

CCN

COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

UNLEASH THE POTENTIAL

OF COUNTIES

Executive Summary

Our Priorities for the New Government

#countiesmatter

Overview

The 36 county and county unitary authorities that make up CCN are the largest part of the local government family. They represent all four corners of England, from Cumbria to Cornwall, Durham to Kent, North Yorkshire to Suffolk, Derbysire to Essex.

The essential services they provide touch on the everyday lives of residents and businesses across 86% of England's landmass and 47% of its population.

This why county authorities, and the communities our councils represent, must be at the heart of the new Government's domestic agenda.

At a time of financial restraint, counties have shown time and again how they can forge new partnerships across the public and private sector to continue to be leaders of place and the anchor institution within our local communities.

As the new government begin to set out their legislative programme, this document sets out the priorities of our member councils and the proposals they believe can help them realise the potential of their areas; from levelling up left-behind areas, tackling our housing crisis to reforming social care.

It outlines our practical proposals across **sustainable and fair funding, reforming adults & children's social care** and securing **devolution for all** to ensure our members have the foundations in place to achieve their ambitions.

With the right foundations in place, counties can do more for their places by **creating communities, growing our economies**, and **tackling climate change**.

Despite many common perceptions, counties are more than just social care authorities; they are the key local agency that can engineer public service reform at scale and help tackle the climate emergency; deliver the homes our communities need; and support the government in delivering post-Brexit growth and prosperity.

We look forward to working together with government to **unleash the potential of counties**.

At a glance...



Our priorities for the new Government

Sustainable & fair funding



Providing a multi-year funding settlement to meet councils spending need, delivering the fair funding review and reforming local government finance so it is more efficient.

Reforming adults & children's social care



A solution to social care funding and reforming care services across the life cycle; improving integration with health, investing in prevention and reforming special educational needs and disabilities legislation.

Devolution for all



A practical framework for devolved powers, institutional and structural reform to genuinely drive powers down to local communities; from Whitehall to County Hall.

Creating communities



A more strategic approach to planning, matched by new infrastructure financing, while enabling counties to continue to provide culture services, improve community safety and well-being.

Growing our economies



Creating the conditions for thriving economies in our communities by harnessing the role of county authorities in place-based growth, devolving skills budgets and investing in transport and connectivity.

Tackling climate change



Supporting councils to reduce their carbon emissions, improving parks, public places and waste management, and investing in green infrastructure and resilience.

#countiesmatter

Over the last ten years, councils have needed to rapidly adapt to a climate of significantly reduced resources, growing and ageing demographics, and the changing needs of our residents. Over 65% of county expenditure is now dedicated to social care. Moreover, the distribution of funding no longer matches the needs of local areas.

Our latest funding forecasts* show that even if county authorities receive an inflationary increase in funding, alongside the continuation of all current funding for social care, they still face a cumulative funding shortfall of £13.2bn over the next five years and pressure to raise council tax. This represents an underlying funding gap of £1.8bn in 2020/21 which will increase year on year to £3.6bn in 2024/25.

Our first priority must be ensuring sustainable and fair funding, providing a solution to the long-term funding needs of councils but also reforming council finance so it is fairer and more efficient. This will allow councils to preserve frontline services, invest in local and national priorities and continue to innovate service delivery to improve outcomes for residents.

Key proposals

- **Immediate confirmation of the provisional local government settlement. The minimum baseline for allocations should be based on the proposals contained in the technical consultation to allow councils to plan effectively and get budgets in place for the financial year starting 1st April 2020.**

- **The £2bn pot hole fund should be distributed directly to councils using the same methodology as 2018/19 with no reporting duties placed on councils.**
- **Use a Spending Review in 2020 to deliver a multi-year settlement of 4 years. This should seek to provide sufficient Core Spending Power up to 2024/25 to meet the projected spending need requirements set out in the Independent Review recently conducted by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) for CCN.**
- **Government must restate a commitment to implement the Review of Relative Needs and Resources in 2021/22. A final consultation and indicative allocations under the formula must be published in early 2020.**
- **The Localism Act should be amended to end the council tax referendum threshold. Councils should have full discretionary powers over council tax discounts.**
- **NHB should either be reformed or abolished. If abolished the funding should be redistributed based on need, with any reform focused on reviewing the role of incentives so they better reward upper-tier councils vital role in providing infrastructure that enables sustainable housing development.**
- **As part of their review of business rates, the Government must fully engage the sector on the future of business rates retention.**

*Updated funding forecasts to be published in early 2020 – includes annual 1.7% increase in settlement funding assessment, 3% public health & continuation of all 2020/21 social care grants to 2024/25

Key Issues at a glance.....



A multi-year settlement of 4 years
Sustainable Funding Settlement



Fairer Funding
Completion of the fair funding review & implementation in 2021



Council Tax & Fiscal Devolution
Freedom over local taxation



Rates & Reform
A new housing & infrastructure incentive & review of business rates retention



All political parties have accepted the need to set out long-term plans for the funding of adult social care services. It is widely accepted that the status quo is no longer an option and this parliament must finally resolve the urgent questions over how adult social care is paid for and delivered.

Sustainable funding is a vital first step to enable counties to deliver the high-quality social care that residents expect. But money is only part of the solution and for this investment to be effective it must be accompanied by reform to the wider framework in which social care for adults and children is delivered.

Councils also continue to have a major role in education. Government must support councils in ensuring the sufficiency of school places and provide sufficient funding for home to school transport (HTST) and special educational needs and disabilities, alongside considering wider legislative reform.

Key proposals

- **Publish a social care White Paper within six months of taking office. This must begin a national discussion and cross-party approach to consider the funding options for adult social care, including younger adults.**
- **Local government must be an equal partner in all local discussions with democratic accountability and population public health underpinning the integration agenda.**
- **Review STP boundaries so they are co-terminous with those of county authorities to ensure efficient and effective integration.**
- **Prioritise investment in children's social care at the Spending Review 2020. A key priority must be children's services, recognising that this is now the fastest growing pressure facing local government.**
- **Increase investment in family support services drawing on the growing bank of evidence and science-based approaches which ensure the 'best start for every child' in their earliest years.**
- **Empower local authorities to be able to require free schools and academies to expand the number of school places they provide to meet local demand.**
- **The Government should consider reviewing statutory duties in relation to Home-to-school transport.**
- **Issue clear guidance for what constitutes "efficient use of resources" in the Children and Families Act 2014, to minimise the amount of SEND cases heard at tribunals.**
- **Support local authorities to invest in creating more specialist SEND places.**
- **Provide greater powers for councils to direct SEND placements in mainstream schools including within academies.**

Key Issues at a glance.....



A solution to the long term funding of adult social care
Adult Social Care Reform



Health & Social Care Integration

Improving local integration with health & housing



Investment in children's services, & improving prevention
Children's Services

Education & SEND

Reforming legislation and providing the right support to families



The devolution agenda gained ground under recent administrations. However, too much time was spent on political negotiation, and too much focus retained on the big cities. The case for devolution to counties is compelling. Devolving powers and funding on economic growth and public sector reform would have a major impact on economic growth in county areas.

Harnessing the strategic role of county authorities must be at the heart of the devolution proposition in shire counties, and the new Government should seek to build on the foundations already in place in our areas.

The county acts as a practical and effective layer of government, being strategic, yet inherently recognised and celebrated by residents. County boundaries are an asset, not a brick wall; with the ability to reach into district and parish economies, but also work constructively across borders at a strategic scale with sub-national and national bodies.

Key proposals

- **The Devolution Whitepaper should provide as much parity with Mayoral Combined Authorities on devolution as possible. This includes powers for a Statutory Spatial Plan; responsibility for the Shared Prosperity Fund; delivery of the Education and Skills Funding Agency; and powers over Bus Franchising.**

- **Provide clear guidance to local areas on acceptable devolution geographies, seeking coterminosity with county boundaries and avoiding inappropriate geographies that could undermine continuing service delivery.**
- **Set out a broad range of Governance options, including non-mayoral combined authority models. This should include options for the strategic authority within the area to take on accountable body status supported through the formation of a joint or special committees.**
- **Any mayoral combined authority should be tailored to recognise the additional complexity of two-tier areas, including voting rights between partners.**
- **The Devolution Whitepaper should set out the options for a county council to strengthen direct accountability through the constitutional adoption of the directly elected mayor/leader.**
- **The Devolution Whitepaper should set out a criteria for unitary reform. This should include confirmation of a minimum population limit 'substantially more' than 300,000 with no upper population limit.**
- **Set out a framework to encourage reform to the existing two-tier structure and greater collaboration in specific service areas.**
- **Align public service bodies to form contiguous boundaries to simplify joint working.**

Key Issues at a glance.....



Ambitious and suitable devolution deals for county & rural areas

Devolution Whitepaper



Accountability

A practical framework for devolved powers



A criteria for institutional and structural reform
Local Government Reform



Public Service Reform

Reforming partnership to support public service reform.



Counties are great places to live and work, and where business and enterprise thrive. However, county house prices are higher than the national average and infrastructure investment has not kept pace with demand. Many county areas have large infrastructure gaps which jeopardises their ability to create sustainable communities.

However, creating real communities requires more than bricks and mortar. Despite the trends of twenty-first century living, such as spending more time online and commuting longer distances to work, most people retain a strong connection to the place in which they live and form identities based on the communities they live in. Counties are the principal agency who need to ensure their residents feel safe as well as promoting their well-being.

Key proposals

- **Encourage joined-up strategic planning outside metro-mayor areas at a county scale in order to improve the duty-to-cooperate. This could be through the formal creation of a growth board, or more informally through non-statutory spatial plans or reintroduction of statutory strategic planning.**
- **Amend legislation to ensure that councils are not bound to sell sites on the basis of higher short-term receipts ahead of long-term social and economic gains.**
- **Set out a framework for housing and growth deals building on the deal agreed across Oxfordshire.**
- **Move to a more balanced distribution of central infrastructure funding between counties and cities which better aligns with local priorities. Funding should be decentralised as far as possible, with decisions made by local leaders on the ground.**
- **Reform the developer contributions system ensuring that, in two tier areas, contributions are distributed fairly to cover the range of physical and social infrastructure required for new development.**
- **Extend the Strategic Infrastructure Tariff to county areas to allow them to fund major infrastructure projects that would help to support and unlock growth opportunities.**
- **County authorities should be fully engaged within national strategies alongside their metropolitan counterparts to protect vulnerable children and prevent serious crime, including knife crime.**
- **Information-sharing protocols between local authorities must be strengthened to ensure that out of area placements of vulnerable children are notified to and co-ordinated by the authority in which the placement is located**
- **Ensure public health funding is protected in real terms over the course of the next parliament. Fully engage counties with national public health strategies for reducing drug misuse and youth crime.**
- **Ensure counties receive a fair share of the £250m cultural capital programme.**

Key Issues at a glance.....



A more strategic approach to planning
Housing & Planning



Infrastructure Financing

Reform the developer contributions system & prioritise long term infrastructure funding



Tackling knife crime and promoting preventative public health approaches

Community Safety & Public Health

Culture & Tourism

Certainty and fair funding for cultural services



County areas are the backbone of the UK economy, delivering 39% of GVA and almost half of England's jobs. However, they suffer from structural weaknesses such as poor productivity and business growth, lower than median wages and significant skills gaps. Despite common perceptions, they are also home to many of the 'left behind' towns, rural and coastal communities in England.

It is this combination of factors that means counties must be at the heart of the incoming government's placed-based growth agenda. They offer a broad reflection on different experiences from those at the heart of driving economic growth through to those facing significant socio-economic challenges.

County authorities are uniquely placed, as strategic authorities, to respond to these opportunities and challenges. Counties are the key local agency in placed-based growth, delivering billions each year in growth related expenditure and capital investment; to their influencing and leadership role as convener, facilitator, and vision setter.

Key proposals

- **Ensure that counties play a key role in the implementation of the Towns Fund and strengthen the role of county councils in delivering the high-streets fund.**
- **Sustainable and fair funding, including a multi-year funding settlement, reforms to New Homes Bonus and business rates retention will allow counties to increase growth-related expenditure.**
- **The National Infrastructure Commission infrastructure assessments should ensure greater consideration of the infrastructure requirements in non-metropolitan areas.**
- **Publish a consultation on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund as soon as possible. It must ensure it gives counties fair opportunities to access future funding opportunities that will reduce economic disparity and generate future economic growth.**
- **Allow bids for the Local Public Transport Fund from county and county unitary authorities to ensure that they have the powers and funding to improve transport.**
- **Revisit reforms to Local Enterprise Partnerships to better recognise the role of local government in driving forward place-based growth. This should also include an enhanced role for counties in the preparation of Local Industrial Strategies.**
- **Empower Sub-National Transport Bodies and consolidate the role of upper-tier councils, devolve appropriate powers alongside sufficient funding and freedoms for counties over local transport.**
- **A target for a full-fibre rollout to all households by 2025 is welcome, but it must set out a clear road-map to achieve this in partnership with county authorities.**
- **Devolve the same responsibilities and budgets for skills and employment that metro-mayor areas enjoy to county councils and unitary authorities.**

Key Issues at a glance.....



Harnessing the strategic role of counties

Regeneration & Productivity

Strategic Investment & Partnerships
Investment to enable growth & reforming partnerships



Improving physical & digital connectivity to support growth
Transport & Connectivity

Skills & Employment
Devolving skills to improve social mobility



Climate change is widely recognised as the greatest challenge facing our generation. The recent general election saw climate change become one of the key issues for debate, with every political party taking care to set out plans to transform the economy and reduce carbon emissions.

County authorities are a vital part of the necessary solution to the climate emergency, through their responsibility for infrastructure, economic growth, stewardship of the rural environment, statutory roles in waste and recycling and providing green spaces and public places. But they want to go further and translate their declarations of climate emergencies into practical action.

Key proposals

- **The government should create a climate transition fund for councils, to enable the rapid conversion of assets including council properties, schools and fleets.**
- **Support counties in developing public health strategies to help reduce air pollution and consult local government on new air quality laws.**
- **Procurement rules should be altered so that all contractors are required to report their carbon emissions and to place a 'carbon/environmental cost' on competing bids.**
- **Local authorities should be engaged as part of efforts to identify land that can be used for environmental purposes.**
- **Create a new investment fund for county farms to ensure their continued long-term viability, providing opportunities for a new generation of farmers.**
- **Priority should be given to infrastructure that will assist councils to develop low-carbon economies.**
- **Infrastructure investment needs to be assessed in such a way as to ensure that communities can get the infrastructure that they need to protect them from adverse weather events and future-proofed to take into account climate threats.**
- **A fair distribution of new flood defence investment, particularly for rural and remote areas.**
- **Bellwin payments are the main mechanism through which councils are reimbursed for additional expenditure when there is an adverse weather event. Given the increased likelihood of these sorts of events, the government should work with council to review the scheme to ensure that it is working as well as it could.**
- **Incentivise and encourage greater collaboration and consolidation of waste contracts into single waste strategies to improve joint-working and increase financial efficiencies.**
- **Review discretionary charging powers of upper-tier councils for waste and recycling services, including freedoms over fees and charges.**

Key Issues at a glance.....



Supporting councils to reduce their carbon emission
Council leadership



Parks & Public Places
improving parks, public places



Prioritising green infrastructure and resilience
Green Infrastructure & Resilience



Waste & Recycling
Greater collaboration across county and district councils to streamline services





COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

Founded in 1997, the County Councils Network is the voice of England's counties. A cross-party organisation, CCN develops policy, commissions research, and presents evidence-based solutions nationally on behalf of the largest grouping of local authorities in England.

In total, the 26 county councils and 10 unitary councils that make up the CCN represent 26 million residents, account for 41% of England's GVA, and deliver high-quality services that matter the most to local communities

The network is a cross party organisation, expressing the views of member councils to the government and within the Local Government Association.

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