

**Charlotte Ramsden Inaugural Presidential address
(22 April 2021)**

Hello and thank you Jenny.

This time last year Jenny Coles published her inaugural Presidential written address, without the opportunity to make a speech to members, partners and friends of ADCS. Who would have dreamt that one year later, we are still not able to gather together? Nevertheless, I am delighted to be able to speak to you, though disappointed it is online.

Every President of ADCS starts off their year knowing some of the challenges to come and knowing there'll be unknown issues that emerge over the year. Without getting too Donald Rumsfeld about it, I think my year as ADCS President will be flavoured with known unknowns. We know there will be long-term impacts, good and bad, experienced by children, young people and their families, as a result of the year-long pandemic and enduring social restrictions. What is unknown is the degree of severity and the legacy of those impacts. So, how do we, as children's services leaders best mirror the strength and resilience our children and families have shown over the last year, in our work with them to build back better. This is not only about Recovery it's about Recovering – an ongoing, non-linear experience which will take time and tenacity, perseverance and persistence, on all our parts. Long-term sustainable support delivered at a local level will be essential. Speaking of support, I would like to take this opportunity to thank some people.

Salford as a city and Salford City Council together with partners, are places of huge passion and energy. That first became evident to me in the early 1990s when I first became a social worker in Salford. And, in 2014, having worked in several North West authorities, when the Salford DCS job came up, it called to me and I'm proud to say I've been there ever since. I would like to thank the City Mayor, Paul Dennett, my two Lead Members, Cllr. John Merry who is also the Deputy Mayor, and Cllr John Walsh and of course the Chief Executive Tom Stannard. All of whom have supported me to undertake the national role of ADCS President. To my children's Assistant Director team Zoe Fearon, Becky Bibby and Debbie Blackburn, I extend my sincere thanks in advance for all of the hard work they are about to do, with additional thanks to my Assistant Director Cathy Starbuck who will be covering some of my Salford duties as I, on their behalf and yours, seek to influence a national agenda that is ambitious for children. My PA Sara Yarwood has long been a source of excellent support helping me to fulfil my local, regional and now national commitments and I am incredibly grateful for her attention to detail.

I am also really grateful to my fellow North West directors for their support of my Presidency and for their camaraderie. I know I can rely on them to keep me sighted on what matters.

I've seen rather more of my husband Martyn and children Beth and Daniel over the last year than I was anticipating. There have been the occasional moments when we've fought like cats in a sack as we've all switched to home working, but their support and love will sustain me through a busy year, as it has done for many a year. Likewise it is great to have my Mum here today and know that she too is cheering me on.

An essential name-check now – Jenny Coles, now the Immediate Past President of ADCS. She may forever be known as our 'Pandemic President', but not even the novel Coronavirus could stop Jenny's leadership shining through. Jenny led the Association without seeing any

of us face to face, without sipping cider or waxing lyrical over wine in a bar at conference. Earlier today, in more private surroundings we gave Jenny a gift to thank her for all she's done as President. What a pleasure it has been to work closely with Jenny; and owing to the pleasures of Zoom and Teams, I do think that I could recognise the bark of your dogs anywhere, Jenny.

And I must thank Steve Crocker, my Vice President. Steve has already thrown himself into the fray with gusto, working closely with me and others on our extensive engagement with central government. I'm really looking forward to working with you Steve.

Before I became Vice President to Jenny, I chaired one of the Association's policy committees and it was through that work that I was first exposed to the brilliant ADCS staff team. The team is small, they work incredibly hard, and I'm looking forward to working with all of them. I have heard many Presidents say they could not have managed without them and I already know this to be true for me too.

It is important to me to have spent that time acknowledging the support and contributions of others. Every former, every serving and every aspirant DCS in the land is by nature a collaborator. Hero leaders are not well suited to systems leadership roles, such as that of the DCS. Hanging on my dining room wall at home is a picture that reminds me daily of the kind of leadership qualities that are essential in the difficult but rewarding work we all do. It's a sketch I inherited from my Dad. A person on a tightrope riding a unicycle and balancing weights. It was his and now my reminder to keep your eye on the goal, and balance carefully as you move forward. It's a clear reminder that you're only one step away from falling, so be humble in your leadership.

Partnerships are in our DNA; we have shared aims and recognise mutual dependencies. With strong partnerships we can be greater than the sum of our parts. Never has that been more evident than over the last 12 months. Local government has shown astonishing flexibility and resilience within all of our services. We have harnessed the multi-agency response to Covid-19 locally. We've seen real agility around decision-making, risk assessment and information sharing across our partnerships, particularly with our schools where LAs have vital co-ordination, support and challenge roles. In many ways schools and councils have never been closer than we are now as together we've worked to keep children in our sight, maximise school attendance, ensure children learning remotely are fed and supported. More recently schools have been supported to do a remarkable job on rapid mass Coronavirus testing.

Several of the Association's policy priorities for the year ahead are underpinned by and depend for their success upon, maintaining existing and building new partnerships of influence. First and most obviously, ADCS wishes to amplify our influence in order to maximize the impact of the Children's Social Care Review if it is to be the 'once in a generation' opportunity to build on the successes and improve the weaknesses in the social care system in order to improve outcomes for children. Crucially we need better residential care, with placements that meet children's actual needs. We can achieve this through better commissioning, child-centred practice and regulation that works. This will be an important aspect of the Association's work over the coming year and each of the ADCS policy committees will pursue particular workstrands to feed into the review. That will keep us all busy, but ever ambitious, we have a few other policy priorities for the year ahead which will guide my focus as President.

There's a pretty obvious golden thread throughout these priorities. Achieving the best possible future for children and young people. But children are not just our future, they are our NOW and if collectively we don't get things right now – in the care review, in the SEND review, in making the case for early help, in adopting a trauma-informed practice approach to working with vulnerable teens – then they won't have the future they deserve.

Our work on SEND, clarity of our role in education, supporting our children in care and our care leavers, plus tackling the pernicious impacts on children and young people of poverty, domestic abuse, parental mental ill-health and substance misuse, are all critical for our children's future. When I first came to Manchester a very long time ago to study geography at University, I saw for the first time real inner city poverty and I was enraged at the injustice of it, particularly the way it blighted children's life chances. The burning desire to do something about it changed my career trajectory away from becoming a geography teacher (great though that would have been) to training to become a Social Worker. Now, so many years later, Manchester and Salford are beacons of regeneration. But, poverty is once again, rife, not just here up north, but everywhere. We must shine a light on inequality and do all we can to prevent child poverty becoming an epidemic wrapped up in a pandemic.

- There are more than four million children currently live in poverty (DWP, 2020)
- Children from black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to be in poverty: 45% compared with 26% of children in white British families (CPAG, 2020)
- Children from households in the bottom fifth of income distribution are over four times more likely to experience severe mental health problems than those in the highest fifth (Kings Fund, 2020)
- Children in the most deprived 10% of small neighbourhoods in the UK are over 10 times more likely to be in foster care or residential care or on protection plans than children in the least deprived 10% (Bywaters et al, 2020).

We need clear priorities in times of uncertainty. Here's one that I think is seminal to recovering:

The NHS has a national Long-Term Plan. It's time we had a Long-Term National Plan for Children and Young People. A plan which is ambitious and predicated upon a universal approach to enabling all children to achieve their potential, whilst retaining a focus on the poorest and the most vulnerable.

The importance of a universalist approach has been highlighted by the recent and extremely distressing anonymous testimonials posted by women and girls on the website 'Everybody's Invited', disclosing thousands of incidents of alleged sexual harassment, abuse and rape amongst school-aged pupils, many, but by no mean all, in independent schools. In 2016, the Women and Equalities Select Committee called for more guidance for schools focused on prevention and a coherent plan to ensure schools are supported to tackle the causes and consequences of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Schools cannot fix all of society's ills and it is certainly true that there's a casual acceptance of degrading and over-sexualised representation of women and girls in our society. This has fermented a culture of misogyny which requires profound socio-cultural change if we are to protect girls without at the same time criminalising a generation of boys. For those where need is greatest, as a sector we've learnt much in recent years about the value of taking a trauma-informed, relationship-based practice approach to working with vulnerable adolescents who are victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, who are in the youth justice system and even involved in serious violence and those who are in need of in-patient mental health care. A collective focus on

meeting the needs of these vulnerable teenagers is crucial in this recovery year. All partners including our schools are essential to this work and all government departments have a part to play.

I want to return briefly to something I mentioned earlier – the strength and resilience our children, families and care leavers have shown during the pandemic. During the pandemic I think we've seen a small but important shift away from professionals solely delivering solutions and interventions to enabling parents to administer their own solutions. This could open up further the exciting possibilities of co-created services and a greater role for local communities in supporting poor or vulnerable families.

Perhaps this will take us towards a new social contract which sees a stronger role for families, communities and employers working in tandem with public services to achieve meaningful change for children and young people. To reach such a nadir, we collectively in local and central government must progress the case for the value of early help and preventative approaches and share our best practice examples. It is not only for local government to evidence that case; indeed, the MHCLG programme formerly known as 'Troubled Families' could readily be developed into an even more meaningful, universal offer of early help support to any family that needed it under its new Supporting Families mandate.

Central government departments must work together to influence the Treasury, rather than relentlessly patrolling the perimeters of their own departments. One way of doing this would be a commitment from the **nine** different central government departments each of which has some responsibility for some aspect of children's policy, to stop 'out-policing' each other, join up their thinking and most importantly pool their financial resources. Please stop the waste of time and money that results from dangling disparate, small, time-limited pots of funding to tackle complex, multi-dimensional and entrenched social and cultural problems. Short term investment is not a sound basis for resourcing sustainable joined-up services.

Those of you who have attended ADCS Presidential receptions in the past will have heard every President make that plea for government to practise what it preaches and join up, be strategic and ambitious for children. Indeed, one of my policy priorities for the year ahead will be to advocate for the development of a more effective interface – nationally, regionally and locally - with providers of adult health and social care services in the creation of more and seamless 0-25 services for those who need them. I know we are all deeply weary of structural reforms to health services. Indeed, I feel strongly myself that such reforms regularly over-state the benefits that structural reform can achieve and routinely underestimate the disruption they cause. But colleagues, together I think we can make sure that the physical, mental and emotional health needs of children and young people are prioritised in ICS developments. I know that all of you, like me, are disappointed at the silence around children's health needs in the White Paper. The emerging operating model for ICSs – the 'wiring' that will sit underneath the new legislation – also appears to have forgotten children. This is so infuriating particularly given the efforts recently of DfE and DHSC to bring mental health support closer to schools. Health is a Statutory Partner in local safeguarding arrangements. Health professionals have statutory duties in relation to children, particularly those youngsters who have special educational needs, disabilities, or mental health needs. We know they are committed to delivering strong health outcomes for children. How can this White Paper have even been conceived of, never mind written in a child-blind way? I am

determined that ADCS policy committees and I as your President will seek ever closer partnership with health colleagues to meet children's needs better and together with our friends and colleagues in ADASS and the LGA ,we will work hard to redress the imbalance of adult and children's health needs in the forthcoming reforms.

I know that ADCS colleagues will be very disappointed if I do not draw my remarks to a close by mentioning money. So here goes. Everyone of us has everything crossed for a multi-year spending review settlement for April 2022 onwards. There are crystal clear moral and economic imperatives for investing now in children and their life chances.

ADCS members believe that the level of investment required to stabilise, sustain and adapt services to meet the needs of the growing number of children and families who need our support to thrive, not just survive in the wake of the pandemic, is around **£12.5billion over three years**. That's a lot of money but it would be worth every penny to create a country that works for all children.

Thank you for listening. It is now my pleasure to invite the Minister Vicky Ford to say a few words. Minister.