

LGA Special Interest Group Annual Report to LGA Board

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Membership

All district councils (other than Gosport Borough Council) are in membership of the DCN effective April 2020.

Aim

The District Councils' Network (DCN) aim is to be the national voice of District Councils, working with our authorities, partners and government to deliver national growth and prosperity at a scale that resonates and reflects how local communities live their lives.

The DCN have four core themes which the priorities in our workstreams are guided by:

1. Stronger Economies

Districts are integral to the UK's future prosperity as the Planning, Housing and Growth Authorities, growing the national economy, one local economy at a time.

2. Better Lives

Districts ensure that no one gets left behind by tackling the complex needs of today whilst helping to prevent the social challenges of tomorrow. We act at a scale where it is possible to solve problems rather than simply manage caseloads.

3. Enhancing Quality of Life

Districts play a crucial role as local leaders who are on the side of residents. Our priorities are shaped by our understanding of and engagement with local communities. Districts protect and enhance the quality of life by safeguarding our environment, promoting public health and leisure and creating attractive places to live, work and raise families

4. Sustainable Finance and Workforce

Districts must work within a financial framework that incentivises and rewards local growth, whilst supporting those areas in greatest need

Key Activities / Outcomes of work undertaken

In responding to the Covid 19 crisis, we have:

- Made successful representations on a range of critical issues for District councils during the pandemic and the recovery, including on:
 - Finance, for eg making case on impact of lost income
 - supporting vulnerable groups, for eg asking for Hardship Fund and for extending eviction ban
 - waste collection, for eg widely covered communications to residents
 - the sustainability of leisure services, for eg a survey evidencing financial impact
 - business grants, for eg shaping BEIS guidance
 - highstreets, for eg highlighting impact on towns and gaining funding for adaptation
 - role in Test and Trace, for eg case for support to EHOs
- Stepped up engagement with all District Councils on weekly video conferences with all Leaders and CEx, involving Ministers and Senior Civil Servants from MHCLG, Defra, BEIS, DCMS, on leading the response to the recovery and the crisis. Further support through policy templates, and other informative speakers.
- Communications and parliament. Published a manifesto for the recovery, Power in Place. Had a wide range of national press coverage in BBC, Telegraph, Times, Guardian, Mirror, Sun, Independent, ITV etc, on priority issues such as finance, waste, leisure, high streets, homelessness, planning. Held a virtual APPG, and engaged MPs through a series of briefings at important times. We have also submitted written evidence which has been accepted to committees over a range of issues.
- Worked productively within the LGA as part of the wider local government family. We have also built relationships with organisations across our workstreams, from Sport England, Local Partnerships, Shelter, Crisis St Mungo's, and dozens more.

In the preceding months before Covid 19 hit we have had a number of successes including contributing to:

- Confirmation that grants, including the New Homes Bonus, would be rolled over for another year.
- The elimination of Negative RSG - which benefited districts £56.2 million across 19/20.
- Delay to the Business Rates Reset - which would have seen 65% of business rates growth removed at a stroke. Our analysis with LG futures and engagement with Ministers resulted in the average district receiving £1.79 million on average compared with current levels.
- Commissioned a range of analysis including on supply of affordable housing, the challenges for low income renters, the options for devolving financial levers to councils, and more.

- We highlighted the influential role and significant contribution of Districts in improving public health outcomes. "[Shaping healthy places: exploring the district role in health](#)", published by the DCN in collaboration with the Local Government Association, details innovative prevention initiatives by district councils to improve people's lives and save long-term costs to the public purse.
- We have engaged with parliamentarians through the APPG for district councils on LEPs, housing, finance and devolution.
- 2020/21 Disabled Facilities Grant allocations have a welcome requirement that the £191m should be passported from counties to districts unless expressly agreed by districts.
- Organised and hosted a DCN Annual Conference with over 250 delegates and a range of speakers across crucial issues for the sector.