

MJ 125 YEARS

Celebrating 125 years

In 1893, Queen Victoria was on the throne, Gladstone was Prime Minister of Britain, former Mayor of Birmingham and reformer Joseph Chamberlain had not long stepped down as president of the Board of Local Government and *Municipal Journal* was born – initially entitled *London* and focusing on the capital.

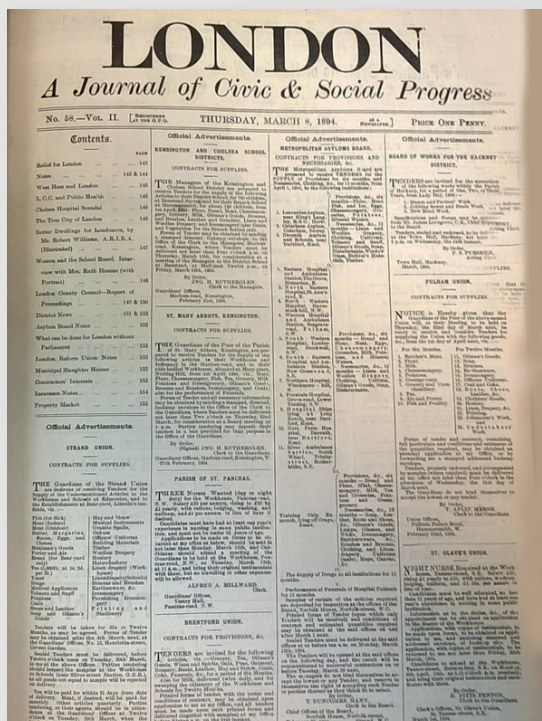
Founder editor, Sir Robert Donald – a Liberal Party sympathiser and friend of Lloyd George – launched a magazine to crusade for local government and to campaign for well-run public services in a bid to tackle the desperate poverty and insanitary living conditions for swathes of the population.

In its very first editorial comment it says: 'We propose to consider the great City, not simply as a resort of business and pleasure, but in its collective aspect as the abode of five millions of people, all of whom are in need of honest, capable and wisely directed government.'

Britain had gone through an industrial revolution, altering the way we lived as a nation, bringing wealth and prosperity to some and deepening the social and economic divide for others. The London County Council was formed in 1889 to modernise the capital.

the waxing and waning of its finances, the structural debates, reorganisations and the legislation. It has charted the rise of the welfare state, covered countless housing crises, and watched local government rebuild after two wars.

In 1993, for the centenary of *Municipal Journal*, the secretary of state for the environment at the time, John Gummer, wrote: 'Local government has a vital role to play in the life of the community. Europe should not make decisions best made in this country. Central government should not make decisions best made locally.'



'The aim of "London" will be to throw light on the problems which are now engaging the attention of our publicists, and to help forward their solutions... it will be the eye and the ear at once for greater and for smaller London,' Sir Robert wrote.

Before long, the remit of *London* expanded to cover the whole of local government across the UK. However, 125 years on, the aims of *The MJ* remain the same: to throw light on the issues of local government, and to help promote solutions.

Strolling through its 125-year history, *The MJ* has grappled with recurring issues of local government –

It is as true today as it was then.

Publishing *The MJ* and working alongside some extraordinary public servants who work tirelessly to deliver services and battle to improve their communities and the lives of residents is an absolute privilege. It is a proud history we hope to carry forward into the future.





1890s

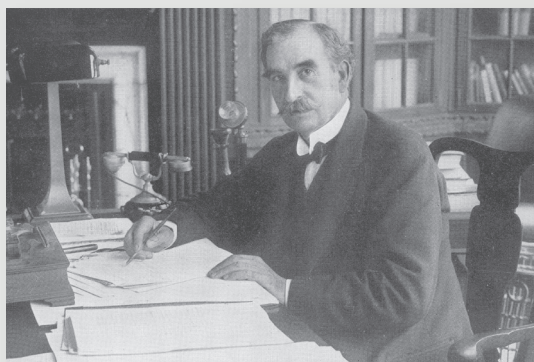
When *London* (later renamed *Municipal Journal*) launched in 1893 Britain was two nations. It was the height of Empire, Queen Victoria was in her last decade and yet millions of poor people lived in abject poverty with slum housing and poor sanitation. Local government came into being to tackle disease and poverty so the journal campaigned against incompetent administration and championed innovation.

The poor and homeless were still accommodated in grim workhouses though increasingly there were moves to create social housing for the 'deserving poor.' But how could these be distinct from the 'undeserving'?

In a report of a select committee in March 1899, the journal wrote: 'In July 1896 the Local Government Board addressed a circular letter to boards of guardians in which they expressed the desire that special attention should be given to the matter in order that as far as possible those persons whose circumstances have compelled them to enter the workhouse but who are known to have previously led moral and respectable lives, should be separated from those who are likely to cause discomfort. The committee received evidence as to the difficulty in arriving at an accurate judgment of the character of applicants on relief and inmates of work.'

The journal also campaigned for more publicly-funded schools, in those days run by the church. In a blistering comment in the issue of March 2 1893 the journal wrote: 'Instead of doing their best to extend the benefits of free education to the children of London the members of our School Board are just now wrangling about religious dogmas stirring up a narrow spirit of bigotry and are generally neglecting their duties. The last two meetings were wasted with theological discussions about the Holy Trinity.' In contrast, the journal thoroughly approved of the new

public baths erected by the parish of Camberwell in London, commenting on February 9 1893: 'The handsome new public baths recently erected by the parish of Camberwell are the second erected by the Commissioners since the adoption of the Act in 1887. There are 96 private baths, first and second swimming baths, each 120ft by 35ft, offices and boardroom, waiting rooms and a public laundry.'



Sir Robert Donald, founder of *The Municipal Journal*

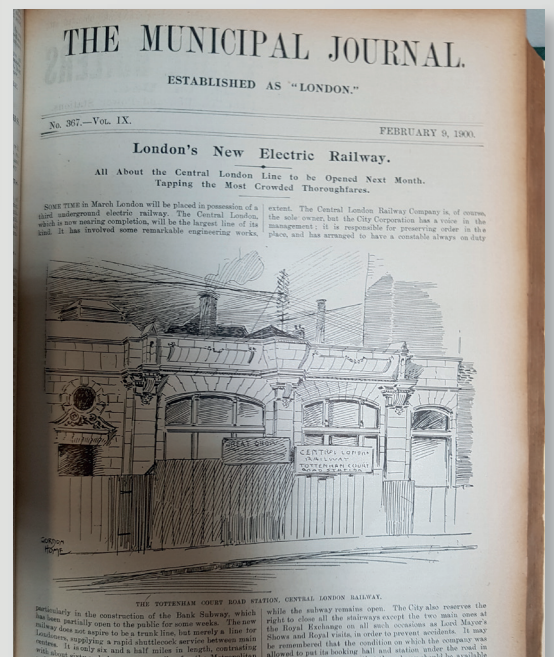
1900s

It was the end of an era as Queen Victoria passed away in 1901 and ushered in the Edwardian age. The journal commented in its January 25 1901 issue that the Victorian age had been 'one of the greatest epochs in the history of civilisation' especially 'in the development of local government'. It added: 'The beginning of the Queen's reign [in 1837] marked the transition between the old regime of the demoralised mediaeval institutions which had sunk the government of our cities to the lowest stages of incapacity and corruption, and the growth of the new development

which the Reform Act of 1835 made possible.' Indeed Queen Victoria, said the journal, 'frequently associated herself with the progress of municipal institutions'.

Transport always formed a key part of the journal's coverage. Almost 120 years before Crossrail the Central London Railway opened and the journal featured it with a sketch of Tottenham Court Road station. Although a private enterprise, the City Corporation provided security for the Bank Subway.

In its issue of February 22 1901, the journal ran a page article headed 'From Horse to Electric Tramways' in which it promised 'the London workmen will be wafted to their suburban residences almost before they are aware they have left the City.'





Slum housing continued to concern the journal. In a March 1900 issue it ran two pages on 'the slums of Newcastle' with graphic photos of tenements and outside toilets and a caption under one saying 'the black patches on the wall represent damp.' It added: 'A public officer whose duty takes him to such quarters finds it essential to take a stimulant to counteract the overpowering and noisome odours which prevail.' The women's suffragette movement was also prominent in that decade and the journal devoted a page in its October 4 1907 issue to 'women candidates' in local government. It even interviewed Mrs Pankhurst who condescendingly said she thought the women's municipal movement was 'a sidetrack intended to divert women from the high road towards the parliamentary franchise'.

1910s

Emily Davison was killed by the King's horse on June 4 1913 and December 1 1919 saw Lady Nancy Astor become the first woman MP to take her seat – Constance Markievicz was elected the year before but was Sinn Fein and refused to take her seat.

The outbreak of war was greeted by the journal in its comment in the 7 August 1914 issue as a 'supreme crisis in our nation's history' and welcomed announcements that council staff should be released for war work. However it also added there should be 'no slackening of work' in local government, the carrying out of public works schemes 'should be accelerated' and new enterprises initiated rather than postponed. An article later that month headed 'Local authorities and the war' considered how councils could help workers put out of a job by the war though it noted that 'relief [i.e. benefits] without work' should only be given as a last resort, preferably in the form of food stamps and preferably given to the women not the men.

Chancellor Lloyd George, however, was quoted

in another article saying councils should spend the minimum on job relief as the war 'may be a very long business'. He also insisted any council-built houses should be let at an economic rent, not subsidised. The journal however continued to cover social issues such as a May 1915 article on air pollution in Manchester whose corporation set up an Air Pollution Advisory Board.

The air in the city was so bad that 'on a sunny day no less than 10% of the sunlight is cut off in passing through the last 100ft of the atmosphere.' Most of the pollution was from chimney fires. An inquiry was carried out at 10 different stations in the city, 'the most complete investigation of the kind that has ever been attempted'.

1920s

The decade was marked by recovery from the war, a growing economy and major changes in local government.

There was also a seismic political event, namely the first Labour government under Ramsay MacDonald in January 1924. The journal optimistically said it was 'clear that it will encourage municipal activities' partly because it had 'more men' from a local government background in it such as from district, town and county councils and especially the London County Council.

The Labour government was short-lived, lasting until November 1924. The new minister of health (which included local government) under the Conservative government was one Neville Chamberlain who had held the post before and whom the journal welcomed as 'a popular choice' because of his experience on Birmingham City Council. It said housing and a reform of the rating and valuation system must be his priorities.

It was Chamberlain who spearheaded the Local Government Act 1929 which abolished the system of Poor Law Unions in England and Wales and their boards of guardians, transferring their powers to county councils and county boroughs.



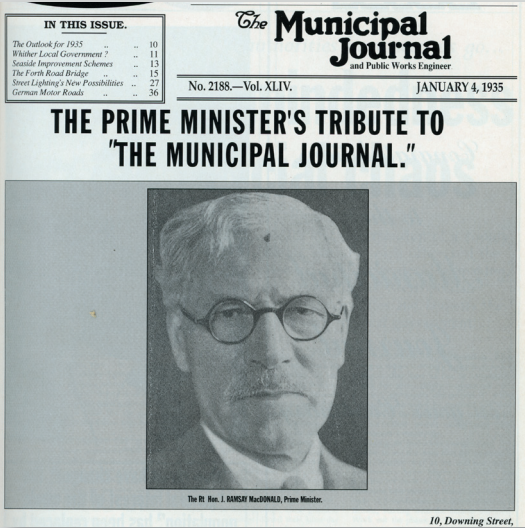
It also gave county councils increased powers over highways. The local authorities took over infirmaries and fever hospitals, while workhouses became public assistance institutions. The Metropolitan Asylums Board was also abolished, and the London County Council became responsible for its institutions.

Like now, the journal had plenty of coverage about salaries. In its issue of January 28, 1927 it noted Cornwall CC was introducing pay bands ranging from £60 a year to £310 plus a Scale A which had no limits, then a novel concept.

The journal also called for a London-wide transport body, complaining about the proliferation of private buses in an article on November 14 1924 and adding 'the whole traffic facilities of London and Greater London should be co-ordinated'.

1930s

The 1920s closed with the Wall Street Crash, and the 1930s opened with the Great Depression.



In 1931, Ramsay MacDonald resigned after a budget to slash government expenditure was rejected by his colleagues, but was persuaded to stay in post.

Unemployment in Britain soared to nearly three million in 1932. The journal reported that Ministry of Health figures revealed 'the total number of persons in receipt of poor relief in England and Wales on the last Saturday in that month [June] was 1,325,307, equivalent to 328 per 10,000 of population'.

On January 4, 1935, the *Municipal Journal* relaunched. In an open letter from the prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald welcomed the changes which mirrored the expansion of local authority responsibilities. 'Their [councils'] work now touches the life of the community at its most vital points, and the health and well-being of the people depend very largely

on whether that work is carried on with competence and with energy.

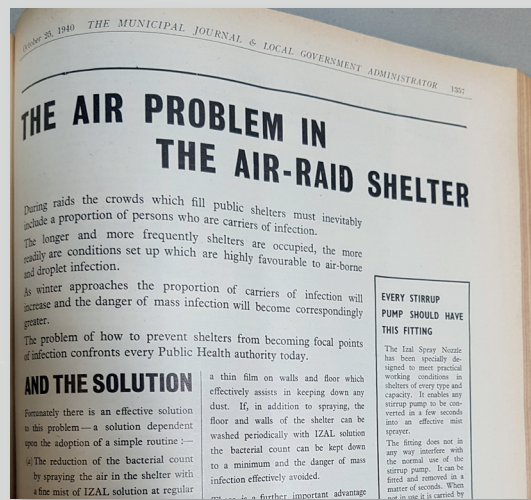
'It is, therefore, very necessary that there should be a paper like "*The Municipal Journal*" in which the problems of local government can be discussed, results examined and experiences shared.'

He added: 'I am glad that its great founder, Sir Robert Donald, lived to see his dreams and labours become true and find realisation.'

The following year unemployment in the North East of England drove 200 men from Jarrow, Tyne and Wear, to march 300 miles to London to ask Parliament for a steel works to replace the local shipyard that had closed. But ultimately, it was rearmament in the run up to the second world war that would bring jobs back to heavy industry areas.

In September 1939, German forces invaded Poland and local authorities' attention turned to the war.

1940s



Over half the decade was spent at war so local authorities were focused for many of those years on coping with civil contingency planning. But it was also a period when the post-war welfare state was planned. In its issue of 12 April, 1940 an article headed 'Food Supplies in Wartime' considered how to manage cold storage of food under rationing. The same month, before bombing began, the journal examined whether the fire service was ready for serious air raids.

In November 1940 at the height of the Blitz an article covered local authorities' aid for air raid victims. The London County Council provided rest centres where families could live, eat and sleep, many of them based in schools and at County Hall. An advertisement in October 1940 from Izal 'the safe germicide' warned against air-borne infections in air raid shelters and promoted its Izal Mist Spray to local authority public health officials.

Astonishingly in the midst of war the journal still looked ahead to the future and ran articles on local government reorganisation, regionalism and 'the future of county councils'.

In November 1942, William Beveridge issued his report on the post-war welfare state in which he highlighted the five 'giant evils'. The journal, in its December 11 comment called the Beveridge Plan 'monumental,' said it would mean the final abolition of the Poor Law, and speculated about whether health and social services might finally be joined adding: 'The number of old persons in the community steadily increases.'

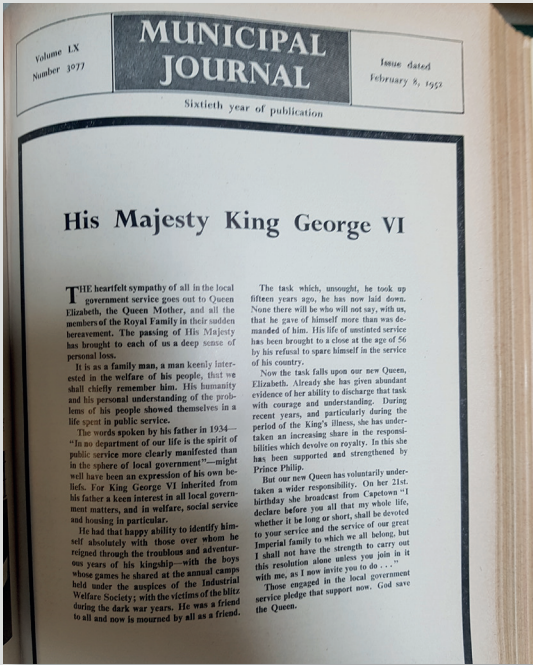
In 1945, the Labour Party defeated Winston Churchill's Conservative Party in the General Election. The new Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, announced he would introduce the welfare state outlined in the 1942 Beveridge Report, including the creation of a National Health Service in 1948 with free medical treatment for all. A national system of benefits was also introduced to provide 'social security' so the population would be protected from the 'cradle to the grave'. Its architect, Aneurin Bevan, later regretted that it had not been possible to have local authorities running the NHS due to complications arising from boundaries and funding.



1950s

The decade began with post-war austerity and rationing and a new Queen and ended with a booming economy and the claim from Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that 'you've never had it so good'. It also saw the planning of new towns like Harlow and Basildon and huge housebuilding programmes. The great London smog of 1952 led to the Clean Air Act of 1956 which shifted domestic heating towards smokeless coal, gas and electricity.

On 6 February 1952 King George VI died and Elizabeth became Queen. In its issue of February 8 1952 the journal wrote that the late king 'inherited from his father a keen interest in all local government matters and in welfare, social services and housing in particular'. In its issue of December 19, 1952 the journal ran an advertising feature promoting floodlighting in advance of the Queen's Coronation the following June.



The NHS, opened in 1948, was one of the great legacies of the Attlee government but its architect Aneurin Bevan, believed ideally that it should be run by local authorities. In an article in the journal in March 1954 he regretted that it had not been possible and that 'the principle of election had to give way to that of selection.' He was, he wrote, by experience and conviction 'a local government man'.

Many cities were replanned after bomb damage, like Wakefield. In the 17 October 1958 issue its town clerk talked of 'a new town centre in nine years' while already Wakefield's city centre roads were being widened, street lighting modernised and a free car park built. That month the journal carried an article on Basildon new town whose target was a population of 100,000, the largest new town in Britain. By September 1958 it was already 42,000. In 2018 its population is 176,000. New housing was increasingly in the form of high rise flats. An advert in November 1958 from Ideal Neofire boasted of 200,000 of its heating units installed 'in post war homes' including for 208 flats owned by Southwark LBC.

Social services was a growing part of the journal's coverage. One article in August 1955 by a child care officer was headlined: 'Some social workers' duties are a needless waste of time'. In a litany of complaints the Nottinghamshire CC employee said too much of his job was taken up with admin work when it could be spent on doing the job for which he was trained.

A leading article in October 1958 called for more respect for home helps who, it said, were not 'municipal Mrs Mopps' but 'an invaluable part of the local authority health services.' They helped prevent family break-ups and enabled the elderly to stay in their own homes, it added

1960s

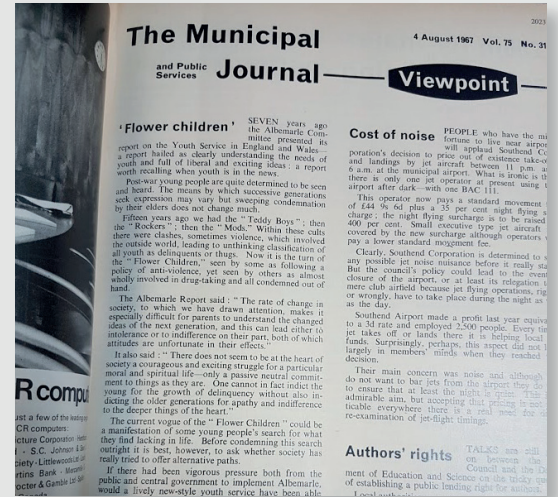
In local government, 1966-69 saw the Royal Commission on Local Government – more commonly known as Redcliffe-Maud after its chairman – sparking one of the biggest rounds of local government reorganisation which would come to pass in 1974.

While the main findings of Redcliffe-Maud were accepted, the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, told the leader of the opposition, Ted Heath, 'this did not mean

necessarily accepting in detail all aspects of the three-tier structure proposed'.

Just like now, the 1960s faced a housing crisis. In 1963, housing minister Keith Joseph was quoted saying: 'We are on the threshold of a breakthrough in building techniques. What we need, and what we are going to achieve, is speedier industrialised building – housing from the factory, housing with larger components.'

But it's not all concrete tower blocks – the 60s were about so much more. 'Books extolling the pleasant immediate effects of drug taking are more dangerous than pornographic literature and should be treated in the same way,' the journal reported in 1967.



Seven years after the Albemarle Report professionalised youth services in England and Wales, the journal opined: 'The means by which successive generations seek expression may vary, but sweeping condemnation by their elders does not change...'

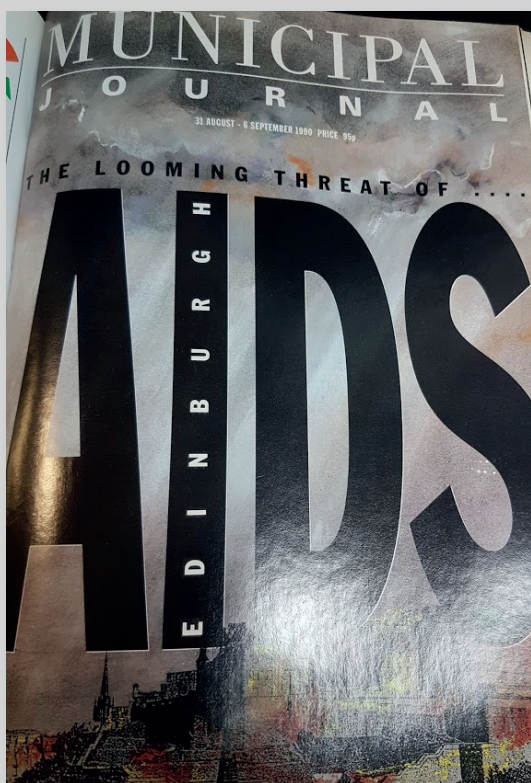
'Now it is the turn of the "Flower Children", seen by some as following a policy of anti-violence, yet seen by others as almost wholly involved in drug-taking and all condemned out of hand.'



Audit Commission. The editor of the journal asked Mr Banham why he wanted to leave the highly paid role in the private sector to take on the task.

'I am one of the most successful directors in McKinsey, and McKinsey are the most successful management consultants in the world,' he said. 'It is true that I have taken a massive cut in salary, but the thing is that this is a very important national problem.'

In March 1986, Mrs Thatcher hit back at Labour local government by scrapping the Greater London Council and six Metropolitan County Councils. 'Reorganisation of local government has become something of a central government plaything,' the journal's comment stated, but it conceded: 'Perhaps the GLC should have been seen to be less of a monolithic figure.' In 1989, the hugely unpopular community charge – or poll tax – was introduced in Scotland before it rolled out in England and Wales, but more of that later.



1990s

The decade began with riots in March 1990 against Margaret Thatcher's poll tax, which ultimately led to her downfall in November 1990. An article by anti-poll tax campaigners in the journal of 12 October, 1990 noted that inner city areas of Glasgow recorded non-payment rates of 50%. When John Major became Prime Minister, he scrapped the poll tax in March 1991 and the Conservatives won the 1992 General Election.

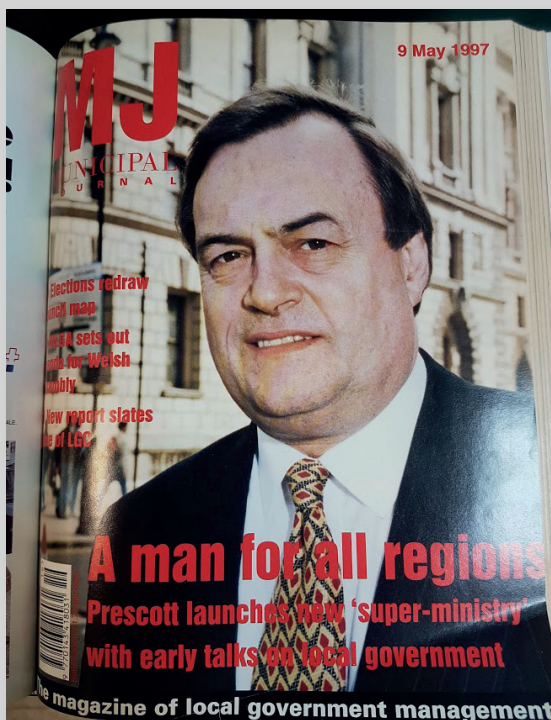
The front cover of 26 February 1993 ran a photo of



a prominent former Bradford City Council leader, one Eric Pickles, complete with hair, who had become an MP and later that year Conservative vice chairman with responsibility for local government. His appointment followed a poor showing by the Conservatives in the May local elections.

One of the issues covered in immense detail in the journal was how the terms and conditions of council staff could be protected when they were privatised. Unions argued that terms were indeed protected by the Transfer of Undertakings Regulations (TUPE) and the battle involved the EU. Contractors feared this meant they had no leeway to reduce pay or lay off staff. In its 29 January 1993 issue a minister was quoted as saying 'we have made a mess of this'.

Much of the decade was taken up with English local government reorganisation. The Local Government Act 1992 created the Local Government Commission which reviewed structure in two-tier areas. After huge controversy and bitter disputes between districts and counties the results were the abolition of Avon, Humberside, Hereford & Worcester, Berkshire and Cleveland counties and their replacement by new unitaries, followed by a second wave of new unitaries in 1997 and 1998.



The three local authority associations were subsumed into the Local Government Association in 1997, the year that Tony Blair won a landslide election and John Prescott became secretary of state. The new Labour government scrapped compulsory competitive tendering, replacing it with best value in the Local Government Act 1999 which came into force in 2000.

New Labour kicked off a devolution revolution, with the Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly in 1999 and a regional agenda.

2000s

The Local Government Act 2000 gave councils more powers to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being within their areas. But it also shifted their operation from the committee-based system to an executive model, with the option of directly elected mayors.

In May 2002, the first 11 directly elected mayors were introduced, including two in the previously troubled authorities of Doncaster and Hackney, where the model was seen as a step forward from the previous political problems. But it was Hartlepool that stole the show, electing local football mascot H'Angus the Monkey, aka Stuart Drummond. In London, the Greater London Authority was established in 2000, with an assembly and

a mayor, echoing back to the early days of the journal with the London County Council and reinstating the layer of government scrapped by Margaret Thatcher.



The Audit Commission introduced Comprehensive Performance Assessments. It saw 13 authorities classified as 'poor', and 22 as 'excellent' – earning themselves freedoms from financial ringfencing and an inspection holiday.

Despite several legal challenges and much wrangling over the classifications, the first league table came out in December 2002 and an era of managerialism boosted the role of officers. It would later be blamed for rising chief executive salaries. By 2007, local government was in the midst of further reorganisation – a bloody battle that would see Bedford BC, Central Bedfordshire, Durham, Northumberland, Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Cornwall, Wiltshire and Shropshire emerge from the ashes.

Herefordshire Council became the first to appoint a joint chief executive with the local Primary Care Trust as local authorities toyed with more joined up public services through Total Place.

2010s

The Conservative/Lib Dem coalition government sparked yet another new era for local authorities. In almost his first move as the new secretary of state, Eric Pickles wielded his axe to scrap the Audit Commission and launched into a war on senior salaries.

Chancellor George Osborne was more of a champion of the sector, sparking the devolution agenda – particularly for Manchester and the Northern Powerhouse – which led to the creation of nine combined authorities and seven metro mayors.

In a surprise move, Mr Osborne also announced the return of business rates to local authority in 2015 in a move that would create a complex minefield of negotiations that are yet to be resolved.

The decade has been dominated by austerity and the rising adult and children's services costs, and by the 2016 Brexit referendum, which sucked up the political bandwidth leaving little room for much else.

Local government, meanwhile, has carried on and will continue to do so, still tackling the issues of housing, poverty and local infrastructure that have dominated the journal's headlines for the past 125 years.

