

## ADCS President's speech to NCASC (Wed 2 Nov 10.15 – 10.35am) (Final)

Colleagues, welcome to the national children and adult services conference 2016, which once again takes place in the great city of Manchester. I'm Dave Hill, this year's president of ADCS. Many illustrious people have gone before me in this role and said to this conference - we live in interesting times, actually we live in challenging times and we are rising to the challenge. We thrive on adversity and owe it to our service users to do so. The last three weeks have been particularly interesting and challenging, as we have seen hundreds of unaccompanied children and young people brought to the UK as the migrant camp at Calais was 'cleared', during the course of last week. All of us will have been moved by the plights of those vulnerable migrants and particularly the hundreds of unaccompanied children and young people who had somehow made it to France.

I have to tell you, conference, that I was very tempted to use this speech to talk fulsomely about the amazing response of local government to this emergency. But, we have a plenary session dedicated to that tomorrow. So, suffice it to say for now that I pay an heartfelt tribute to colleagues and politicians in local areas hosting the six temporary reception centres, and those many councils that stepped up to provide almost 100 emergency weekend placements, the social workers, foster carers and residential staff are heroes. Thank you, you are a credit to public service and utterly child-focussed in the face of an unprecedented and at times chaotic situation.

Improving life chances for children and young people has been a theme of my presidency and a key priority for ADCS it is what we are all about and for me, improving outcomes is all about relationships, relationships of many kinds.

As we strive to create and maintain the conditions in which good social work can thrive, where Social Workers and others can form life-changing relationships, we do so against a backdrop of increasing demand. Later this month, ADCS will publish phase 5 of our Safeguarding Pressures research; a longitudinal study of the scale and nature of children's social care and safeguarding activity. Here are some of the headlines for the year to 31 March 2016, to give us some context. Figures are rounded up:

- **2.2million** initial contacts
- **610,000** referrals ( approximately 20 % of which are re-referrals, that's around 125,000)
- **580,000** social care assessments undertaken
- **280,000** Children in Need **EXCLUDING** children on child protection plans and children looked after
- **225,000** Early Help Assessments completed
- **71,000** looked after children
- **50,000** children subject of child protection plans – almost half of whom, some 23,000 are subject of child protection plan for reason of neglect
- **35,000** care leavers

- **4,500** UASCs, although far more were supported at some point during the year 2015/16. And of course, this number now pales into insignificance, as an ADCS themed report on unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children, to be published tomorrow will illustrate.

It's in that context that our social care staff, indeed our wider workforces are working to create the conditions in which to form meaningful and sustainable relationships with children, young people, their families and carers. As corporate parents, we in local government have a particular responsibility to children in care – all 71,000 of them...and counting. How can we ensure, given the ever rising demand, that we do our very best for children in care and care leavers.

Well, don't be disheartened, we are doing it. Every one of us in this room knows only too well how important positive and meaningful relationships are to children, particularly children and young people in care. It is these relationships that children tell us they value most and can help them overcome challenges in life. Let me show you a short video made from contributions from children in care councils and indeed, individual children in care themselves, they describe whom in the care system has made the most difference to their lives.

CUE VT [video runs for approx. 7 minutes]

...powerful isn't it, conference?

A significant proportion of those 71,000+ children in care, and those we have taken into care since 31 March, including unaccompanied vulnerable children and young people from the camp at Calais, become, eventually, our care leavers. And it is here that another set of our challenges, and costs lie. Last week was national care leavers' week and that caused me to reflect on something I did in my past that I was particularly proud of. Many moons ago when I worked for Westminster Council, I established a leaving care service, one of the first of its kind. One of the drivers for doing so was that we wanted to create what we would now call 'resilience' in our care leavers, helping them to become independent adults able to cope with their often dysfunctional family relationships. Of course, leaving care services are now statutory in local government and I am delighted by that. I also welcomed the publication in July of the government's refreshed care leavers' strategy – an indication that central government takes its role seriously. We can and must do better for care leavers. But how can we hope to do so whilst we take more and more children into care?

As corporate parents I think that local government should lead the debate about taking fewer children into care and doing even better for those children that we do take into care. But how do we get to that turning point safely? We've got to change the shape of children's social care not through the lens of the government's touching faith in structural reform, but by investing in prevention and early help. For a while of course, maybe 2-3 years, you have to double invest – money into early help and money into statutory child protection work, but eventually the balance can begin to

shift. Less child protection work, fewer children in care resulting in more manageable caseloads for Social Workers meaning they are better able to achieve continuity in case-holding, form meaningful sustainable relationships with children and families and thereby make more meaningful, lasting interventions in the lives of children, young people and their families.

Many of those interventions can then be predicated upon breaking the cycle of adult disadvantage, of improving the ability of adults to care effectively for their children, thus preventing some from coming into care.

When we asked our social workers in Essex, four years ago, who wanted to spend more than 80% of their working lives in direct contact with children and families we were inundated with applications for some new teams. How we use relationships as the most powerful tool of change it brings about profound and lasting positive change.

Conference, I've been talking about some of the relationships that can make a big difference to children's lives. I'd like to end on the macro level if I may, and talk a little about the relationship between international governments and the relationship between UK central and local governments.

The relationship between our own government and the French has been front and fore as the appalling conditions in the migrant camp in Calais have hit the headlines on a daily basis. Having been involved alongside LGA colleagues in Gold calls with Home Office and DfE officials of late, I have been taken aback as to how little the French government has known about the number of unaccompanied children living in the camp. Call me naïve, but we haven't Brexited Europe yet, how hard is it to share information that would have allowed UK local authorities to plan for the staged arrival of unaccompanied children, instead of crisis managing urgent arrivals, as we have had to do?

Conference we live in a world that is too binary, remain or Brexit, academies or state schools, in care or in family, central versus local, these binary positions need to give way to a much greater collaboration for the common good and strong partnerships that work with and for families and their children, this applies equally to the adults world and our colleagues in ADASS, where NHS and social care funding continues to be too binary.

And what of the relationship here at home between central and local government? I think elements of central government do understand the crucial and unique role of local government as the shaper of places, places where children and young people are at the heart of everything we do. There is not only a moral argument for child-centric policy development, but frankly an economic imperative too, to ensure all public services improve opportunities and outcomes for our children, who will, after all be the tax-payers of the future, the Social Workers of the future, the government Ministers of the future.



Effective public services can only be delivered in partnership. Partnerships with schools, with health, with police, with communities and with other councils. Local councils lead these partnerships on behalf of the citizens their elected members represent.

Central government cannot hope to operate effectively and efficaciously without strong, confident local government. Our staff have collaboration in their DNA, lets maximise their skills and experience in moving forward. We owe it to those we serve.

Conference it is now my pleasure to hand over to Ray James the immediate past President of ADASS. Ray...over to you...

**Ends**