

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP

Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
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Dear Prime Minister

County Devolution - Delivering Your Ambitions

I write to you in my capacity as Chairman of the County Councils Network (CCN), the representative body for England's county councils and largest unitary authorities.

As we emerge from the coronavirus pandemic, Leaders of our councils share your ambitions to build back better and level up all four corners of England. Last week, your commitment to 're-write' the approach to devolution outside our major cities and empower our great counties to achieve this, marked an important point in the history of our nation.

Counties contain some of the most prosperous places in England, but they are also home to some of the least socially mobile and most deprived communities in the country. CCN has led calls for levelling up and devolution to reach all four corners of England, and we strongly welcome your recent speech. It recognised that county areas must be the building blocks for devolution outside our major cities and the need to empower local leaders to successfully deliver levelling up.

Making devolution a reality in counties could be a game changer for the levelling-up agenda and CCN now stands ready to help deliver County Deals and substantive devolved powers that, until now, have only been available to mayors in the city regions. Your commitment to a flexible approach to strengthening local leadership and governance is welcome and we are encouraged by the principles underpinning County Deals set out following your speech.

We hope that in the coming months the Government can build on these principles through the Levelling Up White Paper, being clear on the need to empower county and unitary authorities to lead negotiations with Government, while working collaboratively with local partners. We will engage extensively with Robert Jenrick and Neil O'Brien on the details of the White Paper during the summer.

Most importantly, turning your commitments into action requires us, the leaders of England's county and unitary authorities, to come to you with our vision on how we can level up, back business, attract more good jobs and improve local services.

CCN will now begin an extensive programme of support to our member councils as they begin to develop their proposals. We need to be bold and ambitious. With Government backing, I am certain our councils have the expertise, local knowledge and capacity to bring forward exciting proposals, with their partners, to devolve powers and budgets across areas such as skills, transport, housing and infrastructure, while providing a platform to drive forward service integration and efficiency at a local level.

I hope that early in the autumn you will meet with county leaders to discuss how we can take the next steps in delivering real devolution to our counties at scale and at pace.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Tim Oliver
CCN Chairman
Leader, Surrey County Council