

5 JANUARY 2026

## **OPEN LETTER: STRONGER VOICES, STRONGER GOVERNANCE AND STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS**

I am honoured and excited to be elected as chair of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) at such a pivotal moment for our sector. I am grateful for the trust placed in me by county association representatives on our National Assembly and optimistic about what we can achieve together.

I want to pay tribute to the late Keith Stevens for his leadership, dedication and commitment. He leaves a lasting legacy and solid foundations on which we can continue to build. I am conscious of the responsibility that comes with following in his footsteps.

Parish and town councils are the bedrock of community life across England. They are an invaluable asset to our country, essential to strong local government and paramount to the success of devolution. At a time of significant change, it is more important than ever that our collective voice is heard. As your chair, I am determined to ensure that voice is stronger, louder and more influential at every level of government.

Across the country, parish and town councils are stepping up to meet growing expectations and increasing responsibilities. Many are taking on new assets and services, responding to financial pressures, and navigating the impacts of local government reorganisation. They are doing so with resilience, innovation and a deep commitment to their communities. NALC must continue to step up alongside them, shaping the national conversation about the vital role of grassroots local government and championing high standards across our sector.

Stronger governance will be central to this work. We must continue to drive forward good governance in parish and town councils, from financial accountability and transparency to professionalism and the highest standards of ethical leadership. It is the cornerstone of our credibility. It means supporting parish and town councils and councillors with clear advice and guidance, training and access to best practices, while also ensuring that NALC itself remains transparent, accountable and responsive to its members.

As we move forward, I will continue to champion a culture of respect, compassion and care within our sector. Councillors balance public service with demanding personal and professional responsibilities, while clerks and

council staff work tirelessly behind the scenes. We must recognise that dedication and support the wellbeing of those who serve residents every day. Strong parish and town councils rely on strong people, and we must never lose sight of that truth.

Looking ahead, NALC and county associations have a critical role to play in helping parish and town councils prepare for the future. From digital transformation and climate adaptation to community resilience and new service models, the challenges and opportunities facing our sector are evolving rapidly. We must anticipate change, share learning widely and ensure that councils of every size are equipped to thrive and remain at the heart of local decision-making.

Strong partnerships will underpin our success. The relationship between NALC, county associations and parish and town councils is fundamental. I am committed to strengthening communication, engagement, and working better across our network. One size does not fit all, and our diversity is one of our greatest strengths. We must all continue to listen carefully, respond constructively and ensure our sector feels connected, represented and supported. It will also require continued engagement with sector bodies, stakeholders and partner organisations.

These priorities, stronger voices, stronger governance and stronger partnerships, will guide my approach as chair and shape how NALC supports parish and town councils at every level. Working with the vice-chairs, Cllr Sue Baxter and Cllr David Francis, and the National Assembly, I look forward to building an effective and inclusive organisation that equips councils and county associations to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead.

By strengthening our voices, our governance and our partnerships, we can ensure that parish and town councils remain a powerful force for the communities they serve. Thank you for placing your trust in me. I look forward to working with you all as we shape the future of our sector together.

Cllr Iain Hamilton  
Chair

