

29 OCTOBER 2019

CLLR JAMES JAMIESON, CHAIRMAN OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION BRIEFING NOTE

Introduction

- Thank you for that welcome, it really is a pleasure to be here with you today, especially as you celebrate your 125th birthday.
- Congratulations to Sue, Keith and the whole team at NALC for putting on this marvellous event. I hope the next 125 years are as productive and successful for NALC.
- A little birdie tells me that this is not the only birthday we are celebrating but don't worry Sue, I won't embarrass you by asking everyone here to sing you 'happy birthday.'
- What I will do, however, is say a few words on some of the LGA's recent work and activity that has taken place over the past few months, what we will be spending our time doing as we head towards the Spending Review, and how we can work together to ensure the best outcomes for local government.

#CouncilsCan

- Earlier this year we launched our #CouncilsCan campaign which made the case for a new devolution settlement for local government to empower councils to transform their local areas. It aimed to influence key announcements such as the Spending Round and Queen's Speech.
- There is evidence that the Government is listening to us, as we saw in the Spending Round, in which the Government pledged a package worth £3.5 billion of new funding and the Queen's Speech, which proposed a number of bills and white papers. This included proposals on devolution, a debate

which is back on the table, education, building safety, electoral integrity, and the Domestic Abuse Bill.

- But more still needs to be done to secure the long-term future of councils.
- The Government also announced that it will be bringing forward proposals for dealing with the adult social care crisis, which we can all agree is a key challenge of our generation.
- Indeed, figures from ADASS show that councils are spending around 37 per cent of their budgets on funding adult social care, meaning there is less money for everything else.
- And future estimates show that if we do not do something, more of a council's budget will be spent on adult social care, meaning less for other areas.

What's next

- Which is why we are continuing our #CouncilsCan campaign as our attention turns to the Spending Review which is a further opportunity to make the changes councils need to see to ensure they have further financial certainty.
- The LGA is developing its submission as we speak, following conversations that are taking place with councillors and officers.
- We will be calling for a variety of measures, from greater financial certainty through business rates retention and control of right to buy receipts, to more devolved powers to give councils a greater say over their own destinies around infrastructure and regeneration funding.
- The Spending Round earlier this year was a good start but this is only for one year, however, and we continue to make the point that a sustainable long-term solution for council-finances is needed.
- The long-term funding settlement should go beyond meeting year-on-year pressures and should be sufficient to improve services, not just keep them

going at current levels, and sufficient to meet the ambitions for prevention, early intervention, investment in the workforce, and unexpected shocks.

- Councils also need stable, devolved infrastructure budgets, as Highways England and Network Rail have and to be at the heart of the new National Infrastructure Strategy, something which we will be calling for.
- This is the most effective way for us to deliver infrastructure improvements quickly in a way that complements local growth strategies.
- And these growth strategies will need to take climate change into consideration, meaning one of the main areas to focus on is the built environment. Any work in this area will need to focus on capital projects around buildings and adaptations.
- We will also be calling for Government to publish its consultation on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the proposed mechanism for replacing EU funding, and to ensure it is local driven and democratically accountable.
- Because this is a critical source of funding for local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships, businesses and the community and voluntary sector. Through their efforts, we can to create jobs, support small and medium enterprises, deliver skills, build infrastructure and boost local growth in all types of areas across the country.

Working together

- If we are to achieve all this, to convince Government to use the Budget in this way and make stronger local government a reality, we must continue to build on the very positive partnership we have forged over the past few years.
- This collaboration has already seen us come forward with a range of improvement projects designed to support principal and local councils to work together to deliver improved services for their communities.

- For instance, last year the LGA and NALC co-authored the One Community guide which provides a framework for effective partnership working between tiers of local government across a range of policy areas.
- And as part of our sector-led improvement programme, the LGA has now also held the first of two pilot peer reviews for larger local councils in Chippenham earlier this year.
- We will be holding the second, in Falmouth, next year.
- Because it is in our collective interests to promote effective collaboration between principal authorities and town and parish councils and support mutually beneficial areas of work.
- And today, I am pleased to be able to launch here a new in-depth guide on loneliness which we have jointly produced with NALC following the launch of the Government's Loneliness Strategy in October 2018.
- The Government's Strategy called for "principal and local councils through the LGA and NALC to explore best practice in combating loneliness".
- And together we are delivering because we know that with principal authorities and local councils working in partnership, we can confront this issue.
- Because it is in our interests to tackle this social blight.
- While loneliness is often associated with older people who live on their own, it is not just about social isolation or older people.
- Loneliness can have an impact, irrespective of age and circumstance.
- Frequent loneliness can also ramp up pressure on public services, increase referrals to adult social care and trigger multiple attendances at GP surgeries.
- So, it makes sense for us to work together to build connected communities equipped and resourced to respond effectively to a wide range of needs.

Devolution

- Sharing best practice like this is a key way that we will also ensure that any devolution that takes place happens against a background of expertise and capability.
- Working together we can address the concerns that some have about this and ensure the right skills are in place.
- It can also promote the understanding both sets of organisations need to ensure the right powers are ‘double devolved’, and that the opportunity to engage positively on co-delivery of services is taken.
- I know that you all, through NALC and individually, have been calling for a new ‘ultra-localism’, with more parish councils and greater ‘double devolution’ of powers from Whitehall to parish level.
- More collaboration between the LGA and NALC through our increasing sector-led improvement offering and joint-publications that share best practice can only be a positive if achieving these aims is to be a reality.
- And this is important because we are working with a Government that seems to be more willing to discuss devolution, particularly to more rural areas, something that will be particularly relevant to NALC members, perhaps.

Concluding remarks

- And I am sure we can achieve this through every part of local government working together to help ourselves, to get the powers and financial settlements we need.
- So, in this, your 125th year, let’s both make a commitment to continue working constructively and collaboratively, and recognise that what is good for one is good for the other.
- Thank you for the opportunity to address you here today.