

— OPEN LETTER TO ALL COUNCILLORS —

17 JANUARY 2021

RE: NEW YEAR OPEN LETTER

I want to wish you a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year and take the opportunity to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation for everything you do for your community.

This open letter is my first as the new chair of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) since I had the honour of being elected by your county association representatives on NALC's National Assembly.

I feel privileged to lead our organisation into the next chapter of our sector's remarkable story. I look forward to working with you and your county associations to promote and support England's 10,000 local (parish and town) councils.

Local councils are the first tier of local government. Local councils that we proudly serve on to make a change in our communities. And local councils have never been more important.

That is why one of my key priorities is to ensure that local councils are rightly recognised and respected as the first tier of local government. A strong national and local voice will be fundamental to delivering this, increasing awareness and understanding of the fantastic work you do to improve your communities and the issues that you face.

My commitment to you is to champion the sector robustly, especially to the government. Redoubling our efforts to ensure ministers and officials genuinely hear, rather than listen to what we say, particularly about our potential. I want to continue building effective relationships and working closely with our partners, including the other local government sector bodies, to achieve this objective.

I need your support to do this, so I ask you to step up your efforts in building links with your MPs. It is of utmost importance that you continually tell them about the great work you do and the issues you face. MPs are your elected representatives in Westminster, and we need them to be taking your issues to parliament, the government, and their political parties. Only by working and lobbying together

can we secure the changes we all want on matters such as remote meetings, civility and respect, access to funding, and more powers and influence.

Another priority that I'm pleased is already at the top of our agenda is good governance, which is fundamental to ensuring an effective and well-functioning democracy at all levels. NALC and county associations provide a range of support, advice, and guidance to enable you to deliver good governance. I would therefore ask you to consider participating in the Local Council Award Scheme to demonstrate this to your residents.

Yet sadly, throughout the sector, there are growing concerns about the impact bullying, harassment, and intimidation have on our councils, councillors, clerks and council staff, and the resulting effectiveness of local councils. That is why we are working with One Voice Wales, the Society of Local Council Clerks and county associations to address this through our Civility and Respect Project. Our commitment is to deliver tangible resources, actions, and interventions in four main areas. Providing councils with the tools to support good governance, lobbying to strengthen the standards regime and encouraging more people to get involved, training, and processes to intervene to provide support to struggling councils. I ask you to place civility and respect at the top of your agenda, keep up-to-date on the project through our dedicated web page, and make full use of all the advice, guidance, and resources available to you.

Together we need to continue demonstrating the relevance of local councils in a changing world by addressing the significant challenges we face, such as promoting health and well-being, tackling the climate emergency, and building community resilience. I ask you to consider how you can address these issues and work with other tiers of government and local agencies to tackle them. We must also encourage more people from all backgrounds and experiences to support this work and get involved in their community and the local council, especially young people who are our future.

I look forward to working with you to champion you, and I want to thank you once again for everything you do.

Yours sincerely,

