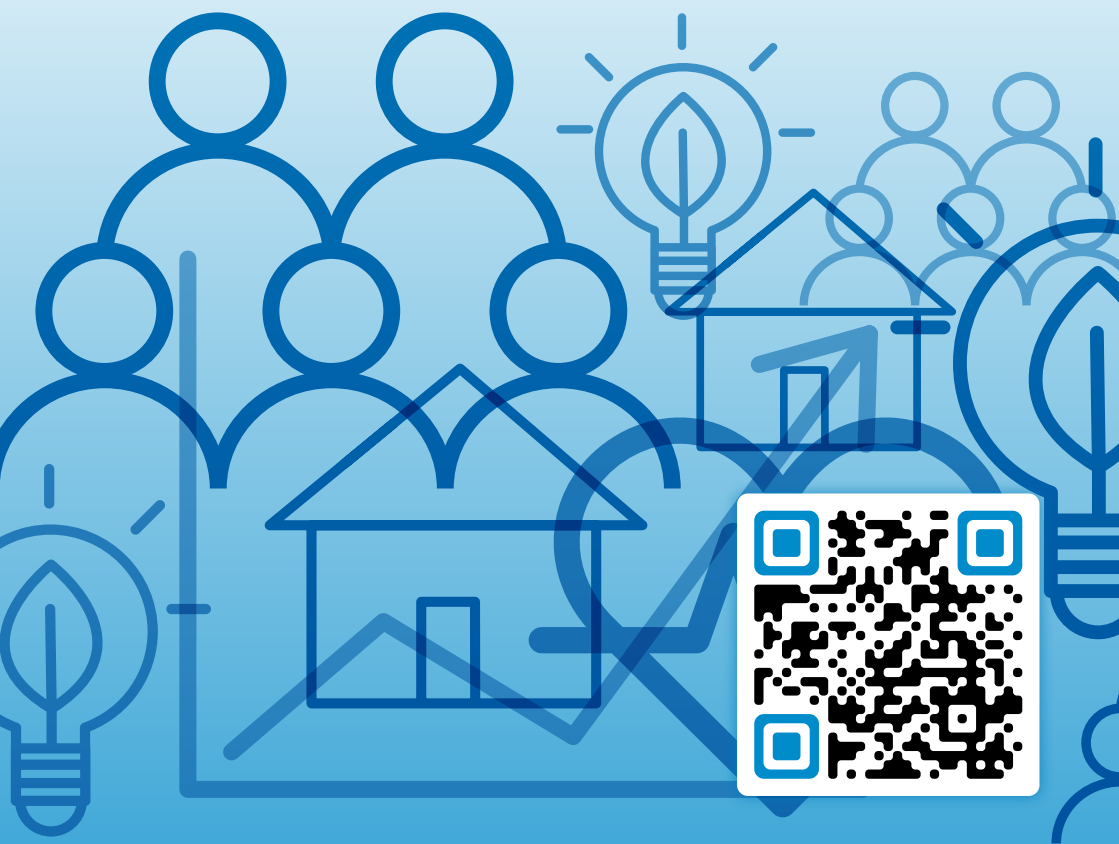


A CONTRACT TO **BACK CONSERVATIVES** IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT





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FOREWORD

Conservative councillors are the backbone of our Conservative movement. The Conservative Party, has over 5,000 councillors representing communities across the country, many of whom were instrumental in getting Members of Parliament (MPs) elected this year. We should also remember this; whilst the Conservatives might not be in national Government, our party continues to maintain control of over 70 local councils across England.

Conservative led councils are better run councils, often setting lower taxes, whilst delivering higher quality public services. It is also Conservative led councils that continue to lead the way in pioneering transformation across the local government sector, using advances in artificial intelligence and technology, to bring about the very best offer to the communities they serve. Despite being out of government, we still have Conservative leaders across the country who are responsible for setting multi-billion-pound budgets and employing thousands of staff.

I welcome this Conservative Party leadership election to give our movement the real debate that is needed about the future direction of not just the party, but more importantly the country. The Local Government Association (LGA) Conservative Group wants to showcase to you in this leadership election the bold policies that you may wish to commit to, to secure the support of Conservatives across the local government family, including our directly elected Mayors and Police & Crime Commissioners.

The reality is that no party ever gets into national government without a solid strong base in local government. To establish a majority Conservative government in 2029, or before, we need to be winning back council seats and re-taking control of councils which, we have unfortunately lost over recent years. In addition, a more equal relationship should be established between the parliamentary party and the local government family, remembering that only united parties win elections.

To that end, I hope that you will support the recommendations outlined in this document to enact during your tenure as party leader. Doing so will give you the support of the Conservative local government family so we can go forward together as one party together to win more councillors, more councils, and to win the next General Election.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single, long, sweeping stroke.

Councillor Kevin Bentley

Leader of the Conservative Group
Local Government Association



**Members of the
LGA Conservative
Group Executive.**

THE STATE OF PLAY

Conservatives remain a dominant force in local government across the country. We have over 5,000 Conservative councillors and control 77 local authorities, including, 19 county councils, 33 district councils, six London boroughs, three metropolitan boroughs, 16 unitary authorities. Despite the result of the General Election, we must remember that in a large proportion of the country, Conservatives remain in local government, delivering council services, keeping council tax down, and transforming our communities.

The next Leader of the Conservative Party will be judged by the British people on Thursday 1 May 2025. This is the date for the next set of local elections where we will see key elections for Conservatives in our county councils and some of our unitary authorities. This will be a big test for Conservatives across the country. To establish a sense of how important these local elections will be, we currently control every single county council in England bar two. Currently our largest political base in the Conservative Party.

Now is the time, and the best opportunity, to completely re-set the relationship between the Parliamentary party and the Conservative local government family. A relationship which treats both councillors directly elected Mayors, Police & Crime Commissioners, and MPs as equals and commits to working as a team to bring our party back into government. Whilst it will of course be the priority for the new leader to set out their agenda to take our party forward, Conservative Campaign Headquarters (CCHQ) must divert its entire energy at retaining as many council seats for the Conservative Party as possible in May. Making sure we continue to run many of England's county councils.

The local elections in May 2025, if taken seriously by CCHQ, can bring an opportunity for the Conservative Party to bounce back with momentum to show that we're back on an electoral course for a victory at the next General Election.

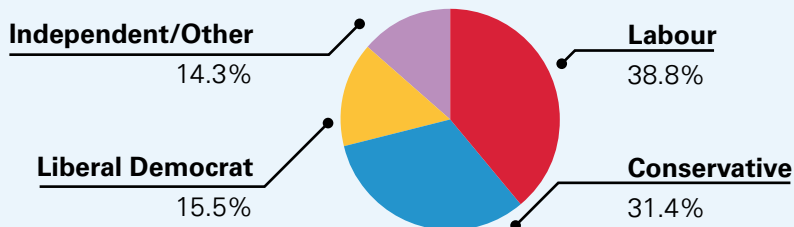
Conservatives in local government won't sit quietly over the coming months ahead. We will shortly be forming the '2024 Committee' which every Conservative council leader and opposition leader will automatically become a member of. We will use the '2024 Committee' to provide a centralised voice for the Conservative Party in local government, operating in a similar way to the '1922 Committee' which is the voice of backbench Conservative MPs.

The '2024 Committee' will assert the Conservative local government family as the second pillar of the Conservative Party. No longer will our Conservative councillors, often the army of activists who get our MPs elected, be ignored by the powers that be. We don't ask for special treatment, just that we reset the relationship, ensuring that all pillars of our movement are fully recognised with parity of esteem with our Parliamentary colleagues.

Over the coming months, we want to move into a position where when making policy decisions, Conservative MPs immediately think "what is the view of our Conservative councillors?" or "What will the impact be on our 77 Conservative controlled councils?". We need to get into a mindset where the Conservatives don't just think about General Elections every four or five years but consider that we have Conservatives up for election every single year for local government elections.

The evidence speaks for itself. The Conservative Party is at its electoral best when it is united as a party, behind its leader, and works together in the interests of our great nation. This publication, with its recommendations, outlines how we can reset that relationship, but also provides the new Leader of the Conservative Party with an understanding of what the policy priorities of Conservative councillors are.

LGA political proportionality for 2024/2025



10 PLEDGES TO BACK CONSERVATIVES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1. The Leader of the Conservative Party should offer a seat at Shadow Cabinet meetings to the Leader of the LGA Conservative Group. This has already been replicated by other political parties for their respective local government leaders.

2. The Conservative Local Government Conference brings together hundreds of our Conservative councillors each year. Over recent years, the party leader's attendance has not been forthcoming. The new Leader of the Conservative Party should unequivocally commit to attending this conference in person.

3. Commit to attending at least one LGA Conservative Group Councillors' Forum in London a year, so our Conservative councillors feel valued and engaged with your strategy and plans.

4. The new Shadow Secretary of State for Local Government should immediately re-start the weekly 'blue team' meetings with the leaders of the whole Conservative local government family, this will ensure Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) opposition spokespeople are fully briefed on the issues impacting Conservative councillors.

5. A promise that the new Leader of the Conservative Party, or one of their advisers, will meet with the LGA Conservative Group and the Conservative Councillors Association every quarter to be fully briefed on the priorities and issues facing Conservative councillors and Conservative led councils.

6. Better engagement from the Conservative Research Department on local government related briefings. We would like to see the Conservative Research Department taking a more pro-active role in showcasing best practice and the good work being done by our Conservative led councils.

7. Ensure that the Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party, with responsibility for local government, is a Conservative councillor and not an MP. We need a councillor in CCHQ influencing our strategy for future local election campaigning who understands the grassroots of our party.

8. Resolve to ensure that future shadow ministers to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, take a proactive approach to engaging with the talent in the local government sector. This will allow shadow ministers to hit the ground running on the first day of a future Conservative government.

9. A commitment for the next Conservative government to deliver real fiscal devolution for local government. This must include multiyear financial settlements, getting a fairer funding review underway, and reviewing outdated legislation on education home to school transport.

10. Giving our Conservative councils the powers they need to support a future Conservative government delivering a property-owning democracy. This could include allowing councils to set planning fees internally, allowing councils to keep 100 per cent of their Right to Buy receipts, and getting rid of bureaucratic European nutrient neutrality regulations.

COMMITMENT TO REAL FISCAL DEVOLUTION FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Conservative led councils continue to demonstrate that where Conservatives are in control, residents get lower taxes, better public services, and value for money. It has been Conservative led councils that have pioneered transformation and innovation to bring local government into the 21st century. Whilst significant steps have been taken to better shape the offer to our communities, it is an unescapable truth that local authorities need more flexibility in funding in key areas such as adult social care, children's services, and highways.

The next Leader of the Conservative Party should unequivocally commit to real fiscal devolution for local government under the next Conservative government. We want to see commitments including:

- Multiyear financial settlements. Rather than awarding local government yearly funding allocations, we need multiyear settlements to allow local government to better plan delivery for our residents. As an example, with multiyear financial settlements, upper tier authorities would be in a better position to provide more certainty to residents on road re-surfacing programmes. An issue that was without a doubt a concern for MPs seeking re-election on the doorstep at the General Election. Despite National Highways being responsible for just 2 per cent of roads, they still receive multiyear financial settlements from the Department for Transport. We ask that local government be treated as equals under a future Conservative government.

- Home to school transport. Data from the County Councils Network, representing councils in county and rural areas (the majority of which are Conservative run) confirms that SEND home to school transport has seen costs “doubling from £387 million in 2018/19 to £790 million in 2023/24”. The existing legislation with respect to home to school transport within the education system was set in 1944. The demands happen to be completely different in 2024 and we urgently need the next Leader of the Conservative Party to commit to reviewing this legislation in the next Conservative government. It is something that is crushing the finances of well run and well managed Conservative councils.
- Fairer funding. An ageing population and significantly increased demands in children’s services means that, fundamentally, we need an honest debate about how we fund local government. What might a future Leader of the Conservative Party consider committing to? There needs to be a fair funding review so that Conservative councils get the funding they’re rightfully entitled to. Specifically, there must be a review of the formulae and the data that is used to assess resources and demands in our local authorities which is currently flawed and favours inner city Labour councils. Likewise, we need a streamlined system of funding. The current process of bidding for government grants is seriously impacting capacity and delivery within the sector. We need a system which does place councils in a position where they must bid against each other.



The last LGA Conservative Group next generation programme cohort – training the Council Leaders of the future.

GIVING CONSERVATIVE COUNCILS THE POWERS TO BUILD THE HOMES OF THE FUTURE

For the Conservative Party to stand relevant, it must be able to sell a positive modern day capitalist agenda to voters. The recent General Election showed that support amongst the younger generations for the Conservative Party is at an all-time low. We believe that this is in part due to the complexities young people are finding in getting onto the property ladder. The Conservative Party is at its best electorally when it stands on a pro housing platform, because we know that the best way to sell capitalism in the modern day, and to sustain a Conservative property-owning democracy, is through bricks and mortar.

So, to help the next Conservative government bring this country back to the property-owning democracy it once was, Conservative led councils can support this endeavour with additional support to the planning system so that spades can get into the ground quicker. We ask the next Leader of the Conservative Party to consider some of the following commitments:

- **Getting rid of nutrient neutrality regulations.** As per the recommendation in the most recent Conservative Party manifesto, the next Leader of the Conservative Party should commit to ending the bureaucratic European ‘nutrient neutrality’ legislation when the Conservatives return to government. These regulations are holding back thousands of houses from being built and is crippling the economy, most notably in areas such as the construction industry.

- **The next generation of social housing.** Right to Buy has been one of the most pro-housing policies introduced by a Conservative government, taking thousands of people out of social housing and putting them on the property ladder. Right to Buy is still, to this day, a policy supported by Conservatives in local government. However, we believe that councils should have the right to keep the entirety of the receipt collected, rather than a majority of the dividend going to Government. Allowing councils to keep 100 per cent of the retention from Right to Buy receipts will finance more social housing to be built, providing more families with a secure home environment and the space needed to save and get onto the property ladder.
- **Bolstering capacity in planning departments.** To help an incoming Conservative government increase housing supply, bolstering capacity within planning departments will ensure applications are processed more quickly. To that end, we believe that the next Conservative government should allow councils to set their own planning fees internally, based upon local demand, and without government interference. This will allow councils to set fees on a local level to avoid planning departments running on deficits, retaining more planning officers, and to speed up the planning process for developers of all sizes.



**Cllr Dan Swords,
Leader of Harlow
Council, kickstarts
a new high-
quality residential
development.**

STRONGER ENGAGEMENT FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTY

This leadership election gives the next Leader of the Conservative Party the perfect opportunity to reset the relationship between the parliamentary party and the Conservative local government family. It is important that the new Leader of the Conservative Party unequivocally commits to a more equal relationship with local government, and one that fully respects the principle that our Conservative councillors should be at the heart of getting the Conservative Party into government by 2029, or before. To that end, we urge the two candidates to support the commitments below.

- In 2010, the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles, established weekly 'blue team' meetings. This meeting included the leaders of the Conservative local government, with representation from the LGA, Conservative Councillors Association, County Councils Network, District Councils Network, and London Councils, the ministerial team at the then Department for Communities and Local Government. Throughout our 14 years in Government, Conservative secretary of state have continued the 'blue team' meetings every week when Parliament is sitting. We want a commitment that the next Leader of the Conservative Party will ensure that their new Shadow Secretary of State will immediately re-start the weekly 'blue team' meetings for the Conservative local government family.

- The Conservative Annual Local Government Conference brings together hundreds of Conservative councillors together each year to network, share policy ideas, to train, and to showcase the great work our Conservative councils and opposition groups are doing. Over recent years, the attendance of Leader of the Conservative Party has slipped, and we want a commitment that you will attend this conference every year, at least in part, to meet our Conservative councillors.
- The Local Government Association holds councillor forums in London around every quarter and beforehand, the LGA Conservative Group hosts a pre-meeting for Conservative councillors. We normally have government ministers, local government stakeholders, and officials from CCHQ in attendance. We would like you to commit to attending at least one LGA Conservative Group Councillors Forum in London a year, so our Conservative councillors feel valued and engaged with your strategy and plans.
- We would expect a future Leader of the Conservative Party to make it clear that future shadow ministers to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, go above and beyond to engage with the wide pool of talent within the local government sector. For example, this would include actively wanting to engage with policy advisers at the Local Government Association to fully understand the key issues facing the sector. This is incredibly important so that shadow ministers can hit the ground running from day one under the next Conservative government.



Cllr Kevin Bentley, Leader of the LGA Conservative Group, meeting Craig Tracey, former Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party with responsibility for local government, in the last parliament.

PROPER REPRESENTATION FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT ON THE TOP TABLE

The Conservative Party is made up of three pillars that hold our movement together. We have the parliamentary party made of our MPs and Peers, the voluntary party made up of our brilliant activists, and then we have the Conservative local government family consisting of over 5,000 Conservative councillors. To re-unite the Conservative Party, to make sure our members and councillors have a proper say on the policy and operational direction of the party, we need a proper representation for local government on the top table. We ask the leadership candidates to consider the following proposals.

- So that our Conservative councillors feel valued and part of the wider team to get us back into government, we believe that the next Leader of the Conservative Party should offer a seat at Shadow Cabinet meetings to the Leader of the LGA Conservative Group. This has been replicated by other political parties for their respective local government leaders. Such a move would demonstrate that Conservatives in local government are taken seriously and would secure a large proportion of the councillor vote during the leadership election for the candidate that commits to this.
- The next Leader of the Conservative Party, or one of their advisers, should commit to meet in person with the LGA Conservative Group and the Conservative Councillors Association every quarter to be fully briefed on the priorities and issues facing Conservative councillors, Conservative led councils, and the area where we need to win back control.

- We would like more engagement from the Conservative Research Department on local government related briefings. We would like to see the Conservative Research Department taking a more pro-active role in showcasing best practice and the good work being done by our Conservative councils. In doing so, both the LGA Conservative Group and the Conservative Councillors Association would be happy to support this work. Likewise, we would like to see a dedicated local government desk within the Conservative Research Department, acknowledging the fact that it is now the Conservative local government pillar which remains in government in parts of the country, controlling multi-billion-pound budgets.
- While Conservatives in local government have received strong levels of engagement from Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party with responsibility for local government, we do believe that the role would be better represented by a Conservative councillor as opposed to a Member of Parliament. We would therefore ask the next Leader of the Conservative Party to consider appointing a Conservative councillor to this position, enabling a councillor to sit directly in CCHQ to influence future local election campaigning strategies.



Leaders of the Conservative local government family attending a meeting of Political Cabinet in Downing Street under the last Conservative Government.







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