

News story: Defence Secretary: Britain committed to leading European security

Sir Michael told the annual Munich Security Conference that while Britain is leaving the European Union, the UK would not be stepping back from its role in European security.

Britain's leadership this year is demonstrated by two new major commitments to the NATO Alliance:

- Leading NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, otherwise known as the 'spearhead force'. This UK-led NATO Brigade is ready and willing to respond to any threat the Alliance faces and shows how NATO is strengthening its collective defence and deterrence.
- Deploying a battle group of around 800 personnel to lead in Estonia NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence, another way in which NATO is stepping up to deter threats. Britain will deploy as part of the battle group the United States is leading in Poland, with over 100 troops.

The Defence Secretary also met with his German counterpart, Ursula von der Leyen, where he discussed the unprecedented level of cooperation between the two countries. Sir Michael also welcomed Germany's commitment to increase its defence spending.

Sir Michael, along with the Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, yesterday [launched](#) Britain's new strategy for engaging more internationally in defence activity.

The International Defence Engagement Strategy is the way in which all defence activity, short of combat operations, work abroad to prevent conflict, build stability and gain influence internationally.

Speaking at the Munich Secretary Conference, Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Britain is committed to Europe's security, and we're stepping up our engagement internationally. Whether defeating Daesh in Iraq and Syria, deploying with our NATO Allies to deter threats, or engaging globally to help countries develop their security, Britain is playing a major role – and will continue to do so.

The Defence Secretary also confirmed that Britain would keep the momentum up in the fight against Daesh. In Iraq and Syria, the RAF are flying day and night to defeat Daesh.

The RAF hit over 300 targets as part of recent operations to liberate eastern Mosul, and is now focussing efforts on the approaches to the west of the city, where it is expected the liberation operation will begin within days.

[News story: Defence Secretary calls on NATO to be fitter, faster, more agile](#)

Attending the annual Munich Security Conference, Sir Michael said the Alliance should not wait for another crisis before it modernises itself.

Calling for an ambitious programme of change, the Defence Secretary outlined three areas for a fitter, faster, more agile NATO:

- Greater flexibility for NATO's top commanders, including the power to move more staff resources around to meet current and future threats.
- Less duplication – the Alliance has five financial control centres.
- Increased coherence – Sir Michael outlined that while improvements were being made, particularly in the merging of intelligence structures, more needed to be done to break down silos.

Describing Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 as a "wake up call" for NATO, the Defence Secretary said NATO members needed to invest more on defence and called on Allies to increase spending every year until the 2% Defence Investment Pledge, agreed at the UK hosted NATO summit in 2014, is met.

At the same time NATO should strengthen its relationships with other organisations, particularly the EU, while avoiding duplication.

Defence Secretary also called on NATO to project stability beyond its borders, by working globally to improve the security areas of fragile nations.

Speaking last night at the conference, Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

We want a fitter, faster, more agile NATO. This means more spending on defence by all the Allies, faster, more flexible decision making, and stronger partnerships.

Britain yesterday [launched](#) its International Defence Engagement Strategy, which contained a new plan for how the UK will strengthen cooperation with Allies and partners, allowing Britain to collectively pack a more powerful punch.

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[Consultation for robust domestic violence legislation is much needed and long overdue – Champion](#)

Sarah Champion MP, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, responding to the announcement of new moves to tackle domestic violence, said:

"We are pleased the Government are finally starting the consultation for robust domestic violence legislation. This is much needed and long overdue.

"Key to the success of this announcement is making sure resources are in place for policing, supporting victims & for preventing domestic violence.

"Domestic violence refuges aren't centrally funded by Government. This has led to inconsistent over quality & local provision. Everyone deserves a place of safety if they are forced to flee their home and sadly this can't currently be guaranteed."

ENDS

[Jeremy Corbyn speech to Labour's Local Government Conference](#)

Check against delivery

Speaking today (Saturday) at Labour's Local Government Conference at Warwick University in Coventry, Jeremy Corbyn, Leader of the Labour Party, said:

"Thank you for that welcome and for that introduction Alice [Perry].

As someone who was a Labour councillor for several years it's always a great pleasure to be among so many talented, innovative and hard-working local representatives standing up for their communities.

And on behalf of the whole Labour party I want to say thank you for what you do in the most difficult circumstances.

Because we meet at a time when there is now a state of emergency in our local services.

That emergency is perhaps most acute in social care an absolute scandal that leaves 1.2 million elderly people without the care they need.

By cutting billions of pounds from local government Downing Street has created a social care crisis which the Royal Society of Medicine just yesterday said was linked to 30,000 excess deaths in 2015 yes 30,000.

People are dying because of the choices made by this government.

Councils are at breaking point on social care. Decent people deserve decent treatment. Our social care system has been privatised, outsourced and cut. It has dehumanised our parents, grandparents and neighbours.

They have now become 15 minute units turning people and care into a commodity, instead of people who have paid into the system their whole life and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

And the staff who are carrying out the most personal tasks for our loved ones, bathing, feeding and protecting them, are among the lowest paid, most stressed and least valued.

This is a disgraceful neglect of people who have worked and contributed to our communities and now are being let down, let down, not by any of you in this hall, but by 10 Downing Street.

Let down by a government that has plunged councils across the country into a state of emergency because they have cut billions of pounds from services to elderly and disabled people.

This is a government that gives billions away in tax breaks to big business and the richest and pays for it by cutting the services to the most vulnerable.

It is this callousness even brutality that has put local services in a state of emergency.

And I want to say a special thank you to LGA Labour Group Leader, Nick Forbes.

Nick and I are in regular contact.

By email, by phone. And yes even by text.

Though a little less than Surrey County Council's leader, David Hodge.

I don't blame Surrey Council for trying to negotiate a better deal when the government has cut £170 million from their budget.

But I do blame the sheer hypocrisy of Tory ministers cutting social care budgets for everyone while they're willing to offer mates' rates to the Conservative Council that represents both the Health Secretary and the Chancellor.

If Cumbria were to get the same 'sweetheart deal' as Surrey county council seems to have done their social care budget would be increased by more than £20m. That's the equivalent of a 15% boost and would mean £2.8m extra for the Copeland constituency.

The state of emergency in social care is a key factor fuelling the NHS crisis, waiting times are getting worse in A&E as more neglected people arrive at their doors. It's not their fault they go to A&E, they are sick and they are in need.

Once there, elderly patients are having to stay in longer because they cannot be safely discharged costing the NHS far more than adequate social care would.

9 out of 10 NHS trusts say they have 'unsafe levels' of overcrowding.

More people on waiting lists, longer waiting times at A&E.

We have a state of emergency in our social care system and the worst crisis in the history of our NHS.

But the Chancellor Philip Hammond failed to put a single penny into social care or the NHS in the Autumn Statement.

Earlier this week it was reported that 24 A&E units face closure because the government is forcing NHS Trusts to find £22 billion of what they call politely and euphemistically "efficiencies" but what we all know are cuts.

So our demand for next month's Budget could not be clearer give ALL councils the financial support they need to deliver decent social care, abandon the corporate tax cuts and invest in our NHS and social care services.

And I make this pledge today: a Labour government under my leadership will always provide the NHS and social care with the funds they need.

We will ensure that care workers get the pay and esteem they deserve and I commend the many Labour councils that have signed up to Unison's ethical care charter.

Next week we face by-elections in Copeland and in Stoke. Both our candidates are experienced local councillors and passionate campaigners for their local services and the NHS under threat in both their communities

These by-elections are a chance to send a message to a Conservative government that puts the rich first but neglects the sick, the elderly, and

those with disabilities.

In both Copeland and Stoke, voters have a chance to tell the government that they've had enough of their damaging cuts to health and social care, their disregard for human life and dignity.

In Copeland, the local council is expected to see a cut of 49% to its funding by 2020. In fact it's one of the ten hardest hit councils in the country.

West Cumberland Hospital is facing downgrading of maternity services which midwives believe will lead to mothers and babies dying.

No wonder that when Theresa May visited this week, she refused to answer questions about cuts to maternity services.

The local paper's headline the next day was "The Lady's not for talking". Well, Labour will never stop talking about defending – and improving – the services that support our most human life and death services.

And in Stoke in particular this by-election is a chance to reject the division and lies of UKIP.

We aim to defeat Ukip's politics of hate in Stoke with Labour's politics of hope and community.

UKIP are in coalition with the Conservatives on Stoke council. And we can already measure their results. The UKIP-Tory alliance is planning to axe £1 million of funding from local children's centres.

Their plans would cut over 60 jobs and put the future of six centres at risk. Local campaigners say that these cuts would leave just nine trained staff to cover the whole city.

UKIP's politics of hate must be defeated. Hatred will not save children's centres. It won't build homes. It won't create jobs and it won't fund health and social care. It won't bring our people dignity or bring our communities together.

But it's true of the Tories too. When politicians of the right have no solutions they find a scapegoat, they try to divide and set people against each other.

Our job, as the Labour Party, isn't to find a vulnerable community to blame it is to unite people together to build a better world.

I'd like to thank all of you who've been to Stoke or Copeland to campaign – I'm off there later today – and encourage you all to do what you can in this last week.

In May, there are local elections in Scotland and Wales, county and unitary elections in England, as well as several mayoral and metro mayor contests in many city regions.

Local Government is the frontline in our battle against the Tories and their reckless austerity.

This Tory Government has willingly plunged our public services into a state of emergency.

Since 2010, councils have seen their funding cut by an average of 40%, for some in this room it is closer to 60%.

It is no wonder that local services are now in a state of emergency across the country.

Cuts to local government are a false economy which put pressure on other budgets. The new mother whose postnatal depression is picked up and dealt with by trained Sure Start staff that saves the NHS dealing with a serious case of depression.

The single parent who is able to stay in work because their child enjoys a safe and nutritious breakfast and after school club that saves the DWP in benefit payments. These and countless other cases mean council services are saving central government funds.

From bin collections to street lighting, bus services to home helps, local government touches our lives in ways that central government never can.

These services are in a state of emergency and all Theresa May can offer is: 'it's a decision for that council'. No it is not. It is a deliberate decision of central government to cut funds and cuts services that all our communities rely on.

The Tories are cutting £3 billion from education meaning 98% of our schools will receive less funding for our children. That's a £339 cut for each primary pupil and £447 for each secondary student. What chance have those children got with those services cut?

And since 2010 they've cut £400 million from youth services, resulting in around 4,000 fewer youth workers and over 600 youth centres have closed, and that's quite apart from the 750 Sure Start centres the Tories have closed in the last six years.

This Government cut colleges and the adult skills budget, they abolished the education maintenance allowance, abolished student maintenance grants and scrapped nurses' bursaries. Where are tomorrow's nurses going to come from?

How can our country be a success if we fail to invest in our young people and block their opportunity to develop the skills they need?

Labour will restore EMA for college students, restore maintenance grants for university students and restore bursaries for those training to be nurses.

The Tories have asset-stripped our own people. Labour will invest in our people to grow our economy and develop our country.

Tory cuts have led to the closure of more than 340 libraries – the places where we learn so much about the world.

And park managers have seen their budgets cut by up to 90% – how can they maintain these parks which are for all of us, with such cuts?

Under this Conservative government homelessness has risen every year. You see it on the streets of every major city every night.

After nearly seven years, the Conservative record on housing is a disgrace.

Affordable housebuilding has fallen to the lowest level in 24 years, the number of homes being built for social rent is now at the lowest level since records began.

Between 1997 and 2010, Labour in government built two million homes, helped a million more families become home-owners.

And put in the biggest investment in social housing in a generation, bringing two million homes up to the Decent Homes Standard. And you can see the benefits and results around the country.

And it is Labour councils that are building on those achievements today:

- Birmingham Council is the biggest housing provider in the city delivering 30% of all new homes, building 240 new council homes in a year.
- Croydon Council has set up its own development company 'Brick by Brick' to build up to 1,000 new affordable and private homes. It means the profits are kept in Croydon, helping to build more additional affordable housing or a dividend return to fund council services.
- And Lancashire County Council has set up a joint venture with its pension fund and affordable housing professionals to buy 800 affordable homes which they provide for sale and social rent across 84 local authorities.

That's local government helping to ensure the next Labour Government puts decent, affordable homes at the heart of our manifesto.

We'll reverse the Conservative cuts to housing investment and build thousands more genuinely affordable homes to rent and buy.

We'll give renters a new charter of rights, end rough sleeping, and help young people on ordinary incomes buy a home of their own. No more first time buyers told that £450,000 is a starter home.

And we'll also end the destructive ideological restrictions on local authorities' ability to build council homes for local people.

The Tories borrow to pay for the failure of their austerity.

Labour will allow you to borrow to build the council homes your communities need.

Labour councils are the best protection for any community against the devastation of Tory austerity.

But because of nearly £20 billion of cuts to council budgets since 2010 you're having to shield your people with one hand tied very tightly behind your back.

This Government boasts about the Northern Powerhouse and the Midlands Engine.

But they're just buzzwords ... spin not strategy.

They haven't devolved power and money to councils.

They've devolved austerity, devolved the cuts.

And it's not just the Tories doing that.

In Scotland, the SNP is doing just the same with a proposed budget cut of over £300 million to local councils.

They may talk the talk in Westminster, and by God they talk in Westminster, But they act like Tories in Holyrood.

For the Tories and the SNP, councils are their human shield, they've devolved austerity and responsibility.

Take social care. There was literally nothing to help solve the social care crisis in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. I sat through it, page by page, and not one word.

Instead they want YOU to increase council tax to pay for THEIR incompetence.

They passed the buck, and the bill, to you.

Councils aren't the problem.

They're providing the answers.

That's because local authorities have always been – and continue to be – in the vanguard of innovation.

Councils pioneered social security provision to reduce poverty and improve the quality of life.

They rid our towns and cities of slum housing, built council homes, parks, care homes, hospitals, museums and libraries – all the things that make our communities better and stronger.

Labour councils today are continuing that pioneering tradition.

- In Liverpool – where one in seven households live in fuel poverty – the council is setting up a new not-for-profit energy company – “the Liverpool LECCy” – to sell gas and electricity at a lower cost than other suppliers
- South Tyneside Council is helping to integrate health and social care services by building an 80 bed care home in the grounds of the District Hospital to help people suffering from dementia.
- And 89 Labour councils have successfully implemented the real Living Wage for council employees. Brent Council even offered business rate relief for companies that pay their employees the Living Wage.

These are three of 100 Innovations by Labour in Power, a great pamphlet published by the LGA Labour Group, examples of what Labour can achieve in power.

And that’s why we need Labour to be in power in towns, counties and city regions and in Westminster too.

I know that Labour metro mayors in Liverpool, Manchester, the West Midlands and elsewhere will continue that legacy as drivers of economic innovation.

But I know too they’ll be able to do that far more effectively with a Labour government in Westminster.

Because our humanity, our values, our care is what makes our communities a better place for everyone.

And our humanity and responsibility does not stop at our own borders. The Government’s decision to renege on its commitment to bring 3,000 vulnerable child refugees is shameful.

These are children who have fled from the warzones and are currently at risk from traffickers.

Lords Dubs’ amendment was accepted by the government and I am proud that Labour councils stand ready to play their role in helping children in desperate need.

There is no finer example of British values.

Our country is now completely out of balance.

Not just between the haves and have-nots.

But between London and the rest of the country.

The North-South divide in income, jobs and pay is increasing faster than ever.

And that divide is being widened by deliberate government policy.

Spending on transport is completely biased towards London.

Over the next five years this Government plans to spend £1,900 per person on transport in London.

In the North West, it will spend just under £300 per person, less than a sixth of what's being spent in capital.

Labour's mission has always been to redistribute wealth to create a fairer society.

Now we must also focus on redistributing power as well as wealth across all our nations and regions.

That's why Labour's proposal for a National Investment Bank, will be supported by a network of regional banks, publicly accountable and locally managed, with specialist knowledge of their areas.

These regional banks will help break the logjam in the British financial system, that is holding back our economy and our country.

By being closer to local people and by making decisions based on local needs they will be able to deliver the capital that government and the banks fail to do in public services, infrastructure and industrial development.

On transport, as London prepares for the opening of Crossrail and now campaigns for Crossrail 2, we will back an East-West link of even greater importance.

The corridor of northern cities stretching from Liverpool and Preston in the west to York and Hull in the east, has the economic clout, and skills, to become a powerful driver of economic growth. Don't worry Nick, it also includes Newcastle.

The North has 15 million people and its £300 billion a year economy is worth more than those of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland combined.

So as John McDonnell announced earlier this month in Liverpool, we will commit to building Crossrail for the North – an improved rail route to link the Atlantic with the North Sea.

It's pointless claiming to take back control of powers and resources from Brussels if they're only going to be hoarded in Downing Street.

Labour has a great history of devolving power. To Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and then to London where, since we last met we have a Labour mayor again, well done Sadiq.

Labour is working together to ensure that when we – together – get back into power, we devolve the powers and resources so that no one and no community is

left behind.

That's the principle that is driving our industrial strategy review being led by Rebecca Long-Bailey and Chi Onwurah.

It's the driving principle behind the fiscal devolution that Teresa Pearce and Jim McMahon are looking at. And thanks Jim for all you've done since coming into parliament.

We will rebuild and transform Britain so that we generate good jobs and prosperity in every community.

That is the difference between the Tories and us.

They have plunged local services into a state of emergency because their priority is tax breaks for the richest.

We will ensure everyone pays their fair share so that no one and no community is left behind.

So let's get back out on the doorsteps and get Labour elected so that we can push back unfairness and inequality in every form as together, we rebuild and transform our country.

Thank you for all you do. Thank you for the hope, innovation and leadership you bring to your communities."

ENDS