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## **SPEECH | NALC CHAIRMAN INTRODUCTORY SPEECH TO NALC CONFERENCE 2018**

Colleagues, welcome to NALC's annual conference 2018 and I want to start by saying simply this – you are just brilliant!

This is the end of my second year as chairman and I'd like to thank you all for your support and the hard work you do for your communities.

This sector is fantastic!

And I'm really looking forward to meeting as many of you as possible over the next couple of exciting days in this great venue of Milton Keynes – fully parished!

One of the delights in my role is to visit so many counties and hear about some of the wonderful things local councils are doing.

And there is so much going on across the country.

Particularly pleasing this year has been to hear about some of the inspiring things you are doing on really big issues, such as promoting dementia friendly communities, such as several local councils in Devon working together to employ a project coordinator.

Also impressive is the work many local councils are doing in partnership with principal authorities as our recent joint report with LGA showed....

....Alcester and Warwickshire appointing health and wellbeing co-ordinations

....Hampshire parishes collectively supporting each other with bulk buying and shared staffing

....Milton Keynes Parish Advisory Group

....Choppington's participatory budgeting in Northumberland.

And I was pleased to be on the judging panel for our Star Councils awards with a record number of entries.

Tonight we will discover who is the Council of the Year but all the finalists in all categories epitomise the fantastic things that local councils of all sizes, as well as county associations, are doing....

...Watchet Town Council in Somerset working with partners to ensure vital services in a very deprived community

...Cogenhoe and Whiston parish council in Northamptonshire, a small parish with big ambition providing a not-for profit replacement bus service as a vital lifeline for communities

...Northwich Town Council in Cheshire focusing on regeneration working with partners to provide events and boost the local economy.

These are just some of the impressive things you're doing - but we want to know more about what you and those not here are doing for your communities.

And it is because of this impressive work that you're doing that we are being listened to more than ever before by government, think tanks, political parties and others.

We've got a government minister, Rishi Sunak MP speaking tomorrow, fresh from yesterday's budget, and the shadow secretary of state Andrew Gwynne MP too.

We've seen Government listen to us.

Over the last year we have persuaded government not to impose referendum principles or capping on the sector, enabling us to raise the resources responsibly that residents want spent on local priorities.

With your support we also persuaded ministers to drop the costly hammer to crack the GDPR nut which would have seen external data protection officers imposed on the sector.

And in the budget we secured victory on our campaign to end the toilet tax, with mandatory rate relief on public toilets.

Others are listening too.

We are also featuring significantly in discussions about future policy developments and how local communities can support important initiatives on the ground.

I have met with Tracey Crouch MP to talk about how we can help the current drive to end loneliness and the government's recent strategy identifies a key role for local councils.

I was also pleased to meet Princess Anne and hear her speak about the role of local councils in supporting loneliness and isolation in rural areas, and her passion for addressing rural affordable housing.

The government's civil society again recognises our role, including in onward devolution.

Influential think tanks such as the Royal Society of Arts are placing local councils at the heart of helping give communities a voice.

And a couple of weeks ago I met with the chief secretary to the treasury Liz Truss MP to press our case for flexible and diverse funding in the budget, finance settlement and spending review – she recognised our role and said that we had been overlooked in the past.

We are not being overlooked now!

This is a time of huge opportunity and potential for the sector to gain influence and the powers to support our residents.

But we cannot be complacent and wait for others to make this happen, there are many competitors out there, old and new.

That is why NALC has begun a big conversation on the future of the sector which is the theme of this conference.

Over the next two days we've asked our impressive panel of contributors and speakers to address a simple question: what's the future of local councils?

We'd like you to do the same, and consider how we need to change as a sector, as councils and as NALC and county associations.

How we can improve our diversity and get more people involved.

And make sure we are best placed and empowered to support our residents and communities face the challenges of the next twenty years and beyond.

Perhaps central to this question is how can we engage councils not represented here today and inspire them to follow some of the great examples provided by other councils of all sizes.

So we have a great programme ahead, get involved and tell us about the future, including writing on the wall and videoing your views, complete our online survey.

And most of all, have fun and enjoy.

Thank you.

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