

Corporate Peer Challenge

Peer Team – Biographies and key information

Reviewed: October 18



Somerset
Council

Corporate Peer Challenge: Peer Team

The peer team for Somerset Council will comprise:

- Councillor Gareth Roberts – Leader of LB Richmond Council – Member Peer (Liberal Democrat)
- Councillor Adam Brown – Leader of West Northamptonshire Council – Member Peer (Conservative)
- Gavin Jones – Chief Executive - Essex County Council - Chief Executive Peer
- Denise Murray - Best Value Commissioner - Slough Borough Council - Senior Finance Officer Peer
- George Candler - Executive Director of Place and Economy (Deputy Chief Executive) at North Northamptonshire Council – Senior Officer Peer
- Eve Roodhouse – Director of Strategy and Reform - LGA
- Emily McGuinness - LGA Peer Challenge Manager
- Kaylash Patel - LGA Project Support Officer (to support the organisation of the CPC but will not join the peer team on-site)

Councillor Gareth Roberts

Cllr Gareth Roberts has served on Richmond Council since 2010 when he was first elected as a Liberal Democrat Councillor for Hampton. In 2018, he was elected as Leader of the Council.

He also serves as Deputy Chairman of the LGA's City Regions Board. The Board through extensive engagement with councils, oversees programmes of work that deliver the strategic priorities set out in the LGA Plan.

Gareth was elected as the Assembly Member for South West London in 2024 where he is the Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for police and crime, the environment and the GLA Budget on the Assembly.

With a professional background in marketing, he has a long record of action of standing up for local people across South West London, including leading the campaign that took Heathrow to court. He has also fought for the protection of local police stations and more police on the streets. Gareth is also passionate about delivering a greener future and making sure people and liberal values are at the heart of its decision-making across the GLA.



Councillor Adam Brown

Adam Brown became the Conservative Leader for West Northamptonshire Council in May 2024, having been a councillor for eight years.

First finding his way into politics in 2015 as a campaign volunteer, he became a Daventry District Councillor for Weedon ward the following year, then later DDC's Deputy Leader.

In 2017 he was elected as a Northamptonshire County Councillor for Bugbrooke and in 2021 became a WNC councillor for the same division – a role he has continued to serve for the past three years alongside the remits of Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Leisure.

Cllr Brown, who lives in Northampton with his wife and three-year-old son, has a professional background in financial services, including spending time working at Santander Bank in Spain after studying modern languages at Exeter University.

He's also a professional rugby referee and Saints fan, and recently championed the successful bid to bring the 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup to West Northants.



Gavin Jones, Chief Executive

Gavin Jones is the Chief Executive of Essex County Council. He announced last month that he will be retiring from his role in the spring of 2025. Gavin has been at the helm of Essex County Council since 2016, having joined from Swindon Council.

The first half of Gavin's career was in a variety of private enterprises and market sectors, including travel and tourism, technology and telecommunications. As Director of Business Development at Galileo International, he worked extensively in the Middle East for some years.

In 2004 he left SITA International (Airline telecommunications company) based in Geneva, having served as Vice President Marketing and Customer Services, to join Swindon Borough Council, his hometown.

He was listed as one of the top 50 New Radicals in the Sunday Observer's national campaign for Britain's most innovative leaders and voted one of the most influential leaders in Local Government. Gavin has been the Chair of the SOLACE Group of companies since 2017. In 2022, Gavin was appointed as by the DLUHC Secretary of State as Lead Commissioner for Slough Borough Council and Thurrock Council (in addition to his current roles) as a consequence of Government intervention.



Denise Murray, Senior Finance Officer Peer

Denise Murray is the Best Value Commissioner at Slough Borough Council having served as the Section 151 Officer at Bristol City Council from 2016 to March 2024.

She has extensive experience of delivering service improvements in large complex organisations. Her local government, voluntary and private sector roles have provided a sound understanding of a wide range of People, Place, Commercial and Corporate functions at unitary, county, borough, district, and parish level across the south of England.

She is an influential senior leader, driving transformational programmes such as devolution and large scale regeneration and has a successful track record tackling the challenges local government face, optimising outcomes using innovative approaches and private investment capital with shared risks and reward.

Denise seeks to improve the governance and financial management style of the organisation to one which supports good governance, financial sustainability, effective working with elected members and maximises public value.



George Candler, Senior Officer Peer

George Candler is the Executive Director of Place and Economy (Deputy Chief Executive) at North Northamptonshire Council.

He served as interim Chief Executive for the authority before the appointment of Adle Wylie in late 2023. He was also previously Chief Executive of Northampton Borough Council.

As Deputy Chief Executive, he helped develop a range of new policies to shape the authority since its vesting day in April 2021 and was pivotal in transforming services to make sure they deliver for the people of North Northamptonshire.

During his career in local government, he has also served as the Director for Place and Enterprise for Shropshire Council, where he also served as Director of Commissioning, Assistant Director for Culture & Leisure, and Director of Transformation.



Eve Roodhouse

Eve Roodhouse is the Director of Strategy and Reform at the LGA and, until August 2024, was also Chief Officer, Culture and Economy at Leeds City Council.

Eve had a wide ranging portfolio covering everything from oversight of Leeds Museums and Galleries through to visitor economy, international relations, economic policy, employment and skills and business support.

Eve joined Leeds City Council in 2018 and since then she has led the delivery of the city's Inclusive Growth Strategy introducing pioneering work in a range of areas including the Leeds Inclusive Anchors Network, the Social Progress Index and the delivery of their vision for innovation.



Before joining local government, Eve worked at NHS Digital for 15 years on the delivery of complex and large scale IT change programmes including the first Prison Health IT system in England and the Child Protection Information Sharing Project – which included her working with the LGA.

Emily McGuinness

Emily McGuinness will be acting as the LGA Peer Challenge Manager during Somerset Council's Corporate Peer Challenge.

Emily McGuinness has worked in local government for over 20 years, working in numerous local authorities across the country. She started in Policy/Scrutiny support before moving to become a Programme Manager delivering a complex local authority change programme. She is currently a Senior Regional Advisor, delivering the LGA's Sector Led Improvement Programme in the South West and providing direct support to all councils across the region – this involves delivering the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Programme, liaising with regional Chief Executives and Leaders to help meet challenges within the sector and working on a national footprint to ensure the LGA remains credible as the national voice of local government.

