

20 MARCH 2018

NALC CHAIRMAN CLLR SUE BAXTER SPEECH TO LOCAL DEMOCRACY PARLIAMENTARY RECEPTION

Thanks Scott and behalf of the National Association of Local Councils, I want to thank you for not only hosting this event but also for co-chairing the All Party Parliamentary Group on local democracy.

Please also convey my thanks to Andrea and other members of the Group, some of whom I know have joined us at various parts of today's parliamentary engagement day. We really do value and appreciate your support in Parliament.

Look, I just wanted to say three quick things before you all get back the important job of networking and chatting with each other.

Firstly, sincere congratulations to all NALC's Star Council finalists, many of whom are here today to celebrate their successes. And well done in fact to everyone who put themselves forward and wanted to tell their story.

For me, all our Star Councils nominees and winners illustrate just how our sector is changing - and changing fast.

Doing things we'd not have expected from our councils in the past, such as getting involved in issues like housing, health and well-being, economic development and transport.

Coupled with taking on services from principal councils, we are helping them with the immense financial pressures they currently face.

But we need the help of everyone in this room and beyond to recognise and celebrate what community councils can and are doing, and their potential to build healthy, vibrant and prosperous, local communities; which are also cohesive and resilient.

That's why I'm so pleased today's parliamentary engagement day - Lobby Day for short and of which this reception is just part - has seen representatives from county associations engage with around a hundred MPs to raise the profile of our sector in Parliament: quite literally making sure the voice of community halls is heard in Westminster's halls.

Secondly, it's our councils who do the little things to make the big things happen, holding our communities together, making our towns and villages places that people want to live and work.

Not my words, but those of the secretary of state Sajid Javid MP to our annual conference in October.

Real praise indeed, but let's not forget they're not everywhere. Not able to be that vital glue that brings communities together, building social cohesion.

Local government reorganisation in Dorset and now potentially in Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire provide a huge opportunity to address that democratic deficit.

To build on previous rounds of reorganisation and campaigns by communities themselves in our cities like Birmingham and London.

To create more community councils to help people help themselves.

And finally I wanted to mention another cause close to my heart, which Scott alluded to earlier with his mention of International Women's Day – diversity.

I applaud everyone in this room for what you are doing: but we need more of you, and more of you from different backgrounds too.

Last year we set up a Diversity Commission to drive our work to increase diversity, to better understand who our councillors are, and to encourage more and diverse people to become councillors.

I need your support on this journey, do please check out the Diversity Commission page on our website at www.nalc.gov.uk for how you can get involved.

Thank you for coming and enjoy the rest of the evening.