

## **Dave Hill Presidential Speech (20 April 2016) FINAL**

### **Introduction & thanks**

I'd like to begin by welcoming you all here today and thanking you for finding the time in your busy working lives to attend....and in the august surroundings of the Kings Fund. Prior to the NHS being formed the Kings Fund existed to support the voluntary aided hospitals in London, now a highly respected health think tank and of course the birthplace of the sugar tax!

To begin, some very important thank you's;

Firstly, to Essex County Council, who I joined in 2010, I think we have been good for each other and I would like to thank the Leader of the Council David Finch and the Lead members I work most closely with – Councillors Dick Madden, Ray Gooding, Anne Brown all of whom are here today, they are all great supporters of better outcomes for children and a joy to work with. Also I would like to thank the Chief Executive Gavin Jones and his predecessor Joanna Killian and the Leaders of all Political Parties in Essex who are supporting me in my presidency and are generously allowing time away from the ranch to carry out my ADCS duties.

To staff at ECC, many of whom I'm delighted to say are here today, the journey for children's services in Essex has been an extraordinary one and our watchword is 'role generosity' people across adults and children's services supporting each other, I personally have had magnificent support from all staff, thank you. But I wanted to namecheck the awesome Helen Lincoln who has been a tower of strength both in Essex and our previous work together at Merton Council – thank you Helen. It would not be right to leave the ECC thank you's without thanking Noreen and Laura, who attempt to keep me on the straight and narrow (well kinda) by organising my work life, thank you both.

To my wife Jo and daughters Laurel and Lydia (looking good guys!) and to a small group of my nearest and dearest, Hollie, Val, David, Jack brother of Hollie, who had planned to be here today, but is now distributing food relief in South Sudan - their need is greater than ours. In particular I would like to thank Mac and Dorothy whose lives I have touched and in return they have had a profound influence on my own life. The love and support of these people sustains me – I shall return to that theme of 'love' a little later. Don't worry, I'm not going to go all TOWIE on you...

.....and of course to Alison O'Sullivan, who has been a thoughtful, persistent and wise President and has given incredibly generously of her time to the Association. I

have both enjoyed working with Alison as her vice president and learned from her, good role models can be hard to come by, I have been very fortunate in having such a good role model.

She has led us authoritatively, whilst making clear in her own inimitable Yorkshire style, that the President is part of a team of elected officers. It will be nigh on impossible to follow such a class act. We share a mutual interest in DIY and 'building things' and have shared many stories together 'on the road' of our successful (and less successful) projects. I look forward to continuing to build a strong ADCS, working closely with the Vice President, Alison Michalska, Alison also has some building connections so I look forward to sharing the house renovation discussions in the coming year. Incidentally, I have also indicated my willingness to change my first name to Alison too, so as to so as to avoid any confusion – I fear this might be a limiting factor for any aspiring future Presidents.

Alison thank you on behalf of ADCS, you have been a star.

### **Looked After Children**

In November the Rees Centre published important research on the educational outcomes for Looked After Children, more often than not LAC are spoken of in relation to their over representation in the prison, mental health, unemployment statistics and so on.

We have a duty to change this narrative and I intend to make that my personal priority in the year ahead. You will recall that during Andrew Webb's Presidency that ADCS published "what is care for" and Alison in the past year has championed 'staying put' in residential care. I believe we must build on that legacy.

The Essex journey has been driven by "Relationship Based work", I believe that this is at the heart of great social work and needs to be central to all that we do.

We may need to take fewer children into care than we currently do (and my views on that point are well known and evident in the Essex work), but for those children and young people that come into our care, we need to enhance their life chances and massively improve their outcomes. I have been a trustee at the Who Care Trust for 7 years and Natasha Finlayson is here today. The WCT and the experience of DCS's around the country is that children and young people express strong views about the need for caring and loving relationships and relationships that endure over time. Amongst those who have graced me with coming along today are two of my favourite people in the world, Mac and Dorothy, our relationships have endured and I receive as much back as I have ever given! Thank you for coming today. I love you both

## **Early Years**

I would like to see a policy shift to a much more holistic approach to early years, particularly the minus nine months, to 4 years age group. We are missing too many opportunities to assist parents of very young children to work alongside other parents to build resilience. There remains effectively an underclass of families often repeating intergenerational cycles of deprivation, lack of opportunity and poor outcomes and we need to focus harder and do better. Improving outcomes for children means breaking the cycle of adult disadvantage. Good social work with adults also helps children. I intend to strengthen the work with ADASS whose annual spring conference I attended last week, my friend in the east Harold Bodmer the new president of ADASS and I will seek to ensure that the social work reform agenda recognises the link between adults and children's social work.

In Essex I recently spent time at Ghyllgrove School in Basildon. I spent the morning with inspiring staff who have developed a special unit in the school called the Ark. The Ark has worked with more than 50 children in the past 2 years at risk of exclusion from school, they take from all schools in Basildon and further afield in Essex. They work intensively with the pupil, their family and the host school – of the 50+ children only one child has been permanently excluded. The sting in the tail of this inspiring story is that they are all infant aged children between the ages of 4 and 7 years. We must do better here.

Creating the conditions for success in a local area for children to grow into well-rounded, economically active adults is key, not only to their life chances, but also to a local area's economic prosperity. The ability to influence the local educational offer is key to that economic growth. I worry that there is a touching faith in organisational form and governance to change the direction and quality of services, the most obvious example of this are the current proposals for full academisation of our schools. The hundred year link between local authorities, standards and governance in schools should not be deconstructed without the most careful thought and consideration. As a DCS in three local authorities the thing I have valued the most and used most powerfully, is the holistic view of children's welfare, development and outcomes. The year ahead will bring important debates and ADCS will want to be central to influencing the right outcomes.

## **Radical non-intervention and the relationship between the state and its citizens**

We should decide what the state is for and what its limits are. It's our relationships with each other that is critical; the State doesn't hold all the answers. Where we need to intervene we should do so decisively and with the welfare of children at the heart

of all we do, but we intervene too often and sometimes too readily. Children, young people, their families and communities are more resilient than we give them credit for. Social Workers and other professionals can on occasions act in a way that is formulaic and reactionary, the most skilled know how to work with, rather than doing unto children and families. We should not forget that the Children Act itself as well as having the paramount welfare of children at its heart, also asks us to balance that principle with the rights of children to live in their own families. We should always continue to debate whether we have that balance properly calibrated.

**.....and finally Improvement interventions that are sector-led and peer driven** – I've been lucky over my career to work in a number of LAs, for 10 years at assistant director level and a DCS in three, some more challenged than others. Latterly, I've been privileged, alongside members of my ECC team, to work alongside a number of LAs in challenging circumstances. What this has brought home to me, not that I'd ever forgotten it, is the power of peer support, peer challenge and mentoring. The Ofsted approach to inspection will change over the coming period and ADCS are pleased to be involved in a constructive dialogue about what comes after the Single Inspection Framework, but the place of peer support and challenge is critical and we need to have inspection and peer approaches better organised and coordinated.

This is not a plea for local authorities to 'second' their best staff into Ofsted, far from it. We need to get ourselves into a position whereby the sector defines good practice and Ofsted inspection is informed by, but does not shape the view of what good and outstanding practice in children's social care looks like. Working with government for instance through the new 'What Works Centres', we need to invest in how to lead, nurture and grow excellent practice and services – there are many good and excellent examples around the country to draw upon.

## **Conclusion**

As every President who has served before me has said, this role is one of custodianship. It also has its privileges, allowing each incumbent to champion issues that are close to their heart.

My overarching personal priority as President will be: **Changing the public narrative about the care system** – I am passionate about getting a more balanced view of our care system into political and public discourse. I am looking forward enormously to the year ahead and trying to make a difference.

Thank you for coming along to support and listen to me; that's it folks enjoy the fizz and canapes.