visits in person from Independent Group members to the Group Office, and will happily give you a guided tour to the facilities available in Local Government House. Do, please, get in touch with us with your queries and concerns. Even if we don't know the answer to a question ourselves, the Local Government Group enjoys a collective expertise which is always available to you. We can generally find a colleague who will be able to resolve any queries you have. If you want to visit the office please give us some notice so that we can re-arrange diaries accordingly. Thank you.

My appreciation for the support that many group members have given us in the office over the past year and our best wishes to you all for an equally successful 2014 / 2015 political year.

LGA Independent Group Achievements 2013-14

The Independent Group is a diverse group of councillors committed to representing their electorate and working together, we are more effective.

Diversity brings a wide range of experiences, skills and ideas, gives us strength in being more representative and rich in ideas and thought. To gain respect in negotiating with we need a recognisable identity and a process for making sure our members are well connected with the group, so that we come across as coherent on issues where we do agree, well informed and clearly working for a better local government for our residents.

To ensure the best quality of councillors, we need to ensure support and equal access to elected office.

- Our first series of workshop events developed an identity, captured in our strapline and image. We advised and encouraged local Independent networks across the country
- We were instrumental in linking the LGA to the Government Equalities Office: access to elected office for disabled people initiative, with extra support available for candidates who have to incur additional costs in campaigning
- We worked with the Electoral Commission to make the case to government for a fair electoral process, starting with the PCC elections.
- We have lobbied the BBC and other national Broadcasters to ensure that our group members receive a more equitable slice of air time.
- I continue to have a role in the joint LGA/APCC (Association of Policy and Crime Commissioners) Strategic Partnership
- I continue to work with the Women in Local Government Society (WLGS) to press the case for more involvement for women in politics across the piece.

Our councillors are skilled, well-informed and connected to the national decision-making

- We held 5 regional and one county meeting, well attended and with key speakers across all aspects of service planning and delivery. We encouraged an active, inclusive approach, building on the skills of our own inspiring group members.
- We held an extremely successful annual conference on 11 November 2013, among a full range of guests were some 45 politics students from De Montfort University who learned about local government on the ground and the National Graduate Development Scheme
- We accredited new group member peers and we are working hard to ensure that our member peers are given every opportunity to support LGA Corporate Peer Challenges, to improve local government.
- We increased the number of our Member Peer Group, so we have a broad base of skills available. They have been extremely busy contacting members in their respective regions, providing support across a range of issues.

- Maggie, Vanessa and Noleen continue to answer increasing numbers of individual queries from Group members and they have provided general advice on standing for election to more and more prospective Councillors. I have followed up political questions.
- We have set up Facebook and Knowledge Hub sites for our group members to share views. Councillors Clarence Barrett, Bertie MacKay and Gillian Ford have built their own networks with our group members on issues do to with Urban, Rural and Community Wellbeing service planning and delivery
- We have opened up the LGA to enable more councillors to benefit; on boards, training events, Councillors' Forum and via the updated web and internet connections.
- I and other Group Leaders have had the opportunity to meet with representatives from the Scottish and Northern Ireland Local Government Associations. We are building our relationship with Independent Group members in Wales.
- Two flagship projects: Access to Elected Office and the Independent Group Next Generation Programme will give even more access to local democracy and skills than ever before.
- There are already 125 Independent Group members who have completed LGA Leadership Academy Programme with another 6 colleagues signed up for 2014-2015

Result: Attendance and engagement at events has been higher than ever before, with strong and inspiring contributions from a large number of members taking the floor. We have continued to seek our Group member views on a range of key consultations.

Influencing national government

Our conferences focus on forthcoming key issues which form the basis of our group's ideas and direction. Our board representatives discuss them in detail and draw on member networks to identify priorities and actions. The Executive of area chairman and your elected leaders preview both strategic and immediate agenda issues to clarify the best approach to achieving the agreed objectives. This is done through the influencing the LGA, the party manifestoes, the Government, the Lords and the public.

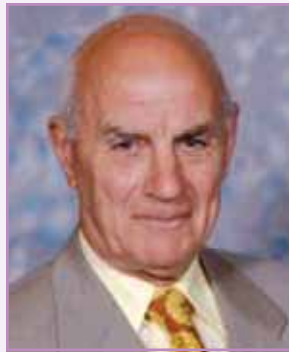
- I continue to meet with Lord Laming, Convenor of the Cross Bench and Independent Peers in the House of Lords. I meet regularly with our parliamentary advisor to ensure connection between what our members want and legislation in progress. We seek to influence the legislation in government and amendments through the Lords
- Our Lead Members continue to attend Parliamentary Select Committees when called on

Listening and influencing more widely shaping our future

- We have supported the LGA drive to have as many councils as possible in membership of the LGA, resulting in only two councils being out of membership for 2014/2015
- We work to ensure the LGA remains a truly cross-party organisation, and we take every opportunity to make successful and useful contributions
- We provided strong Independent Group representation at the LGA New Models of Local Government road-shows designed to help the LGA influence manifestos in favour of local government ahead of the 2015 General election

We have enabled you to have more influence, putting Independents more clearly on the map; in negotiations with ministers, giving evidence at select committees, at conferences and in the press. Whenever your voices were needed, you have given us the support that makes us effective.

Marianne Overton
Leader of the Independent Group



Councillor Charles Swift OBE

Peterborough City Council, who celebrated 60 years as a local councillor on 1st July 2014.

Our congratulations and thanks for your exceptional contribution to your local community and local democracy.

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·  Facebook (use icon logo too) LGAIndependentGroup

We look forward to hearing from you.

The **LGA Independent Group** works with you and for you

For each individual council in membership of the LGA direct benefits are summarised in the document
Benefits of membership

Contact the group office for your council's benefits' summary



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