

8 NOVEMBER 2019

- OPEN LETTER TO POLITICAL PARTY LEADERS -

### **Re: Building strong communities**

Bringing the country together is currently one of the most significant challenges we face, and never has it been so important that more people are engaged and active in our local communities.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is urging your General Election manifesto to meet this challenge by including measures that help communities to help themselves so local people can build strong, thriving and resilient communities.

Whoever forms the next Government must ensure our nation's diverse communities – in rural and urban areas, and from coast to country – have a voice and say over local services, are able to take back control, and can bring people together and heal division.

Now is the time for the political parties to reinvigorate their approach to localism and devolution with a clear commitment to empower communities, build capacity and support, and provide flexible and diverse funding.

And you can achieve this by building on the growing role of the movement of 10,000 local (parish and town) councils and their 100,000 councillors – who represent over 25 million people in England – and who are already a unit of solidarity and natural focus of community effort and engagement.

As the most local level of democracy and community action, councils can, and already are, using their unique place-based role to tackle challenges from health and well-being to housing, loneliness to local services, community assets to cohesion, parks and open spaces to public toilets, and transport to town centres and high streets.

NALC therefore offers three ways – set out in more detail in our Prospectus for Ultra-Localism which is attached – for the political parties to help build strong, thriving and resilient communities.

Empower people and communities:

- by levelling up the whole country and establishing new local councils in unparished areas including cities such as London, so no community is left behind in having democratic local leadership that is accountable, open and transparent;
- by allowing communities to take back control of their area and have more of a say over planning, housing and development by strengthening neighbourhood planning and ensuring neighbourhood plans have greater weight and protection

Build capacity and support local leadership:

- by freeing up communities to respond to the changing needs of their area by making it easier to access the general power of competence, supported by a new national democracy fund to encourage more people to become councillors and support training and development
- by strengthening the standards regime to improve conduct and behaviour and increase public trust and confidence, and tackling intimidation of elected representatives

Flexible and diverse funding:

- by empowering local leaders at all levels to plan for the future and invest in their areas by scrapping council tax referendums
- by re-introducing legislation to exempt from business rates public conveniences, which are an important and valued community facility and asset and provide both a public health and economic benefit

In return, we offer the next government a willing partner to work with to build strong communities and help tackle some of the most pressing issues our country faces.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Sue Baxter  
Chairman  
National Association of Local Councils