

CCN Chairman – Opening Address

Good morning and welcome to everybody.

As always, we have a really good attendance at our ever popular annual CCN conference.

Our conference, gives us time to consider and reflect on the challenges and opportunities before us and of course in good company.

<pause>

Last year, my speech started with by me saying “that it was the third and final time I would address the CCN Conference as your Chairman.”

But, here I am again one year on!

I am extremely grateful to you for extending my stay for the fourth and final important and significant year ahead.

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The County Councils Network is highly regarded and respected – not only amongst our member councils but nationally and within the corridors of power at Westminster and Whitehall.

Our reputation has been hard-earned – our campaigning is measured – considered and well thought through.

Differentiating the ground upon which we campaign, not jumping on every available bandwagon for the sake of publicity.

Our approach is intelligent, evidence based and assertive.

We frequently create national headlines as indeed we have in recent weeks with great success.

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At this point, I am sure all of us would like to join together in thanking our hard-working, small and dedicated team of seven at CCN Headquarters.

They work so hard to support members all year round to make it all happen, including in this conference.

<APPLUASE pause>

Usually I start by reflecting on the year gone by and the agenda in the year ahead.

However, the priorities of last year continue to be unresolved, and will be dominated by money and finance.

Staying financially solvent this year, has been a challenge.

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I said in my speech last year, and I quote “put frankly, counties more than any other sector of local government need a lifeline from Central Government over the next two financial years.

whilst we await the introduction of a new evidence based, fair funding formula and the introduction of a simpler business rate retention model”.

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It is within this context that CCN launched a campaign for additional funding earlier this year.

CCN have utilised the spotlight on our councils, by spelling out clearly to Government and our Members of Parliament the severity of our financial situation.

Our campaign for emergency funding to help us through both the current and coming financial year up to 2021 has been successful.

I can confidently say it exceeded all expectations!

Without this additional funding from government, the consequences would have been severe!

So, to Government – Thank You for listening – Thank You for responding.

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Later today, we have the opportunity to show our appreciation to the Secretary of State, James Brokenshire

And also Rishi Sunak, Local Government Minister leading on the funding issues.

They made strenuous efforts in securing a better outcome in the Autumn Budget than we could have realistically expected.

But, we are under no illusion that the challenges we face in the future will have somehow disappeared.

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Obtaining a good outcome from the Spending Review and the Fair Funding Formula will be our principle objectives.

This is alongside influencing;

- The long-awaited social care green paper ;
- Designing a simpler business rates retention system that rewards growth;
- AND delivering fundamental reform to the New Homes Bonus.

To help achieve this, I am delighted to be officially launching our new campaign, ***A Fairer Future for Counties*** today.

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This new campaign will articulate the on-going financial pressures we face and providing Government with the evidence base to feed into the Fair Funding review.

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In launching this new campaign, I want to make it quite clear that CCN is in no way trying to skew the dice to the advantage of counties but to provide Government with robust evidence across all of local government that supports the need for change.

We may gain on the swings and lose on some of the roundabouts.

However, one thing I am sure of, is that provided the new funding model is FAIR, NEEDS-LED and EVIDENCE-BASED counties share of the funding cake will be proportionality greater than under the current complex, opaque system that it replaces.

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I can say this with confidence, because of the quality of CCN's research and advocacy they provide.

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Take for instance adult learning disabilities. Now exceeding the net cost of providing social care services to the elderly and frail in many of member councils.

Analysis published today by CCN, shows that the annual costs of providing services to our adult disabled residents will be almost £2bn higher in 2024/25 than a decade ago, with 49% of these costs falling on member authorities.

In addition, our research shows that the number of adults with learning disabilities is a third higher in CCN Member authorities compared to London boroughs – big, big differentials which must be reflected and weighted in the funding formula.

Residents with adult learning disabilities now thankfully have a much longer life expectancy, greater independence and a greatly improved quality of life.

However, many understandably are restricted in their earning capacity, and therefore all the costs fall directly on our councils.

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Similarly, counties as a fact of Rurality face a disproportionate burden in providing mainstream school

transport and specifically Special Education Needs transport.

CCN has shown that counties' costs to provide school transport are many times higher than urban areas, as a result of distances travelled.

And research published this week will show that SEN home to school transport costs have increased by 30% since 2014.

And again, in education, our statutory duty to provide a sufficiency of school places, alongside the increasing demand for high-needs funding, are creating real significant pressures to both our capital and revenue budgets.

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To ensure the long term survival of councils these enormous extra costs must be recognised and the situation rectified.

For the fair funding review to be a success, significant additional resources for local government need to be introduced through the Spending Review – if we are to continue to deliver the complex range of services to our residents and business, and that reflect the growth in demand, particularly people-based services in children and adults social care.

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Good progress is being made. Local government ministers highly value CCN's input and are keen to engage further.

To help us in this endeavour, CCN has commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers to provide independent, robust evidence of the demand-led pressures and importantly the comparisons between ourselves and our metropolitan counterparts, where indeed pressures and needs may be different and should be therefore reflected if the formula is to be truly fair.

PwC will be expanding on this vital piece of work to conference after my speech.

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But it is not just the funding, our campaign for a "Fairer Future for Counties" is about so much more.

Understandably, through the Brexit negotiations, devolution has taken a backstage.

Our campaign to influence Government to trust, devolve and empower strategic counties must be reinvigorated.

Calling for Westminster to let go, devolve and reduce the bureaucratic burden and prescription from Whitehall.

We must set out our case for change that has the potential to improve a whole range of local government services, and more broadly, other public services. For example:

- Empowered to help the integration of health and social care.
- Growing our economies in partnership with LEP's, providing growth and prosperity alongside skills fit for the future.
- Greater strategic planning powers, supporting accelerated housing delivery and infrastructure for growth.

Counties could achieve so much more if empowered to get on with the job!

<pause>

I hope it won't be a distraction, but behind me whilst I am speaking, you will see a few photographs on screen, taken from a book the "History of Kent County Council". reminding us all of how it used to be – so much has gone backwards.

Counties had responsibility for community and mental health, further education and skills, infrastructure provision, policing and even the county home guard.

We need to change the direction of travel to deliver a fair future for counties that draws on our great past.

For instance, take Health and social care integration.

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Whilst we await with baited breath for the social care Green paper, we must continue to argue strongly for greater leverage for local government in bringing about community health and care integration.

Delivering better use of the NHS pound and the social care pound, alongside better health and wellbeing outcomes.

Very much in line with Heather Jameson's excellent editorial in the Municipal Journal last week entitled: "Healing health is a local government issue".

And I quote: "It is true that the National Health Service has become a National Hospital Service, driving people towards A&E and the most costly parts of the system for ailments that could and should be caught before they reach crisis point. Not just to cut costs but to stop suffering too".

Clinical Commissioning Groups have been reluctant to engage with local government.

But where local government has penetrated the barriers, a few spectacular outcomes have been delivered across the country.

And I cite one small example in Canterbury, where barriers have come down, integration and joint working has taken place.

Admissions into hospitals have reduced by 20% and likewise speeding up delayed transfers out of hospital - saving CCGs really significant sums of money.

A greater investment in community health services around GP practices is essential.

Surely, with the significant additional money being invested in the National Health Service and the forthcoming 10 year plan, a greater proportion of this money needs to be spent on community and primary health care services.

Therefore, as part of a funding and integration package with the NHS, I believe that this should mean at least 20% of the NHS' £20bn 'birthday present' should be invested directly by councils in community-based care to meet growing demand in areas such as learning disabilities.

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On the growth agenda, both housing and economic, we need to bring back real spatial planning powers.

It is worth remembering that pre-1976 all major planning applications were decided by the County Council.

We need greater powers in setting strategic infrastructure levies, across our geographies.

In two-tier areas the current CIL and Section 106 developer contribution arrangements leak like a sieve and have missed the opportunity to collect significant, additional contributions to fund infrastructure provision.

The recently announced Oliver Letwin "Independent review of build out report" has outlined some important recommendations for speeding up build out rates.

These recommendations need to be seriously considered by local and central Government.

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On economic growth, industrial strategies, shared prosperity funds and skills, our relationship with Local Enterprise Partnerships will be crucial.

We must continue with our campaign to change the direction of travel by Government in their proposed Strengthened Local Enterprise Partnerships arrangements announced in July.

The proposed downgrading of local government representation on LEP Boards are a backward step.

And if Government is to devolve the skills agenda to LEP geographies, these governance arrangements become even more important.

"I am convinced that empowered as strategic authorities, counties can rise above the parapet and be an even more visible presence in non-metropolitan England.

<pause>

Before I finish, I would like to add to Simon's earlier thanks to our sponsors, who have so generously supported this conference.

And finally our message to government.

We cannot do the impossible.

We must have sustainable, sufficient, and fair funding.

We are here to help you improve and transform public services.

Deliver better value for money for the public pound.

Trust us.

Empower us.

Provide a fair future for counties and, we will deliver.