

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid speaks to the Local Government Association

Good afternoon everyone – it's great to be back talking to the LGA again. Now where was I?

Well, when I last left off with you, well that was in 2017, I'm amazed that you've invited me back and that is because before I logged in, I took a moment to re-read some of the feedback from my last speech to the LGA as a Secretary of State – just for old time's sake.

And I must say my favourite description was when someone called it “cat food lasagne”, that is the best description in terms of my most favourable one. I still don't actually know it what means, I have never had cat food lasagne, I do not know about you Izzi and others. But I do know that it's harder to heckle someone on Zoom! So I thought that would be a very good format for me.

Now a lot has changed since 2017. 90's fashion is back although England are actually winning in semi-finals now – something we can all celebrate.

But in all seriousness, we've all learned a lot since then. The last eighteen months have been some of the most difficult in our country's history.

And I'll freely admit, I haven't found it easy to watch from the side-lines. That's not what I'm all about. I'm so pleased that the PM has brought me back from furlough because what I did miss in the time that I have been out of government, in parliament but out of government, is being able to help through public service.

And on that point I'm 100 percent aligned with the LGA, with everyone listening today – because public service is what you're all about. You're the front line of our democracy. Without you, this country simply wouldn't be able to function. That's just a fact.

I've always loved working with local government and what you do for this country I saw, as many of you would know, first-hand when I was the Communities Secretary.

There are so many parts of life in this country where local government holds the key – that is especially true for health and care.

I was thinking just before this speech and preparing for my remarks you have to go all the way back Viscount Addison, he was the first ever Minister of Health a hundred years ago, to find a Health Secretary with experience of local government. It's experience that I promise to use.

It's not just your knowledge of your communities, which is vast. It's also the huge trust those communities have in you. It's a degree of trust that,

I'm acutely aware, is higher than the trust in central government. And many of you are aware of, and it is one of the things that really struck me when I was Communities Secretary, was how sometimes government policy, the policy we have together, both central and local government which we agree on, is sometimes better understood and believed in by people when they know it is coming from local government rather than Westminster.

Well I remember watching, I do not know if any of you watched during the lockdown the show on the Salisbury Poisonings on BBC iPlayer. And in scene after scene, you see the Director of Public Health, who whatever she said, whatever she did, she was out thinking all of the suits who had joined her from the Cabinet Office and all the other departments. I think that a lot of people thought because she knew, because she did, knew the city better than anyone else – and she knew what needed to be done. Of course we know it's a dramatised account, but I think we can all recognise some truth in that.

So at this moment, as we reshape what health and care look like for a post-pandemic world, it's only right that local government should be at the heart of our plans.

Because the pandemic has shown us how quickly a local health problem can become a global one, and a global health problem can become a local one.

I've been so impressed by how you've worked with anyone and everyone to deliver for local people throughout the pandemic, from surging testing to helping vulnerable people off our streets.

And next Wednesday here in Westminster what we are going to see is the second reading of our Health and Care Bill. The officials in my department they just call it "The Bill", which is quite unhelpful. But the reason they call it that is because it is such an important and central piece of legislation, it really is a big set of reforms we set out.

It's a blueprint also for future collaboration. So through Integrated Care Systems, local government will be a central player in the health and care needs of the people they serve. You'll not only shape what that care looks like, but be at the heart of efforts to prevent people from becoming patients in the first place.

The Directors of Public Health are going to play the role they were born to play, which really is an aim to set them free so they can help with so many more of the challenges that we all face. Whether it's healthy weight, or action on smoking and alcohol abuse, I know we're going to benefit from the experience local government has to offer.

And just as we draw on your expertise, you will be able to call on our new Office for Health Promotion, which will be under the leadership of the Chief Medical Officer. That's the kind of leadership I know people will value everywhere.

Because these changes weren't simply drawn up in a beige boardroom in Whitehall. These are changes people have really had an input in because we

know that these are the kind of changes that we need to do to improve the health of the nation.

The Health and Care Bill is a result of close work with the NHS, yes. But equally, it's a product of local government. So I'm so grateful to everyone in local government that has played a part in shaping them – including James and Ian and everyone involved through the LGA.

The other thing of course, the other big task we'll be working on together in the months ahead is to put social care on a sustainable footing for the future.

Many of you may remember that when I was the Communities Secretary, I tried to do all I could to be your voice in Whitehall that pushed for so many things on social care including the social care precept and getting more of those money-raising powers into local hands. But we know the job isn't done. Governments have recognised for years now that we need a new settlement as it were on social care, a new approach. I want to assure you that I will continue to be your voice,

Now we all want to see high-quality personalised care. We all want to see fairer ways of paying for that care. We all want people to have the choice of housing that works for them. We all want also carers to be better recognised for the work they do.

So I'm also determined we approach social care with the same spirit of integration and innovation we've seen through this pandemic – because we know this is when we can all work at our best.

It's a big in-tray. The biggest I've had at any department I've led, and I've run five.

My immediate priority is to help get us safely out of this pandemic. But I'm mindful I'm not simply the "Covid Secretary", I'm the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. I'll be looking at everything under the sun that's going to improve the health of our great country.

We can see there are a huge lot of challenges ahead. But what I know from looking at those challenges, I know about the incredible capabilities of local government and I have every confidence that we can rise to meet them those challenges together.

That is something I am very much looking forward to. Thank you.