



SOLACE STATEMENT ON THE NEW GOVERNMENT

On behalf of chief executives and senior managers in UK local government, we would like to congratulate the new government on their success. The establishment of the new coalition government in line with the established principles of British democracy has shown our politics at its best. Throughout what has been a turbulent and unprecedented period the political parties, supported by the civil service, have brought great credit upon themselves and have demonstrated the strength and maturity of our democratic system under great pressure. Coalitions are not new in local government or in the UK's devolved governments, but it is particularly significant that this process has been handled honourably and constitutionally in Westminster. We would like to note and to add our thanks to the parties involved, and to the civil service, for this accomplishment.

We believe that the creation of the new Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government may offer great promise for the future of local democracy and public services in our country. The future will be particularly challenging given the need to reduce the country's debt and revitalise our economy in the coming years. SOLACE looks forward to working closely with the new government on the many challenges facing our communities. We would like to make an open and constructive offer to share our experience and expertise in order to support ministers to develop and deliver positive policy solutions for these challenging times.

The governing parties have come to power, elected on a strong localist programme, and we ask that the new government help us deliver a fresh settlement for local government which restores public faith and democratic accountability. The status quo is in real need of change and it is in our country's interest that we create a new settlement between local and central democracy that can reduce public expenditure, tackle deep social economic and environmental challenges and rebuild confidence in democracy.

This means bold but well-planned change.

A new settlement must mean clear spending plans for the next four years. The political debate during the election campaign shied away from the real financial challenges. The price of this delay cannot be an unplanned and inefficient short term slash. Real reductions need proper preparation. A new settlement should also mean area-based budgeting to bring decision making to levels where it can really make a difference. A genuine area-wide approach would enhance collaboration, increase democratic legitimacy and reduce service overheads. In other words, more for less.

A new settlement needs a new approach to localism. Localism isn't about a power grab by local government. Localism is about government recognising and respecting local needs and priorities and of course a genuine localist agenda is about more than

local government. Localism is about supporting change from the bottom up; about handing power back to local people. Localism is a movement as much as a policy, and sustainable movements need strong institutions. Political parties, parliaments and local councils are some of the institutions that our democracy is built around and a localist government needs effective local government.

A new settlement must mean respect for public service employees. In recessionary times people rely on public services more, not less. So we need to make sure that we have talented people with the commitment and the imagination to deliver innovative and quality services. We will not do this if political debate caricatures their vocation and demeans their status. As the Institute for Leadership and Management put it recently, "Policymakers need to recognise that public sector managers can be allies in this campaign and must not see them as a barrier to achieving their goals."

This all means that we need a settlement founded on innovation and collaboration rather than instruction and compliance. There is a huge appetite for change in local government. Things can and should be different. And what's more, we cannot afford for things to remain the same. SOLACE members appreciate more than most just how challenging the future financial context is going to be and they will be an essential part of successfully reordering public services in this context.

We too believe that that we need to be honest about what government can achieve and that real change will only come when everyone works together and recognises their responsibilities as well as their entitlements.

We hope the new government will recognise local government as part of the solution in building a responsible society and will work with us, as government in the frontline, a partner to deliver better services at a price we can afford.

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