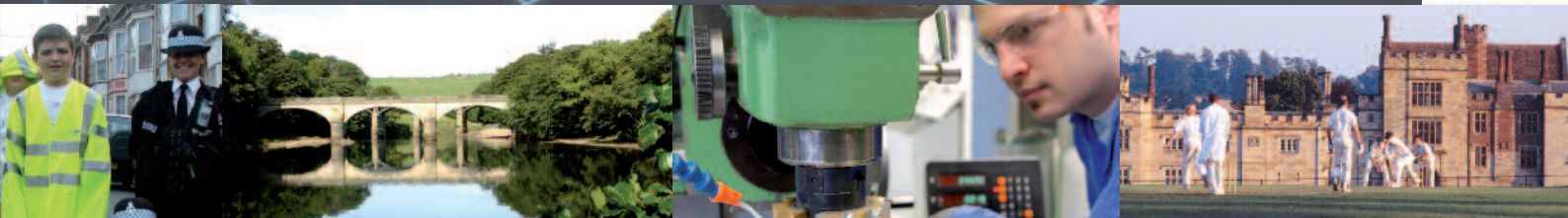
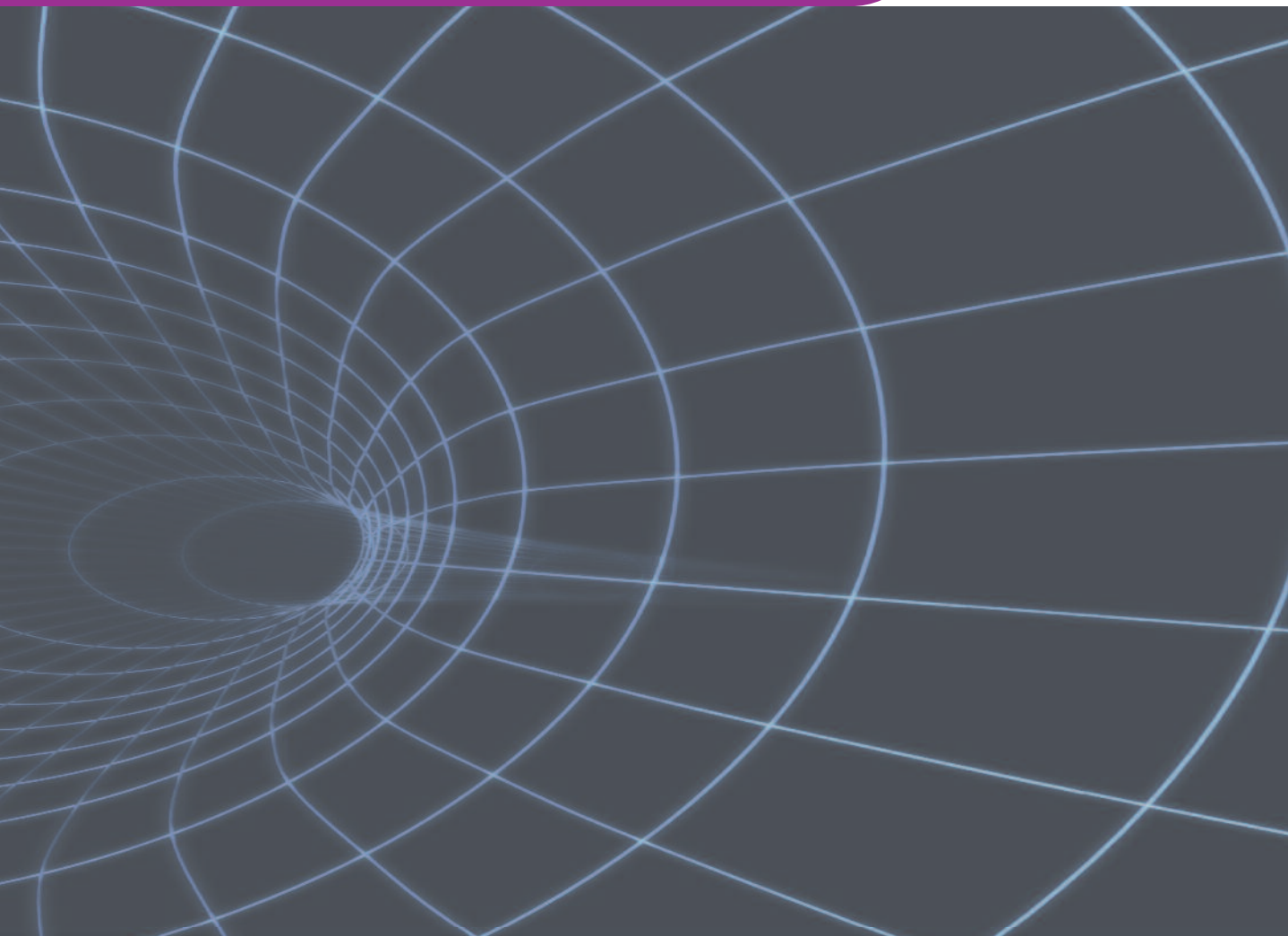


**County Councils** Network  
Manifesto **2010**



[www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk](http://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk)

## About CCN

The County Councils Network (CCN) exists to share good practice and policy research across its member authorities, and to speak with one voice to central government. CCN works as a national network of 37 councils, with over 2500 councillors, serving 24 million people across 45 thousand square miles of England.

Our member authorities include county councils in continuing multi-tier areas and unitary counties. They have a common interest based on the effective governance of counties as distinctive areas with shared characteristics (including geography, demography, economy and history). Counties can be characterised as 'polycentric' and cover a mix of distinct communities or settlements, whether they are rural or a mix of urban and rural. Although counties have much in common with other upper tier authorities these shared characteristics distinguish counties as a group.

Together our member authorities represent 48% of the population of England and provide services across 87% of its land area. CCN is a special interest group of the LGA.

CCN works on an inclusive and all party basis, and recognises that member authorities must have the right to respond to their communities in different ways. We seek to make representations to government that can be supported by all member authorities.

## Foreword

At the time of writing the government has announced that the third year of the three year local government finance settlement will be honoured for 2010/11. We welcome this commitment. However our Members are already facing increasing demand for services coupled with decreasing resources, and are planning in anticipation of more dramatic scaling back in resource and further challenges in the future. As we enter a new decade it is clear that the scale of the economic and social challenges facing us means that we need to find new and different ways of working to secure the best outcomes for the communities and individuals. By the end of the decade local government and the wider landscape of public services will not be as they are now. We have reached the limits of “doing more with less” and need to find more radical solutions to the issues that we face.

The challenge to our member authorities will be to find smarter ways of working together with partners and communities. Central government will be faced with the challenge to step back, to remove unnecessary bureaucratic and legal barriers to form a supportive framework for success, and to trust localities to deliver. The challenge for society as a whole will be to explore the implicit contract between individuals and the government, to reconsider expectations about what public goods should be provided by government, and what should be the sphere of individual or collective societal effort.

Rising to those challenges will not be simple, but CCN firmly believes that local government and our member authorities have a major contribution to make to a positive future. CCN member authorities are made up of over 2,500 Local Councillors who together represent almost half of the population of England. Those Local Councillors are local people who come from, live and often work in the communities which elect them. They have a clear connection to the places that they serve and where they and their families also live and use local services.

Our member authorities share a belief in democracy and accountability to local people. CCN members share a vision of a future where the local democratic process is at the heart of the planning and delivery of all public services delivered locally, and where local Councillors are elected to Councils that have the powers to shape actively the places that they represent and the resources to enable the provision of locally distinctive services that meet the needs of those local places and communities.

Our member authorities believe that local government working alongside central government provides the key that can unlock better outcomes for local communities and for England. In this Manifesto we set out some simple steps that central government working with local government can take to help open the door to a brighter future.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy Palmer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'T'.

**Councillor Tim Palmer**  
Chairman of the CCN

## Local Democracy - Local Solutions for Local People

**CCN believes** in local democracy which produces local solutions for local people. Local government is primarily accountable to local people through the electoral process, not to central government.

If electors are to value democracy and the electoral process, they must believe that their vote makes a difference both in local and national elections.

For that to be true local authorities must be able to make a real difference for the local people, communities and places that they serve. This means being able to take sometimes difficult decisions about resources and services to meet the needs of local communities and to be accountable for those decisions to local people through the electoral process.

Local government's democratic mandate and the ability to make legitimate local choices distinguishes local democracy from local administration, and local government from all other local providers of public services.

### We call for:

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- Central government to recognise, endorse and celebrate the local democratic process and the consequent legitimate democratic accountability of local government to local people and local communities;
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- A power of general competence to enable local authorities to enter into any venture intended to benefit local people and local communities;
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- Recognition that the democratic process may mean that services will vary from place to place, and that this is not a "postcode lottery" but a legitimate exercise of political choice to meet differing needs. We recognise that citizens are entitled to expect good basic services to meet needs wherever they live, but this does not mean that all services must be delivered to a national template.

## Local Place - an Area Based Approach to Public Services

**CCN believes** that a new area based approach to local public services is needed. Democratically elected local authorities (and, in continuing multi-tier areas, county councils) are uniquely placed to “hold the ring” of accountability for public services locally and to enable the effective and efficient delivery of public services to local communities. As leaders of place local authorities should have a key role in determining the priorities of public services locally, including those not currently under direct democratic control.

We believe that a far greater proportion of the resource that is spent locally should be under local democratic control and direction. Local authorities taking direct responsibility from quangos or other agencies would lead to significant gains in both cost effectiveness and democratic accountability.

CCN supports efforts to consider the totality of public service activity and resource employed in an area and to ensure that the total effort is orchestrated and applied most efficiently and effectively to the achievement of the outcomes that are most important to that area. However, success requires central government to achieve a radically more joined up and holistic approach in order to deliver real service improvements and efficiencies.

### We call for:

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- **Recognition that the accountability derived from the local electoral process means that local authorities (and in multi-tier areas county councils) are uniquely placed to convene and lead partnerships locally;**
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- **A duty on all public bodies to cooperate with the local authority on an area based approach to the delivery of local services to local communities;**
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- **Extension of local democratic influence over other public services operating locally, including Health and Police. This includes extending the commissioning role of local authorities to encompass commissioning for health and social care. We also support the extension of scrutiny to include other public services and utilities;**
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- **A radical reduction in the number of quangos and other agencies and transfer of powers, responsibility and full funding to local government;**
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- **Real commitment across central government to the principles of considering the totality of public service activity and resource employed locally, and concerted action by central government to join up policy across Westminster and Whitehall and to streamline and align operating and performance frameworks.**

## A Local Approach to Sub-regional and Regional Working

**CCN believes** that local government is best placed to design sub-regional and regional arrangements to encourage effective working across administrative boundaries.

Fixed sub-regional structures bounded by rules and legislative requirements fit central government's need for conformity and control not the needs of local communities and economies. Local government is capable of managing more flexible and adaptable structures which provide a better fit with local needs and allow for more innovation in the longer term.

CCN believes that powers, functions and funding should be devolved from unelected regional and sub-regional bodies to elected local government, and to county authorities in continuing multi-tier areas. This includes responsibility for strategic economic development, regional planning (both spatial planning and economic strategy) and learning and skills.

In continuing multi-tier areas county councils should have responsibility for sub-regional spatial and economic strategies, working with other authorities in the region to ensure that where needed there is an overall congruent regional strategy which relates both to the specific needs of sub regions and to national strategy.

Placing responsibility for economic and spatial planning firmly at the county level is the best way of ensuring the provision of housing numbers to meet local and national need, with the economic growth, services and infrastructure required to build and maintain sustainable local communities.

### We call for:

- 
- Powers, functions and funding to be devolved from unelected regional and sub regional bodies to elected local government, to unitary authorities and to county authorities in continuing multi-tier areas. This includes responsibility for strategic economic development, spatial planning and learning and skills;
- 
- Any sub-regional or regional arrangements to be voluntary, based on whole LAA areas, and to enable local authorities as democratically accountable bodies to come together to work jointly in different patterns and combinations depending on the issue under consideration.

## Local Accountability to Local People

**CCN believes** that local government is primarily accountable to local people. The current performance and inspection regime places too much emphasis on accountability to central government and national performance and inspection frameworks and too little on achievement of local priorities and local performance management.

The current process is resource intensive and diverts energy and resources from service improvement into demonstrating compliance. We can no longer afford the distraction from core business that the current regime implies.

Future performance management must be built around local priorities and encourage the pursuit of excellence and innovation to meet the needs of citizens and service users, it must be streamlined and enable authorities to be fleet of foot.

We believe that there is a continuing role for effective, risk based, well targeted and above all proportionate inspection in this future vision particularly in the case of services to vulnerable groups. Councils and partnerships must take responsibility for improvement. Government must ensure that any national frameworks are aligned and that only issues that have to be determined at the national level are included.

### We call for:

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- A dramatic scaling back of nationally prescribed indicators, service frameworks and inspection and audit;
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- Locally owned performance management within local government that focuses on local priorities and encourages the pursuit of excellence and innovation to meet the needs of citizens and service users;
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- Alignment of any continuing central frameworks across all public services operating at the local level to ensure that different organisations working in partnership locally are not hampered by conflicting objectives and measures set at the national level;
- 
- Any remaining inspection to be risk based, well targeted and proportionate and focussed on services to vulnerable groups not on internal processes.

## Local Communities - Local economies

**CCN believes** that all of England's communities matter. The communities served by CCN member authorities are diverse. Although they may be more rural in nature, they also have significant urban populations. Counties tend to be "polycentric"; rather than having a single major urban conurbation at their core they tend to have a number of urban centres often of a similar size.

Counties therefore face particular challenges in having to balance the needs of urban and rural areas and to provide services to meet effectively the needs of both despite the additional cost of providing services in rural areas characterised by sparsity.

County areas are major contributors to the national economy, on a par with cities. However, there are clearly differences between the economies of urban and rural areas, and counties have characteristics of both. In more rural areas distance working and micro-businesses are an important element of the economy. Rural wages tend to be lower leading to issues of housing affordability, exacerbated by migration to rural areas. In county economies generally, tourism, the natural environment and agriculture continue to be important factors.

### We call for:

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- A greater recognition and understanding of the diversity of England's communities. Maximum devolution will make a significant contribution to enabling local authorities to ensure that services can be tailored to the needs of rural as well as urban areas;
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- All top level policy to be effectively rural proofed and for all of those engaged in policy development at a national and regional level to have a real understanding of the rural context to avoid simple assumptions that what works for urban areas will work equally well in a non-urban context;
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- A wider programme of exchange of staff between member authorities and Civil Servants in Whitehall and in the regions to help ensure that there is a wider understanding of governance outside of Westminster and Whitehall and the Cities.

## Fair Funding for Local Services

**CCN believes** that the current local government finance system is not fit for purpose. The money to provide local services channelled through central government is raised from local people, through Council Tax, national business rates and through taxes on income and expenditure.

The current funding model (the four block model) makes it almost impossible to explain to taxpayers, councillors and officers how an authority is funded. Ministers cannot use the model to direct funding appropriately to local authorities for particular services and must rely on specific or area based grants to ensure that funding reaches the correct authorities.

The plethora of individual funding schemes for different (and often related) initiatives each with different criteria, timescales and administrative requirements is inefficient and ineffective. CCN is also concerned that funding system does not adequately recognise the additional costs involved in the provision of services in county areas which contain a mixture of urban and rural areas.

A new approach to local government finance is needed to deliver greater autonomy and effectiveness in how local services are funded. This would include rationalising revenues and capital funding stream through a placed based approach to local services, return of business rates to local control, the ability to vary local taxation and the replacement of the four block model. Central government needs to fund fully the responsibilities that it delegates to local government and to address long term funding issues in areas such as adult social care and waste.

### We call for:

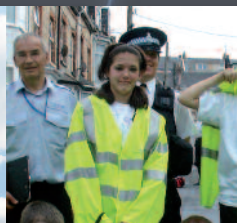
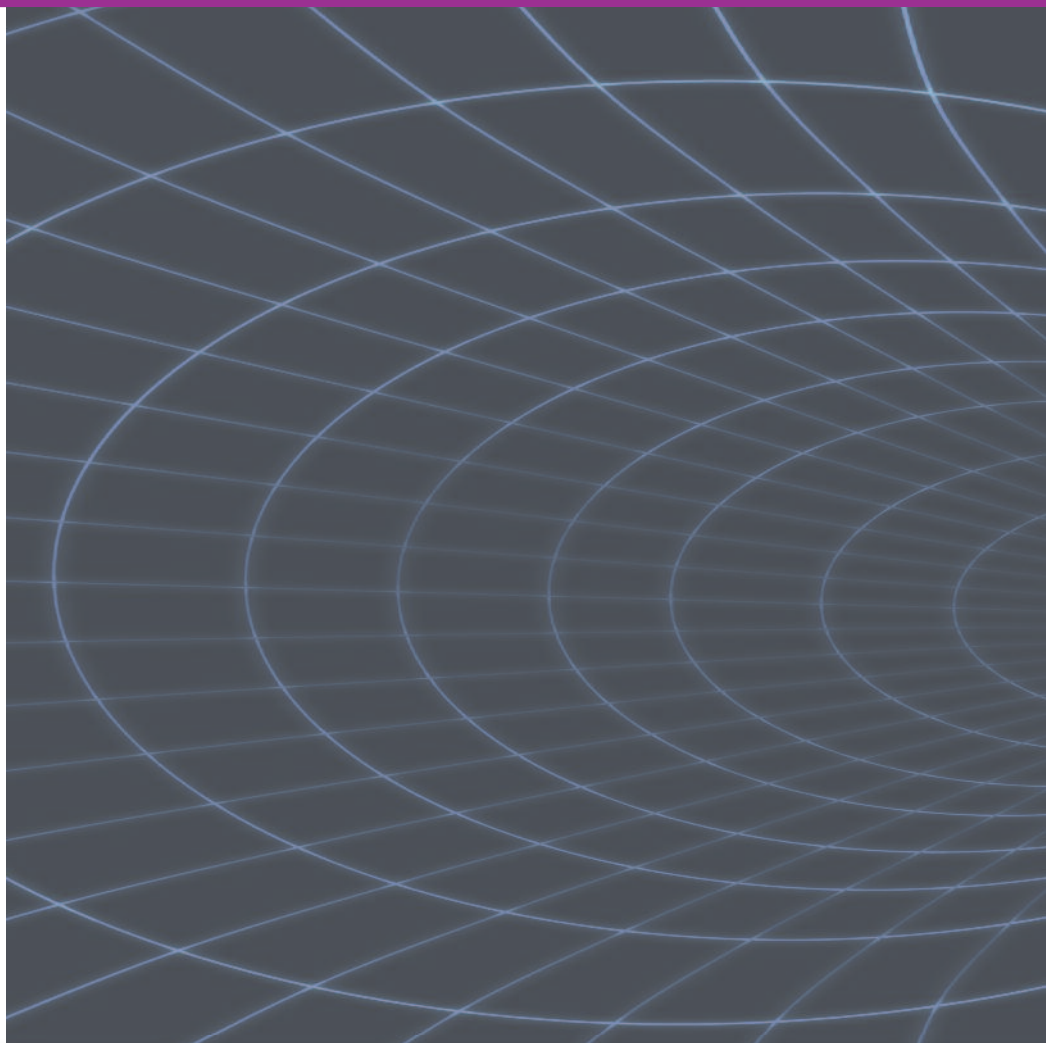
- 
- **A fundamental change to how local services are funded to ensure a greater autonomy and effectiveness in how local services are delivered. Funding must be directed to local government through a model that is fair and transparent;**
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- **Any new responsibilities devolved to local authorities must be fully funded;**
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- **Local authorities to have the ability to raise revenue locally to support local services and to enable the exercise of local political choice. Business rates should be returned to local control and local authorities need to have the ability to vary local taxes in response to particular local circumstances;**

- 
- Any model for allocating funding to local government must recognise the additional costs involved in the provision of services in county areas which contain a mixture of urban and rural areas. For education funding this would imply the implementation of an activity-led funding model with a fair balance between basic entitlement and targeted funding;
- 
- Continued support for prudential borrowing. Local authorities need to be able to take value for money decisions on the level of borrowing needed to invest properly in infrastructure.



# CCN

County Councils Network



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