

Joint Statement

Devolution, Growth and Public Sector Reform: County & District Collaboration

As we enter a new Parliament the CCN and DCN want to make a bold and united statement on English Devolution.

During the past five years we have witnessed substantial, but unfinished, progress on localism and devolution. There is now a political consensus and broad commitment from the new Conservative Government that devolution within England has the potential to rebalance our economy, deliver better public services and revitalise our democracy.

A comprehensive and bold devolution settlement for England must reach all four corners of the nation, beyond Westminster, to empower local communities. As we look ahead to the first Queens Speech of the Parliament the Government now has the opportunity to deliver fully on its devolution and localism credentials.

The last five years has demonstrated that the urban and rural economies represented by our members continue to be the largest contributors to national growth and to the Treasury. Without the additional value generated by our economies, the recovery would simply not have materialised. Our member councils have also shown their resilience and resourcefulness in adapting to the austere fiscal climate and reforming frontline services.

Despite our successes, this Parliamentary period will continue to present major challenges for local government, none more so than continuing reductions to local authority funding at a time of rising demand for public services. Faced with these pressures, counties and districts are reaching the limit to what can be achieved within the existing funding and service provision framework between Central and Local Government. Services that people rely on to support themselves and their families risk failing, unless we free local government to respond to these strategic challenges.

We remain concerned, therefore, that the devolution focus, including the incoming Government's Manifesto, may remain too narrowly focused on City Regions and one-size-fits all approach to English Devolution. It is our strong belief that this will only hinder the Government in achieving its core aims of securing economic recovery, reducing the deficit and reforming public services.

While our two Networks have a number of separate and sometimes conflicting policy objectives, we believe that we agree on many more issues, particularly the principles that must be at the heart of fair and effective devolution settlement for England.

Both the CCN and DCN recognise that there has been a long and sometimes unhelpful debate around the traditional shire district and county structure. Instead, we want to move forward on the basis of a joint understanding of place, people and functional economic

areas, and focus the future debate and activity on how authorities across tiers and borders can deliver better outcomes for local communities in the most effective way.

The CCN's recent *County Devolution* document and forthcoming research commissioned by the DCN from INLOGOV will set out a comprehensive framework for achieving devolution to two-tier areas. The documents provide the start of a realistic conversation with the incoming Government about devolution in two-tier areas and serve as a framework for county and district partners to develop a compelling joint vision locally.

To that end, in order to provide assistance and support to Ministers to secure early and sustainable progress on your agenda, we wish to set out explicitly our commitment to working together to deliver an English devolution settlement in two-tier areas. Over the coming months, we commit to activity encouraging and supporting our member councils, alongside the LGA, in designing and delivering devolution proposals and promoting collaboration between our respective member councils

In return, we expect the Government to put forward an agenda on English Devolution which recognises that Cities, Counties and Districts have an equal role to play in reforming our constitutional settlement and delivering real devolution. This does not mean that all areas progress towards a new settlement straight away, nor that devolution will look the same in every area.

However, our concern is that a narrow focus on empowering City areas would threaten to create a two-speed approach to local government and public sector reform, undermining the Government's core objectives and creating a democratic deficit for the millions of people our local Councillors seek to represent.



Cllr David Hodge

Chairman

County Councils Network



Cllr Neil Clarke, MBE

Chairman

District Councils' Network