

Labour Party Annual Conference 2017
Brighton, 24 September - 27 September 2017

FOR THE MANY
NOT THE FEW

Speech by

ANDREW GWYNNE

Shadow Secretary of State for
Communities and Local
Government

24 September 2017
Brighton Centre

Speech issued on a check against delivery basis

Andrew Gwynne speech to Labour Party Conference

Andrew Gwynne MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, speaking at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton today, said:

*****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*****

I'm delighted to respond to the 'Protecting Communities' debate as Labour's new Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

I want to begin by thanking my immediate predecessors, Graeme Morris and Theresa Pearce, and to introduce our new CLG team in Parliament - Yvonne Fovargue, Jim McMahon, Roy Kennedy, Jeremy Beecham and my PPS Stephen Morgan, the first Labour MP for Portsmouth South, in the seat's 99 year history.

I served for 12 years as a councillor in Greater Manchester. In fact all of the Labour CLG team began our political journeys in local government. And I want to thank our Labour councillors who do an outstanding job across the country.

I also want to thank Councillor Nick Forbes for his leadership of the LGA Labour group. Nick has long campaigned against the "scissors of doom" forced onto local authorities by this Tory Government. Thank you Nick and the LGA Labour Group team.

Let's also pay tribute to the emergency services, the volunteers and the community who rushed to the aid of Grenfell residents on the 14th June.

The support that has been shown by the community in response to this incident has continued to show how sorely lacking the response has been from Government. Thank you, John Healey and Emma Dent-Coad, for your work following this tragedy. We will not stop until every resident of Grenfell tower has a safe place to live, and the support they need to rebuild their lives.

Conference, we know the difference Labour in local government can make. In Bristol, Labour has pushed the social care crisis into the spotlight - leading the call for city leaders to come together to lobby central government over cuts.

South Tyneside has developed a purpose-built facility to support integrated health and care services, designed to support the needs of those with varying stages of dementia.

In London, Sadiq Khan, has called an end to Boris's vanity projects, instead prioritising the development of new affordable housing.

In Greater Manchester and Merseyside, our Metro Mayors, Andy Burnham and Steve Rotherham, understand that 'a Northern Powerhouse' is one built by local people, and by investing in our communities - and not through slogans alone.

And after one of our darkest nights this year, as Manchester woke to find children, young people and their families had lost their lives, Andy offered the unifying leadership that was needed .

Labour in local government will continue to innovate to make a real difference to people's lives. But I also know the very difficult decisions that councillors have had to make over the past seven years as this Tory government sneakily attempts to devolve the blame for their cuts away from Whitehall - to local councillors in town halls.

Conference, we won't be fooled. Police cuts. Fire Service cuts. SureStart closures. The crisis in social care.

They all have the same root cause: a Tory dogmatic vision of a smaller state.

Austerity is a political choice. And we also know their cuts have hit the poorest communities the hardest.

But it doesn't have to be this way. This was the simple message that our leader Jeremy Corbyn took to the country in June's Election.

If, like me, you went to see Jeremy speak, you would have seen the very real desperation for change that greeted him. The emotion in the eyes of those who, for the first time in years, felt hope. People who don't accept this country - the fifth richest in the world - should be defined by growing unfairness and inequality.

That's why a vote for Labour will always be a vote for a fairer Britain .

But conference, we cannot empower our communities if we impoverish them. That's why we have promised to put council funding on a sustainable footing. Councils would be £1.5bn better off under a Labour Government next year. But seven years of savage cuts has created a hole in our public services that demands more from us than increased investment; it demands that we consider fresh ideas and approaches.

A generation of outsourcing and forced privatisation of public services, has hollowed out the capacity of our councils to deliver for our communities. For the past 3 decades, we've been told that outsourcing delivers better value for money.

But, all too often, when savings are made, it is because services are cut back, charges are introduced, and the pay and conditions of our valued public service workforce are

attacked. Meanwhile, those decisions are hidden behind a cloak of commercial confidentiality.

And we know what else happens when our local services are handed over to private companies.

Our councils continue to have responsibility for local services, but they lose the ability to deliver them. So that when you report a pothole or complain about street cleansing, it is to someone in a call centre far away who doesn't know your area, and has never walked down your streets – that's if you're lucky enough to speak to someone at all. And with every contract that's outsourced, our democratic institutions lose dedicated, qualified staff.

Across the country Labour councils are already showing that it doesn't have to be this way. Labour Councils in North Tyneside, Islington, Stockport, and many others, have shown that local services can be delivered better and more efficiently in-house. Austerity demanded innovation from the sector – and the ideas and innovations from Labour Councils must not be forgotten as we plan for Government.

So, today I can announce Labour's radical plan to renew faith in local services and deliver a renaissance of local government. Building on the work of my colleague, Jon Trickett, the next Labour Government will deliver a Bill to rebuild our local services. In it, we will give councils greater powers to deliver services themselves; because our services should be run for our local communities alone.

We'll extend transparency and Freedom of Information rules, so that communities know where their money is going. And we'll end the two tier workforce with a "Fair Wage" clause. Taken together, this will be some of the largest set of reforms to local government in modern times.

Empowering communities and rebuilding local institutions and local services. Because they're our public services - and we should always put people first. It's about strengthening society. It's about putting our values – our socialism – into practice.

We understand that it is by the strength of our common endeavour that we achieve more together than we do alone. And it is communities – properly empowered and renewed – that are at the forefront of delivering that Labour vision of a better, fairer, more equal society. We are so close to having the chance to make our vision a reality.

So let's make it our sole mission - a Labour Government. Standing up for our neighbourhoods, protecting our communities. For the many, not the few. Let's get to it.

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