

LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson speech to NCAS conference

Welcome to conference and thanks

- Good morning.
- It's a pleasure to join you all today. I would like to open by thanking our event partners, Newton.
- It's great to address you alongside Jenny and James who are doing brilliant work with their organisations, combining this with their busy roles in their own councils.
- I would like to thank all of you, as well as your colleagues in city, county and town halls. Your tireless work shows local government at its most innovative; and at its most impressive.
- As we move into a second lockdown, you are already doing all you can to support your communities, working long hours and at pace to make a difference.
- Your contribution, during this most challenging period, has come at tremendous personal cost to those closest to you as well. I extend my thanks to them too.

Introduce the key themes

- There's an old saying that a week is a long time in politics and a year certainly feels like a lifetime. The world feels very different from the last NCASC when we were together in Bournemouth.
- We could have never predicted just how much, and how quickly, councils would have to adapt and deliver as we stepped up to the challenge of a global pandemic.
- Together, we have:

- Helped ensure older and disabled members of our communities are protected;
 - Worked with schools and swiftly established systems to keep children safe and well; and
 - Demonstrated the knowledge, experience and expertise of councils' public health services.
- Thanks to the work of everyone in local government,
 - **71 per cent** of residents trust their councils; and
 - **75 per cent** are satisfied with the way their local councils run things in their areas.
 - Both of these are **up 12 points** since February
 - Your work has also been consistently and continually praised by those on the national stage – including politicians of all colours.
 - These words now need to be followed up with action – and that means powers, funding and the long-awaited reforms that will allow us to lead and transform our communities for the better.
 - This is what the LGA will always campaign for.
 - There is no doubt that the pandemic has shone the spotlight and proved how valuable the work you do is for people and for society.
 - But COVID-19 has also thrown into sharp relief the longstanding issues facing councils and our communities.
 - When we spoke last year, I said that as Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council and Chairman of the LGA, adult social care and children's services were top of my worry list.

- That was true then and it remains the case as we speak today.
- I worry even more about the widening health, care and social inequalities that prevent some of our residents from thriving.
- Councils may have been able to prevent many of these if we'd had the investment to focus on prevention and early intervention.
- This should be central to the plans to rebuild our nation.
- Through our ongoing lobbying around the Comprehensive Spending Review - *Rethink Local* - we continue to make the case how *Councils Can and Will* deliver for their communities, providing national government gives us the right powers, sustainable funding and enhanced financial flexibilities.
- This will help ensure all members of our communities – from children and families to older people and those with longstanding health conditions – can live the lives they deserve.

Wellbeing and early intervention

- We all agree that we can't return to the status quo.
- This **has** to be the moment we finally change the way we support people's wellbeing in the widest sense.
- Councils are the only organisations who can bring together all the services that help address the wider determinants of health – safe and accessible housing, health protection, early years support, community resilience and access to good work.
- We know our communities best and have the relationships with local partners to rapidly plan and deploy support.
- But we need the resources and freedoms to deliver.

- Without this, we will continue to fight a losing battle of trying to treat an ever-growing burden of long-term ill-health.
- In my conversations with Ministers, I have been pushing for less central direction and more local flexibility. For councils to be empowered to innovate and create services that are tailored to our communities and localities.

Health and social care

- This should be central to the plans to fix social care, once and for all.
- I don't want to have to address you all this time next year to discuss what the Social Care White Paper should and shouldn't include.
- Our older and disabled people deserve better than another year of discussions and debates as the issue gets further kicked into the long grass.
- Our workforce deserves better too.
- The outpouring of support for our frontline workers in recent months has demonstrated the importance of having a highly skilled, well equipped, well paid and supported care workforce.
- This forms part of our [seven principles](#) for social care reform, which chart a way to ensure the very best local and sustainable care and support.
- This is our approach as the LGA to health and social care – one that empowers local areas, gives social care the profile it deserves whilst also ensuring we have sustainable funding delivered through a long-term plan.
- 2021 will already be a big year for our teams.

- By April, all areas will be covered by an integrated care system that will become increasingly responsible for the sustainability of the health and care system - in some cases, including adult and children's social care.
- While we support more joined up planning and delivery with the NHS, these reforms need to build on, rather than replace, existing plans for places and neighbourhoods.
- This includes building on the existing role of Health and Wellbeing Boards as the only place-based collaborative leadership where clinical, political and community leaders come together to drive a shared vision and action plan for their place.
- Because the last year shows us that empowering councils to lead their local areas helps ensure people get the support they need to live their best life.
- This is good for people and it's good for our communities.

Children's services

- The pandemic has also had a profound impact on our younger residents – on children, and families.
- It has caused financial hardship, exacerbated poor mental health and led to a range of hidden harms, as children were no longer seen in school or health settings for months.
- Some of these hardships are falling disproportionately on those children and families already economically disadvantaged or from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.
- The debate about the provision of free school meals to disadvantaged children is just one area where councils have

stepped in to provide much needed support, and can do so much more with the extra resources.

- The relationship between councils and schools improved markedly during lockdown. Councils and schools in their areas – regardless of structure – came together to swiftly establish systems to keep children safe when they were no longer able to attend school.
- We must take advantage of new relationships that were formed and ways of working to improve outcomes for children.
- Councils continued to have significant concerns about how the local and regional restrictions would impact on children's schooling and this will no doubt continue as we proceed to national restrictions.
- In many areas, councils are seeing increased home schooling, without councils having the necessary powers to ensure children are educated in safe environments.
- But the real challenge for children's services is yet to come, as more and more families look to their council for support.
- From job losses to mental health issues, from coping with bereavement, to loneliness and stress.
- Many of our residents are going to be struggling - it is estimated that up to 10 million people, including 1.5 million children, may need mental health support.
- We need a new national focus on helping everyone stay mentally well, backed-up by funding for councils to spend with the voluntary and community sector on meeting local mental wellbeing needs throughout people's lives.

- Councils' want to put children at the heart of the recovery planning from the pandemic, ensuring their futures aren't dictated by what has happened this year.
- With the right powers, funding, and partnership with central government, councils can resolve the disproportionate impacts on different communities and avoid long-term damage.
- The LGA's [Child Centred Recovery publication](#) articulates local government's vision for children, young people and families.
- Our report is deliberately broad, but as an urgent starting point calls on the Government to:
 - restore the £1.7 billion early intervention funding lost since 2010,
 - ensure a cross-Whitehall strategy that puts children and young people at the heart of recovery, and,
 - ensure dedicated action to prevent the attainment gap from widening. This includes immediate work to stabilise the early years sector and support children and young people to attend school or to continue learning from home where required.
- This is our opportunity to improve the life chances of children and young people by ensuring councils are sustainability funded to provide access to high quality services and support across children's social care, education and youth services.
- The Government's upcoming review of the care system, and of the special educational needs and disabilities system, should begin as soon as possible so that we can make the improvements we need.
- Together, central and local government must grasp this chance to ensure that every child and young person is given the best start that they deserve.

Wrap up and closing

- 2020 has presented so many challenges in so many ways, but I hope that we can take the opportunity to consider the role that councils have played and will continue to play.
- The LGA has been busy making the case of the importance of the Comprehensive Spending Review and how councils can build on the positives we have achieved in the past few months.
- Our detailed submission to the Treasury outlined the various policy levers that councils have been able to utilise in response to the pandemic.
- Supporting everyone who needs it, eradicating the inequalities many face and creating new hope in our communities requires a collective effort.
- National and local government must work in partnership to deliver a new joint approach.
- Every council function – including adult social care, public health and looking after our children and young people – will be integral to the recovery of local and national economies.
- Councils are ambitious for our communities, and as always we stand ready with local solutions to national challenges.
- But to do this, we need the powers, freedoms and financial certainty to deliver.
- As we approach a second national lockdown this winter, you are stepping up again to support our communities.
- There is no doubt that the days and weeks ahead will be testing. We will be working tirelessly and making personal sacrifices too. I want to take this opportunity to thank you in advance.

- The vital work that you do – day in, day out, will be critical.
- My commitment is that as your membership body, the LGA will continue to make the case to Government and champion the vital work that you do.
- I am proud of the dedication and determination of every one of you and how you have risen to the challenge in very testing circumstances, often going beyond the call of duty to improve peoples' lives.
- Thank you to the Association Presidents for opening the conference.
- I would now like to introduce Cllr Paulette Hamilton, Vice Chair of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, who will be chairing the next plenary session on Inclusive Leadership in Social Care.
- ENDS.