

## **LGA Special Interest Group Annual Report to LGA Leadership Board**

<b>SIG Name:</b>	District Councils Network
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Cllr Neil Clarke (DCN Chair until 4 July)
<b>Lead Officer:</b>	Matthew Hamilton – DCN Director

### **Aim**

The aim of the District Councils' Network is to be the national voice of District Councils, working with our authorities, partners and government to deliver national growth and prosperity and services at a scale that make sense to local communities.

The DCN strives to support the development of innovative and collaborative solutions for people and places. We do this through:

- Collaboration and Networking
- Influencing national policy
- Commissioning evidence based research and developing new ways of working with our member organisations and partners
- Using our connections to our communities to give real-life, real-time perspectives

The DCN has four priority areas:

- Driving national growth and prosperity - making sure Districts are best placed and incentivised to drive national productivity through business and housing growth
- Devolution and the future of local government in localities- Putting Districts at the heart of devolution and the transformation of public sector delivery, delivering those services that matter to residents the most.
- Improving the health and wellbeing of our communities - ensuring Districts have a key role in the integration of health and social care and delivering preventative services.
- Resourcing a new local government sector- Transforming local government finance to support local decision making, enhanced self-sufficiency and freedoms, flexibilities to generate new income streams, and providing incentives for growth

### **Key Activities / Outcomes of work undertaken**

This has been another busy and productive year for the DCN. Over the last year we believe the DCN has gone from strength to strength in representing and reflecting the views of district councils and Local Government more widely at national level. We look forward to continuing to ensure that our collective voice is heard loud and clear over the coming year at a time when the New Government will be taking forward measures on a range of issues that run to the very heart of what we do as districts councils including implementing the Housing White Paper, the Industrial Strategy and 100% retention of business rates.

Despite its small core team the DCN has continued to benefit from working collaboratively with resources from individual district councils, the LGA and other bodies such as think

tanks and universities and we have taken forward many initiatives over the last year including

- A new All Party Parliamentary Group for District Councils has been established, chaired by Mark Pawsey MP. The APPG has hit the ground running and has conducted an Inquiry in relation to collaboration and devolution which saw representations from over 7 councils as well as four high profile oral evidence giving sessions with input from District Councils and MPs alike. The Report will be launched on the 12 July at the House of Commons
- The DCN also hosted its first National Conference on the 2-3 February 'District Delivering Growth' and we were delighted that over 180 people attended this high profile and successful two day event which featured two Secretaries of State, Sajid Javid MP and Greg Clark MP, as well as Gavin Barwell MP and Sir John Peace. The event was a resounding success with excellent feedback from delegates, strong endorsement of the work and importance of district councils by Ministers and the opportunity to reach a wider audience. The joint working with the LGA on this event was key in the professional level of delivery we achieved. In response to demand the DCN Conference will become an annual event
- Launch of our new, user friendly website

We have also had success in influencing government in particular in terms of the Planning and Housing and the Housing White paper. Specific example of this include :

- preventing the privatisation of planning departments and securing an uplift in planning fees (to be confirmed)
- calling for greater fiscal freedoms and compulsory purchase order powers in relation to housing
- Shaping the reform of business rates for example by agreeing and setting out a collective set of principles for business rates with CCN and RSN,
- Continuing to lobby for greater recognition of the importance of district councils in prevention and Early Help service for example by establishing a DCN Public Health Taskforce and Healthy Towns and Villages Network and holding two high profile Conferences on the district role in tackling dementia and shaping the district role in improving peoples health
- Clarity over the DFG funding in national guidance as it relates to district councils
- emphasising that when it comes to the future of local government in localities, one size does not fit all - a phrase which the Secretary of State himself used at our DCN Conference.
- Providing tailored briefings and policy seminars to our membership on a wide range of key issues and responding to over 20 consultations, including the Housing White Paper, Industrial Strategy and business rates

The DCN will continue making the forceful argument to government about the value district councils deliver to those that they serve which we will do throughout the coming year.