

- TO THE LEADERS OF ALL THE POLITICAL PARTIES -

28 APRIL 2017

PUTTING COMMUNITIES IN CONTROL

As you write your manifesto for the General Election on 8 June I am urging you to consider how you will put communities in control of their areas and shift more power down to local people.

This General Election, post Brexit, provides an important opportunity for the main political parties to set out a vision of how communities, neighbourhoods and residents can be more engaged in and have a real say over those issues which are best dealt with at a local level.

Accordingly, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) wants to see the following three big questions addressed in General Election manifestos.

Firstly, how will devolution be maximised with powers and responsibilities devolved to the lowest and most local level?

Secondly, how will proposals encourage more people to get involved and engaged in their local communities, building resilience, empowering neighbourhoods and engaging more people in local democracy?

And finally, how will proposals ensure key local discretionary services from public conveniences to children's centres, from libraries to local festivals continue to be provided during this continuing period of financial austerity?

Local councils are the backbone of our democracy and at the heart of many communities. They provide our neighbourhoods, villages, towns and small cities with a much needed democratic voice and structure for engaging with local people to take action to improve their area. We are asking our 10,000 councils and 80,000 councillors to join our call by asking the above questions of parliamentary candidates, including during local debates.

However, NALC offers the political parties and the next government three simple answers to these big questions, supported by a range of specific measures, to put communities in control through stronger local democracy with fairer funding and more powers to engage with local people and help improve the social and economic vitality of local areas.

Stronger local democracy:

- Further measures to support the creation of new local councils including a 'community right of appeal', mandatory use of referendums, investment in a national support programme and mandatory governance reviews as part of devolution deals.
- Introduce a local democracy programme aimed at encouraging more people to become councillors, making it easier for people to stand and serve, gathering elections data and promoting contested elections, undertaking a census survey of councillors and establishing a national democracy fund.
- Strengthen the standards regime to allow local councils to impose sanctions for breaches of the code of conduct.
- Production of an improvement strategy for local councils to provide a framework for good governance, community engagement and council improvement, along with government investment and support.

More powers:

- The role of local councils in the planning and licensing system should be strengthened through new consultation and appeal powers, along with new support and further incentives to promote the take-up of neighbourhood planning.
- The government should develop and promote examples of joint working and devolution between principal councils and local councils including onward devolution of services, and introduce a new 'right to engage' to help local councils work more equitably and effectively with principal councils and other public services.
- The government should undertake a review of the Localism Act 2011, in particular the general power of competence, removing any barriers and promoting greater use of this 'power to innovate'.
- Reform outdated laws governing the administration of local councils through a Parish Councils Bill, including new powers to deliver local services.
- Give communities and local councils the power to adopt new governance models such as having a leader/cabinet.

Fairer funding:

- Renewed action by the government to ensure council tax support funding is passed on to local councils by principal councils, either by identifying funding in the local government financial settlement, issuing statutory guidance or passing funding on to local councils directly.
- Council tax referendum principles should not be extended to local councils and the power of the secretary of state in the Localism Act 2011 should be repealed.
- Reform of the business rate system to provide a 5% share for local councils to help them support local economic development, regeneration and growth, extension of the business rate retention pilots to include local councils, and the exemption of public conveniences from non-domestic rates.
- Ensuring communities benefit from development through stronger measures to provide local councils with a share of Community Infrastructure Levy, New Homes Bonus and underground exploration funding.

We would of course be happy to discuss our questions and ideas with you at any time.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Sue Baxter
Chairman