

AGENDA ITEM 5

General Election – Campaigns & Advocacy Report by Head of Policy & Communications

Introduction

1. This discussion paper provides information on CCN's approach to engaging with the General Election and post-election period. It provides relevant background information and an update on activity to date by the CCN Team. Looking ahead, it sets out a recommended approach to engaging with the General Election and influencing the incoming Government, including ten key reforms to be promoted as a *Your County Matters: A Plan for Government* document.

General Election 2017

2. On 18th April, the Prime Minister announced that she intended to seek a General Election. Despite the Fixed Term Parliament Act, the House of Commons subsequently supported a motion in favour of a General Election and Parliament was dissolved on Tuesday 3rd May. The General Election will now take place on Thursday 8th June.
3. During the previous General Election campaign in 2015, CCN had considerable time to seek to influence all political party manifestos in the run up to the Election, publishing *Our Plan for Government 2015-20¹* some eight months before polling day.
4. The calling of a, largely unexpected, snap General Election severely curtails the lead-in period before Party Manifestos will be published. Coupled with purdah ahead County Elections, where CCN has not sought to publish policy, research or communications material which could impact on local or national campaigns, this has restricted CCN's ability to publicly seek to influence key policy areas of the main party agendas.
5. Despite the short lead into the Election, CCN has sought to influence party manifestos through our discussions with national key national stakeholders,

¹ <http://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk/library/july-2013/file79/>

building on the recent launch of our *Your County Matters* microsite. CCN has also arranged a number of meetings with Civil Servants in key departments, including the Treasury, DCLG, and BEIS, to update Officials on our on-going projects and feed into the briefing process for new Ministers.

6. At the time of writing, it is expected that the party manifestos will be officially published the week commencing the 15th May 2017. While the prevailing campaign and media narrative is dominated by debates over Brexit and Leadership, there has been much speculation over what will be included in the respective party manifestos; this includes strong indications that all parties will place a particular focus on social care, the Industrial Strategy, infrastructure investment and schools funding. These are all key issues CCN has been campaigning on for a number of months now, including through consultation responses, *Your County Matters* campaign and on-going research (see agenda item 4).
7. However, it has been heavily reported that party manifestos, particularly the Conservative Party's, are unlikely to provide extensive detail on how any specific policies will be developed and implemented. This provides scope for CCN to seek to influence the incoming Government outside of the Manifesto process.

Post-Election Lobbying

8. It is therefore critical that CCN focuses on finalising our existing research projects and preparing our post-election plans and messaging to engage new Ministers and Departments. It highly likely that whoever forms the next Government could potentially call an emergency budget and will undertake a Spending Review during the summer and Autumn. A new legislative programme will also be announced as part of the Queens Speech.
9. Following the conclusion of the local elections, the LGA published a short briefing outlining what it would like to see each of the main party manifestos adopt and implement on entering Office.² CCN understand that following the conclusion of the General Election, this will form the basis of a renewed advocacy agenda, with it is expected to focus on renewing the '100 Days' document published in 2014
10. The LGA have seemingly not undertaken extensive lobbying in the national media, recognising the need to manage sensitivities during the purdah period of both local and national election campaigns. It also reflects the difficulty of securing prominent coverage of local government advocacy during a congested period of national political positioning and multiple high-profile representative bodies seeking coverage.

² <http://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/local-government-priorities-general-election-manifestos-april>

11. CCN supports many of the policy priorities highlighted within the LGA briefing, particularly those relating to children's and adults social care. However, it is important to recognise that CCN have a number of unique, specific and independent policy positions for county authorities across local government finance, devolution, economic growth, schools and governance reform.
12. To articulate CCN's policy positions to the incoming Government, CCN has put together an overarching *Your County Matters: A Plan for Government* document. Building on recent advocacy and our current work programme, CCN is proposing that the 10 overarching priorities act as an accessible set of ideas to build CCN's advocacy during the pre and post-election period.
13. The overarching 10 priorities set out in Appendix 1 are deliberately high-level and provide the key messages for CCN to respond to manifesto pledges and any early announcements by the incoming Government. They provide an important set of proposals for CCN to communicate to Political Parties, Government and County MPs on entering office through proactive communications and public affairs activity.
14. CCN will also use the 10 priorities outlined in appendix 1 to actively seek to influence LGA positioning and subsequent policy development post-election.
15. Once the formation of the incoming administration, Ministers and priorities become clearer, CCN will use on-going research and advocacy projects, including recent consultation responses (see agenda item 4), to provide additional robust evidence to refine our messaging and provide more specific supporting policy positions.
16. CCN aim to launch a full designed publication at the Executive on Wednesday 19th July. CCN will then engage in more detailed advocacy during the first months of the new administration, seeking to influence key milestones such as the Queens Speech and Spending Review.

Next Steps

17. A timeline of key dates and milestones for CCN's pre and post-election advocacy is provided in Appendix 2.
18. Following the discussion at Executive and publication of manifestos, CCN will refine the *Your County Matters: A Plan for Government*. In light of any developments since this paper was written (i.e. Manifesto launches) CCN ask Executive Committee to comment on, and approve, the overarching 10 priorities as a basis for the pre and post-election CCN activity.
19. During May and June, CCN will engage members of the Executive and wider membership, through our members survey and also our through our key officer networks, to develop further detailed policy proposals in the coming months.

20. Following the publication of Manifestos and during the lead up to the General Election, CCN will consider some limited media activity in both the national and trade media to trail some of the CCN's key priorities to be adopted by an incoming Government.
21. Following the conclusion of the Election and as the new Government begins to take shape, CCN will utilise the Chairman, Vice-Chairmen and Spokesmen to undertake further national advocacy on the policy priorities outlined in the *Your County Matters: A Plan for Government*.

Recommendations

- 1) Members note the contents of this paper and strategy for engaging the new Government.
- 2) Members comment on, and approve, the CCN's *Your County Matters: A Plan for Government*.

Appendix 1 –

DRAFT:

Your County Matters: A Plan for Government

10 Reforms to Transform Services and the Lives of Residents in Counties

CCN and County Leaders believe that the incoming Government must be bold in a number of policy areas to ensure that counties achieve their full potential; recognising the unique issues facing England's county heartlands and proposing radical reforms to empower County authorities to deliver fairer funding for local services, drive growth, and reform public services. Equally, our focus is on ensuring that CCN works in a constructive manner with whoever enters Downing Street on Friday 9th June, providing practical solutions, based on robust evidence, to the Government in delivering our shared priorities for Office.

Our 10 priorities for reform would help transform local services and the lives of residents in Shire Counties. *A Plan for Government* builds on the established advocacy of CCN, articulated through our *Your County Matters* campaign.

You can find out more on CCN's Your County Matters campaign by visiting www.yourcountymatters.org.uk

1) Fair Funding for Local Government – delivering both sustainable and *fairer* funding deal for County Shires, addressing the historic funding and council tax inequalities between rural and metropolitan areas. Ensuring that councils have the funding they need to provide vital services is crucial but of equal importance is ensuring fairness. The incoming Government should commit to, and prioritise, the continuation of a full needs-based review of local government funding based on the 'cost-drivers' model developed by the Associations of Local Authority Treasurers.

2) Incentivising Growth & Self-Sufficiency – reforms to local government finance to ensure that councils are truly incentivised to promote sustainable growth, efficient service provision and become self-sustaining. The incoming Government should commit to the implementation of full business rates retention, but recognise the complexity of delivering a system that provides fair and sustainable baseline funding and incentivises growth. The pause in the Local Government Finance Bill should be used to reassess the policy and engage CCN on their recent modelling on the implications of reform, which demonstrates London and district councils will disproportionately benefit unless the specific needs of counties are recognised. Of equal importance is starting a national debate on wider fiscal freedoms for local government and incentivising the right behaviours and efficiencies, including further changes to New Homes Bonus, and ensuring an evidence-based approach to restructuring proposals that maximise efficiency savings.

3) An economy that works for all – a place-based industrial strategy to drive growth in our towns, counties and rural heartlands. The recently published Green Paper set out the case for a place-based industrial strategy to deliver an economy that tackles our internationally weak productivity; but the paper largely neglected both the opportunities and challenges facing county and rural economies. Building on recently commissioned research by CCN on county economies, there is the opportunity for the incoming Government to better articulate that county and rural economies are of equal importance to a strong, stable and resurgent post-Brexit UK economy. We need a national debate about how the annual £8.6bn net contribution from the UK to the EU budget and replacement for EU Structural funds can be used as a catalyst to transform local economies and life chances.

4) Thriving communities – strategic planning and infrastructure investment that allows counties to grow. It has been universally recognised that the planning system in England is not delivering enough homes. We need bolder reforms in county areas to address the lack of spatial strategic planning, with a more formal role for county councils. Insufficient investment in our transport and physical infrastructure is the greatest source of local opposition to new developments, while improvements to digital infrastructure in rural communities is necessary to deliver high-value jobs and economic growth. Strategic planning powers for counties would help areas better align provision, but we need to bridge the unsustainable gap between infrastructure investment afforded to our Cities and investment in county areas if we are to deliver more homes and boost county economies.ⁱ

5) Social and economic inclusion – bridging the aspiration, attainment and skills gap after Brexit. If the post-Brexit economic policy is to address underlying issues associated with the vote to leave the EU, it must focus on skills and employment in county areas, ensuring well paid, highly skilled employment opportunities. Work-based wages are significantly lower in county areas, while the skills misalignments are also pervasive. We must ensure the full devolution of the national skills and adult learning budgets to all upper-tier councils through devolution (see below) and full business rates retention. Wider radical reforms to Further Education provision must also be considered, with a greater role for local councils.

6) Devolution to Shire England - empowering county authorities as the default body for devolved powers and functions. All political parties have recognised that an inclusive economy, building more homes, and bridging the skills gap all require local leadership and devolved public services; but devolution outside of the major cities has stalled. England's County heartlands are missing out on the opportunities of greater local decision making. Counties recognise the need for less fragmented governance and service provision, alongside stronger more accountable local leadership. But combined authorities and elected mayors are largely unsuitable for county areas, and most importantly, unpopular. We need to find an alternative. The next phase of devolution should devolve a strategic suite and core offer of functions and budgets to all areas and ensure that powers

returned from Brussels are devolved from Westminster to local areas. System leadership by county and county unitary authorities at scale, based around county geographies, but in partnership with district and unitary councils is required. In this vein, recent proposals put forward by Localis require specific attention, while Government should set out a clear, evidence based agenda on local government reorganisation for those areas wishing to pursue reform.

7) Sustainable social care – a locally-led system that is fair and equitable for service users and taxpayers. The provision of £2bn in the Spring Budget provided much needed stability in the short-term. However, counties want to work with the incoming Government to deliver a long-term, sustainably funded and prevention-focused solution for social care, including a range of innovative options, such as insurance products. We must ensure that self-funding clients are not unfairly burdened with spiralling care costs and local authority funded clients receive quality care in the most appropriate setting. Any future funding model must seek to ensure there is adequate funding for existing funding shortfalls, and any cap on care is fully funded. Resources must follow need, including taking into account the significant cost of delivering services to the largest and fastest growing elderly population in rural county areas.

8) Health and Social Care Integration – bringing democratic leadership and financial discipline to the NHS. Funding alone will not deliver a long-term sustainable settlement for social care, and counties recognise that the pace of integration needs to be intensified. The recently published Next Steps on the NHS Five Year Forward View potentially represents a backward step towards integration, while complex and overlapping STP footprints and some unpopular local plans developed in isolation to local government are not aiding progress. Local government leadership in health commissioning needs to be strengthened and long standing systematic barriers must be removed, including a review of the delivery of disabled facilities grants to reduce the negative impact that exists in two-tier areas on delayed transfers of care.

9) Preventative children's social care – a fully-funded and prevention focused service to provide every child with the best start in life. Any incoming Government must seek to close the existing funding gap for children's social care and provide the conditions for counties to invest in preventative and family-based interventions. Investing in providing stable homes will improve the life chances of children, including improving attainment and reducing the chance of them not being in education, employment or training as they enter adulthood.

10) A modern and fair education system – fairer funding for a mixed economy of excellent schools. The incoming Government must deliver a fairer schools funding formula that addresses the historic discrepancies that have seen county schools receive significantly less funding for schools with similar characteristics when compared to areas such as Inner London. Existing plans to reform must continue, but the proposed formula must be significantly revised. A successful and vibrant schools sector must contain a mixed economy of schools, including maintained, free schools and academies. The county role in educational provision must not be

overlooked, with 86% of our schools either good or outstanding. The incoming Government should seek to protect the role of Counties in delivering locally-led school support services that are shaped and responsive to local circumstances. CCN member councils deliver efficient and valued services, including school improvement services which continue to be purchased by 68% of academies.

Appendix 2 – Advocacy Timeline & Actions

May

- CCN Executive to discuss and approve overarching 10 priorities for Shire Counties
- CCN team to consider implications of manifesto pledges for CCN Member Councils.
- CCN to issue Members Survey to Leaders, Cabinet Members and Executive Members.

June

- 8th - General Election Results
- Following the appointment of the full government, CCN to develop understanding of key figures, their positions and best methods of approach.
- 19th - State Opening of Parliament
- Post the State Opening of Parliament, CCN to adjust work Programme to correspond to Parliament's legislative agenda, and to seek clarity on the implications for existing work streams.
- 20th June – KMPG & CCN Health & Social Care Integration Seminar
- Date TBC - CCN to launch Oxford Economics study and undertake proactive media and public affairs strategy.
- Date TBC – CCN to launch LG Futures Research on Learning Disabilities.
- CCN to develop more detailed proposals to be included in full *Your County Matters: A Plan for Government*.
- CCN to prepare briefings for new County MPs with a view to hosting an event at an appropriate time.

July

- 4th - LGA Conference
- CCN Reception at LGA Conference (4 July, 18:30-20:30 at Round Room, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham B3 3DH)
- CCN to use LGA conference to engage with key opinion formers and any new ministers as necessary. CCN to provide member councils with updated briefings on CCN's *Your County Matters: A Plan for Government* to ensure coherent messaging on the areas that matter most to counties.
- 19th July – CCN will launch a full *Your County Matters: A Plan for Government* at the CCN Executive.

August-September

- Spending Review Consultation (unconfirmed)
- 20th September – CCN AGM & Council



COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

CCN Executive

Wednesday 17 May 2017

AGENDA ITEM 6

County Economies & the Industrial Strategy
Report by Head of Policy & Communications
Presentation by Richard Holt, Oxford Economics
