

10 MARCH 2020

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY | SPEECH BY RICHARD HOLDEN MP

Sue and colleagues, good morning and a very warm welcome to sunny Westminster.

I'm Richard Holden, and I was proud to be elected Member of Parliament for North West Durham in the recent General Election.

And I was also proud last month to be elected as co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Local Democracy.

My colleague and fellow co-chair, Cheryl Mackrory, MP for Falmouth and Truro, is on the Environment Bill Committee today and sends her apologies, but I know she is hoping to catch up with Sue later today.

Now one really important issue we identified at our first meeting was the need for the parish movement to engage early and en masse with the new Government.

So we were delighted to hear NALC were ahead of the game and had already planned today's Lobby Day.

I think this is a fantastic initiative to raise the profile of local councils in Parliament and to build links with your MPs.

There is real value in a single day of action to try and better connect our village and town halls with our Whitehall.

So well done to so many of who are meeting your MPs today, especially as I know only too well how busy we are and how hard we are to pin down!

They need you more than they probably realise, so do keep trying.

But if your MPs haven't yet agreed to meet with you, I suggest you ring their Parliament office to tell them you're here and in their neighbourhood and building. And send them a tweet.

So the role of our cross-party group, which comprises parliamentarians from both Houses of Parliament, and includes former NALC president and cross-bencher, Lord Lytton, is to promote local democracy and in particular the role of the first tier local government in England.

I'm delighted to take up this role to advance the cause of grassroots local democracy at what is an exciting time for local councils.

I've got involved because I think big councils like our unitary in Durham with the best will in the world can't be the community voice.

So I back our towns and parishes, and am looking forward to working with them across my constituency, and with you all across the country.

There's much in the government's manifesto where I think local councils can help, from devolution to high streets, civic infrastructure to towns and high streets, health and wellbeing to climate change.

But it's vital you're not overlooked.

So our job will be to help raise your profile as the first tier of local government, and as community anchors making a change in communities.

To work with the government where we can, but also challenge them when we must.

We've already written to the Secretary of State to this effect, asking him to meet with our Group and also your chairman Sue.

And asking him to get involved in Lobby Day, though I think ministers have a bit on their plate at the moment.

Bit crucially we also called on him to renew the government's commitment to end the toilet tax in tomorrow's budget.

I know this campaign is a huge priority for NALC and one I've been pleased to back, and add my voice to yours, securing support and coverage in the media including through The Sun and the BBC.

I am sure there are many other issues where I and the Group can help you in the coming weeks and months.

But as someone who worked in government, as a special adviser in the House of Lords and Department for Education, I want to conclude by saying say this.

Do engage positively with the government, and your MPs of course. We'll get further together if we're not just moaning all the time.

Do prioritise your asks of government. They won't be able to do everything, all at once.

But then do rally around your asks en masse. Again there is real strength in a movement such as yours when you can mobilise everyone together.

And do keep promoting the brilliant things which I see in my own patch, where local councils are making such a big difference to local people and communities.

I intend to do just that and I'm really excited about working with you.

Have a fantastic Lobby Day.