

## Elected member profile

# Councillor Margaret Eaton

*Councillor Margaret Eaton OBE was elected Chairman of the Local Government Association in September 2008. She has over 20 years experience in local government, having served on Bradford Metropolitan District Council, the fourth largest Metropolitan District Council in England, since May 1986 and was the first female leader of the Council from May 2000 to May 2006*



handled differently'. Cllr Eaton pointed out that the benefit of hindsight is a great gift, but not one that even the Audit Commission could claim to possess as they also lost money in the banking collapse! Cllr Eaton says "Councils worked by the rules and whilst there is always scope for us to look at treasury rules and see if things could operate differently we can never be black and white about these things. Different processes will work well for different local authorities and we have to remember there are stark differences between a small local district council and a large metropolitan authority."

Cllr Eaton is also keen to ensure that the value of local councils in influencing the local economy is recognised not just locally but nationally. She is keen for that message to be taken on board by the LGAs 466 local authorities in England and Wales.

"When we are facing the starkest of recessions the role of the local council is critical. We have huge spending power and making decisions that have a positive impact on the local economy can reap local rewards. Councils can help with cash flow for local businesses by paying their own bills promptly and we should look at how we can help with other types of support". Cllr Eaton also supports the growing demands for greater local powers, believing this is essential if councils are to make the most of dealing with the impact of the recession; "We really need stronger powers for councils to deal with empty retail units. It can have a devastating impact on the local environmental quality and is a real factor is slowing down any recovery process. Confidence

**E**lected chairman of the LGA at the beginning of September 2008 Cllr Margaret Eaton has had plenty to keep her occupied in her new position. The Icelandic banking collapse saw £850m of councils' investments disappear with councils facing further financial difficulties with a collapse in revenue from planning and other fees and charges within weeks of her appointment. Alongside increased running costs

as council bills for fuel and utilities rocketed Cllr Eaton was quickly thrust into the media spotlight as she responded to the impact of the recession on local councils.

First of all Cllr Eaton faced a round of high level talks with administrators of Icelandic banks, Heritable and Kaupthing, as well as lobbying the treasury for support for councils hit hardest by the banking collapse. Cllr Eaton was also quick to respond to press criticism on behalf of LGA member authorities that 'things could have been