

27 AUGUST 2025

OPEN LETTER: SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY OF DEVOLUTION

In my final open letter as the chair of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) before my term ends in December, I want to thank everyone for their service, reflect on some achievements over the last four years, and issue a call to action on devolution.

First and foremost, my sincere thanks to everyone who works within and in partnership with parish and town councils nationwide. Your hard work, tireless dedication, and unwavering commitment continue to make a real difference to communities and build a stronger, fairer, and more resilient society.

I want to congratulate all new and returning councillors elected this May. You are all part of a hugely successful, effective and growing community tier of government — more than 100,000 councillors investing over 14 million hours a year, and collectively stewarding around £2 billion in resources to improve lives and give people a voice. I wish you every success in the years ahead.

As a passionate advocate of learning and networking, I encourage every councillor — both new and experienced — to make the most of the training and development opportunities offered by your county association. Alongside this, NALC continues to provide national resources that will help you in your role, such as The Good Councillor's Guide series and recently updated Local Councils Explained. Please create your account on our new website, unlocking further benefits of membership that will strengthen your council, including free access to thousands of resources such as advice notes, publications, and campaign materials.

It has been an honour and a privilege to serve you as the chair of your national body for the last four years. Indeed, there are so many achievements during my tenure, of which I am incredibly proud. From working to develop positive relationships with principal authorities and their representative bodies, including the Local Government Association, to raising the profile of the sector among parliamentarians from all political parties. Conveying the importance of our sector to the government and parliament, delivering tangible policy like freedom from council tax referendums, commitments to allow councils to meet remotely and strengthen the standards regimes, changes to Martyn's Law and the audit regime, and millions of pounds in government funding for community assets, neighbourhood planning and local projects. Ensuring parish and town councils are

recognised as having a key role in local government reorganisation and devolution, with consideration being given to creating more across England. Please read our Annual Report 2024/25 for more details. But none of this would be possible without your support, and the support of NALC staff and county associations.

As I look to the future, I am convinced that this is a crucial moment for local democracy and community leadership. The government's devolution and local government reform agenda is advancing across England, with new structures and powers emerging in strategic authorities, city-regions, and counties. It is not simply about shifting powers from Whitehall to regional mayors or county leaders. Devolution must be about putting decision-making closer to people, empowering communities to shape the places where they live and work. As the community tier of local government, parish and town councils are uniquely placed to make this vision a reality, to help make a success of devolution.

Already, parish and town councils are delivering services, enabling housing, stewarding green spaces, supporting local economies, driving climate action, and fostering civic pride. But the potential is far greater, and we can do so much more. Devolution offers us the chance to have a greater say over priorities in our areas, take on new responsibilities where we have the ambition and capacity, and work in partnership with other tiers of government to deliver more for our residents.

That is why I am calling on every parish and town council to:

- Engage proactively with principal authorities and combined authorities to make your voice heard in devolution discussions, advocating for a clear role for parish and town councils in new governance arrangements, funding, and service delivery.
- Demonstrate leadership and ambition to showcase the difference you already make, and set out bold visions for your community under a devolved settlement.
- Collaborate with neighbouring councils by working together, so we can strengthen our collective voice and develop proposals that reflect shared priorities and local needs.
- Invest in and strengthen your capacity by building the skills, resources, and partnerships needed to play a greater role and thrive in a devolved landscape.

NALC remains fully committed to championing the role of parish and town councils in this new era. We will continue to work nationally to influence policy

and work with county associations to support you with resources, training, and advocacy. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity. The more we do now, the greater our chances of ensuring effective engagement and relationships with new structures that parish and town councils are not only part of the conversation but at the heart of England's future devolved governance. Together, we can build stronger, more empowered communities.

Thank you again for the honour of serving as your chair.

Cllr Keith Stevens
Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Keith Stevens". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "K" and a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.