Putting local councillors first

The Liberal Democrat Group in the Local Government Association

The Liberal Democrats have over 4,400 councillors across England and Wales. Consequently, our Group at the LGA plays a major role in the organisation.

We are the persistent defenders of local democracy, arguing that what a local community can do for itself is best left to that local community, without interference from central government.

The Liberal Democrat Group exists to represent our Council Groups and councillors and provide a representation at all levels on the national stage - whether internally, within the Party or to the respective arms of Government.
Standing up for councillors across England and Wales

It was precisely through a desire to represent all councillors that the LGA Lib Dem Group this year changed its processes to make the elections an all councillor ballot.

The awareness of the change to the electorate was low and indeed the turnout can be enhanced in future years but it was a significant step in developing a closer relationship with all our councillors.

Further, the publication of Power Actually was the culmination of drawing together your work and efforts up and down the country. Copies can still be obtained from the Office but it has been a real success.

Visits to more than 40 councils where the LGA been incredibly well received by Councillors who are eager to be part of the wider Lib Dem family and to learn more about how we can improve ourselves and our councils.

The passing of the Sustainable Communities Act which was supported by many of our council groups and one of whose main sponsors was Julia Goldsworthy MP. Our MPs are incredibly supportive of our local government base - they just need the ammunition from our experience on the ground. Please make a conscious effort over coming months to provide more materials to our parliamentary party.
Local authorities

There are more than 20,000 elected councillors on the 410 local authorities in England and Wales. Of these 1200 councillors are in Welsh authorities, responsible for more than £4 billion of public expenditure. Local authorities across England and Wales employ more than two million people and undertake up to 700 different functions.

There are several different types of local authority across England and Wales. Currently most of local government is characterised by two tiers. At one level, 34 county councils look after education, social services, transport strategic planning, fire services, consumer protection, refuse disposal, smallholdings and libraries. Examples of county councils include Kent, Somerset and Northumberland.

At the other level, 234 district councils within the county council areas look after local planning, housing, local highways, building regulation, environmental health and refuse collection, while recreation and cultural matters are divided. Examples of district authorities include Caradon, Cambridge, Northampton, West Lindsey and Berwick.

The 46 unitary authorities in England each put all of the above functions under one roof. Examples of unitary authorities include Portsmouth, Hull, Milton Keynes, North East Lincolnshire and Warrington.

Similarly, there are single-tier councils in London (such as the Boroughs of Sutton, Kingston and Camden) and other English metropolitan areas in the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and Tyne & Wear (such as Rochdale, Liverpool, Newcastle, Bristol, Stockport and Birmingham). There are 32 London borough councils and 36 metropolitan district councils.

Local Elections 2007

There were 10,500 councillors up for election on May 3rd 2007. Elections were held in a total of 312 local authorities. Half of those seats were in just three regions - eastern, southern and the south-western. Across all 36 Metropolitan boroughs, one-third of council seats were contested. In 25 unitary authorities the whole council went to the polls, while in another 20 only a third of seats were up for election. Of district councils, 153 elected the entire council, while another 78 elected a third.

At the elections, the Lib Dem share of the vote held steady at 26 percent. Although the party made a net loss of 246 council seats in the election, 155 of these were in just 10 of the 310 councils with elections. The Lib Dems retained control of 17 councils, gaining six and losing ten.

The party made spectacular gains against the Conservatives in places like Eastbourne, Hinckley and Bosworth and Salisbury. However, this success was tempered with losses in places like Bournemouth, Torbay and Uttlesford.

The party won 294 more councillors than Labour and made progress in places such as like Kingston-upon-Hull, Manchester and Warrington. Meanwhile, the Conservatives continue to have no representation in northern cities such as Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle.

There were also full elections in all of Scotland’s 32 unitary authorities. In Highland, the Lib Dems gained eight seats and in the Scottish Borders, the party gained two seats. In Edinburgh, the Lib Dems became the largest party on the council for the first time.

Party Shares of the Vote in the 2007 elections

Lib Dem 26%, Con 40%, Labour 27%, Others 7%
Really good links with the Parliamentary Team in the Lords and Commons

It’s especially encouraging to report on the great relationship the Lib Dem LGA group have with the parliamentary team. It is robust and not without disagreement, but it works.

Andrew Stunell leads a team who have a background in local government themselves (indeed several of our Lords and MPs are councillors themselves) and is in constant contact with the LGA Lib Dem Cabinet.

Current project includes increasing the opportunities for joint working and in particular highlighting issues facing councils in parliament.

We are especially keen that councillors alert us to live examples of local issues and that they identify micro as well as macro issues of importance to them.

**Lib Dem Team in the Commons**
Andrew Stunell MP
Tom Brake MP
Paul Holmes MP
Jo Swinson MP

**Lib Dem Team in the Lords**
Baroness Ros Scott
Lord Navnit Dholakia
Baroness Sally Hamwee
Lord Tony Greaves
Improving services and enhancing support

The Lib Dem Group has developed strong links across the local government family: with ALDC, Improvement and Development Agency (Idea), Leadership Centre for Local Government (LCLG) and the Standards Board for England (SBE).

We have established an Improvement and Innovation Board and this has met formally once and has started the process of sharing knowledge and experience of who is working where and when. It is a start on ensuring that all our Council Groups and Leaders in particular have the support they need to operate effectively as elected Liberal Democrat councillors.

The LGA itself operates an Improvement Board and there is a consensus that ‘sector led improvement’ is the way forward to stop heavy-handed government intervention and ensure that local political solutions are at the forefront of helping Council improve services.

This is work for which there has been considerable demand over a period of time - we are hopeful that we can begin to roll out a higher level of support over the coming weeks and months.

Idea Lib Dem Peers:
Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson
Cllr Howard Sykes
Cllr Cathy Bakewell
Cllr Richard Kemp

LCLG Lib Dem Political Director
Cllr Erica Kemp

Councillor Howard Sykes is part of the IdeaA team working with Liberal Democrat councillors and councils
Punching our weight with the Government

As a political group within the Local Government Association our spokespersons have access for lobbying, often education to most arms of the government. Further, the LGA has pretty sophisticated links within the government and the senior civil service structures.

Over the last year our LGA Lib Dem leads have met with over 20 ministers including (in no particular order) John Healey, Hazel Blears, John Prescott, Ruth Kelly, Phil Woolas and Baroness Scotland.

As Group leader Richard Kemp has met with Gordon Brown (as part of an LGA delegation) and has been able to press the case for devolved power, spending and decision making.

There are many views on the idea of working with the Government, but the reality is that by standing up for the Lib Dems within the LGA we have some ability to affect thinking, plans and legislation on occasion.

Too often we don’t have enough information on the direct effects of legislation and announcements on councils we run and lead and this is something where we could all improve.
The Liberal Democrat Local Government Conference

“400 councillors discussing our achievements has finally placed us back at the heart of the debate within the party - and great food to boot.”

Feedback on the June Conference

After some discussion and planning ALDC and the Lib Dem LGA Group organised the first special Local Government Conference in June 2007.

Held in the Birmingham Convention Centre the event was attended by over 400 delegates, had a strong local government theme and drew in key parliamentary spokespersons.

Of particular interest were the presentations by South Somerset, South Shropshire, Durham, Birmingham on the work Liberal Democrats have done in office.

There was feedback that there was too many sessions available and that we didn’t do enough to promote the dinner the night before and these two elements will be taken on board when planning next year.

A strong dialogue is underway with the Federal Conference Committee about enhancing links with the Party’s Conferences and in particular learning from each other and sharing good ideas.

We have agreed to repeat the event and the intention is to make this an annual event.

The Local Government Conference will be on Friday 13th and Saturday 14th June 2008 at the Birmingham Convention Centre

A top class panel (l to r) of Brendan Carlin, Edward Welsh, Cllr Sue Anderson, Nick Clegg MP and Cllr Kath Pinnock
Members of the Lib Dem LGA Cabinet

Leader
Richard Kemp
Liverpool

Deputy Leader
Gerald Vernon-Jackson
Portsmouth

Whip
John Commons
Manchester

Group Chair
David Williams
Richmond

Group Executive (4 places)
Howard Sykes
Oldham
Stan Collins
South Lakeland
Pat Aston
Kerrier
Edward Lord
City of London

Fire Forum
David Goddard
Stockport

Urban Commission
Greg Stone
Newcastle

Rural Commission
Pat Aston (Lead)
Kerrier

Children & Young People
David Belotti (lead)
Bath NES

Community Well Being
David Rogers (lead)
Lewes

Culture, Tourism & Sport
Chris White (lead)
Hertfordshire

Improvement
David Williams (lead)
Richmond

Safer Communities
Allan Siao Ming Witherick (lead)
Hertfordshire

Regeneration & Transport
Richard Knowles (lead)
Oldham

Environment
Dorothy Thornhill (Lead)
Watford

Human Resources Panel
Steve Comer (Lead)
Bristol

Resources Panel
Keith Whitmore
Manchester

Scrutiny Panel
Trevor Jones
Dorset

Appointments:

4Ps
Edward Lord
City of London

LACORS
David Belotti
Bath NES

IDeA
Derek Osbourne
LB Kingston

European Lead
Graham Tope
LB Sutton

The reports of all members of the LGA Lib Dem Group for 2007 are available on the group website: www.libdemgroup.lga.gov.uk
Liberal principles within the LGA

As part of the proportionality arrangements at the LGA the Lib Dems hold a number of posts in the board structure that give us influence.

In particular, Cllr David Rogers chairs the Community Well-Being Board (CWB) and Cllr Chris White chairs the Culture Tourism and Sport Board (CTS).

It’s fair to say that the work is varied and involves lots of meetings, but it enables us to be heard on a range of topics where a liberal voice will otherwise be absent.

Particular battles we have fought and made some progress on have been around highlighting the under-funding of concessionary fares, the pressure on social care budgets and the gulf between the words of the government on rural issues and the reality.

In addition, the LGA, working through the political group offices, makes a number of appointments to working groups, sub groups, panels and commissions through which councillors can make a constructive contribution to often very specific debates.

It is the Boards that set the agenda each year for the work of the LGA - if there are areas of work, best practise of knowledge that you would find your authority please do speak to either the Lib Dem Board lead or the staff team in the office.

Councillor Chris White (Hertfordshire) is the Liberal Democrat lead on and LGA Chair of the Culture, Tourism and Sport Board.
Council Group of the Year

Now a key annual event, this is a small way to recognise the excellent work of Liberal Democrat councillors all around the country.

The winners for 2007 were:

**Council Group of the Year 2007:**
**WINNER- CARDIFF CITY COUNCIL**
Commended - South Norfolk DC and South Shropshire DC

**Tackling Anti Social Behaviour:** WINNER - Watford Borough Council
Commended - Liverpool City Council

**Supporting Culture and Regeneration:** WINNER - Liverpool City Council

**Green Council Group of the Year:** JOINT WINNERS - Uttlesford District Council and London Borough of Richmond

**Improving Local Housing:** WINNER - South Shropshire District Council
Commended - Teignbridge District Council

**Backbencher of the Year:**
**WINNER - Cllr Anna Berent (London Borough of Islington)**
Highly Commended - Cllr Sheila Smillie (Watford Borough Council) and Cllr Maggie Foot (South Somerset District Council)
Local authorities in England and Wales are currently led by Liberal Democrats:

- Cllr Roger Styring  Alnwick District Council
- Cllr Jason Zadrozy  Ashfield District Council
- Cllr Elizabeth Hunter  Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council
- Cllr Paul Lorber  Brent Council
- Cllr Mrs Cheryl Green  Bridgend County Borough Council
- Cllr Michael G Rich  Broxtowe Borough Council
- Cllr Gordon Birtwistle  Burnley Borough Council
- Cllr Ian Nimmo-Smith  Cambridge City Council
- Cllr Keith Moffitt  Camden Council
- Cllr Neil K Stanley  Cannock Chase District Council
- Cllr John Turner  Caradon District Council
- Cllr Rodney Berman  Cardiff City and County Council
- Cllr Frederick D Greenslade  Carrick District Council
- Cllr Ray Russell  Chesterfield Borough Council
- Cllr Stephen Galloway  City of York Council
- Cllr David Whalley  Cornwall County Council
- Cllr Brian C Greenslade  Devon County Council
- Cllr Fraser Reynolds  Durham City Council
- Cllr David Tutt  Eastbourne Borough Council
- Cllr Keith House  Eastleigh Borough Council
- Cllr Chris Millington  Harlow District Council (Joint Leader)
- Cllr David A Neighbour  Hart District Council
- Cllr David C Bill  Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council
- Cllr Carl Minns  Hull City Council
- Cllr James Kempton  Islington Council
- Cllr Derek Osbourne  Kingston upon Thames Royal Borough Council
- Cllr Richard Brett  Leeds City Council (Alternate Leader)
- Cllr Ann De Vecchi  Lewes District Council
- Cllr Warren Bradley  Liverpool City Council
- Cllr Mrs Fran Wilson  Maidstone Borough Council
- Cllr Isobel McCall  Milton Keynes Council
- Cllr John W Shipley OBE  Newcastle upon Tyne City Council
- Cllr Andrew De Freitas  North East Lincolnshire Council
- Cllr Simon Partridge  North Norfolk District Council
- Cllr Tony Woods  Northampton Borough Council
- Cllr John W Boyce  Oadby and Wigston Borough Council
- Cllr John Goddard  Oxford City Council
- Cllr Alan Davies  Pendle Borough Council
- Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson  Portsmouth City Council
- Cllr Timothy Jones  Richmond upon Thames London Borough Council
- Cllr Paul Sample  Salisbury District Council
- Cllr Tony Robertson  Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
- Cllr Jill Shortland  Somerset County Council
- Cllr Brendan Jameson  South Lakeland District Council
- Cllr Tim Carroll  South Somerset District Council
- Cllr Nick Stanton  Southwark Council
- Cllr Robert F Donald  St Albans City and District Council
- Cllr Brian Spencer  St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council
- Cllr David Goddard  Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
- Cllr Sean Brennan  Sutton London Borough Council
- Cllr Chris Holley  Swansea City and County Council
- Cllr Ross Henley  Taunton Deane Borough Council
- Cllr Alan Connett  Teignbridge District Council
- Cllr Ann Shaw OBE  Three Rivers District Council
- Cllr Jerry Patterson  Vale of White Horse District Council
- Cllr Ian Marks  Warrington Borough Council
- Mayor Dorothy Thornhill  Watford Borough Council
- Cllr Reginald Shore  West Lindsey District Council
- Cllr Aled R Roberts  Wrexham County Borough Council
Speaking and communicating what you do in your ward and in your council

Liberal Democrats have been at the forefront of fighting for the community on a range of topics, but all too often it feels like fighting a lonely battle.

To address this we have instituted a range of conferences and seminars for portfolio holders and spokespersons.

These days are organised in conjunction with the front bench parliamentary team and have proved to be really valuable.

Conferences and seminars have included: housing, adult social care, finance, community safety.

Coming soon are the Environment Conference on Friday 11th January and Children and Young peoples on Friday 1st - Saturday 2nd February.

We try and locate these round the country and have used Newcastle, Taunton and Nottingham, but are conscious that Local Government House, London, is free and equally accessible from Liverpool and Cornwall for example.

We are currently trying to co-ordinate the dates for the rest of the year and will be having a special day for Whips, business managers, members of local standards board and Group Secretaries.

Simon Hughes MP, Party President, was the Liberal Democrat keynote speaker at the 2007 LGA Annual Conference