

# District Councils' Network

## The one voice of district councils in the LGA



Close to people, focused on place

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District Council Chief Executives in England

Dear Colleague

### District Councils' Network (DCN) - Monthly Update

This is the first of a series of monthly updates on the activities and achievements of the DCN and the Chief Executives' Group which supports it. This first update in my term as Chairman of that support group (DCCEN) deals with three main issues:

- Achievements since the DCN started in November 2009
- Our business plan and priorities for 2011/12
- Support mechanisms to secure our future achievements

### Achievements since November 2009

Under the political chairmanship of Gary Porter (South Holland), and the officer leadership of Alan Goodrum (Chiltern) and then Nina Dawes (Lichfield), the DCN has more than doubled its membership to 178 out of the 201 district councils in England. That is a significant foundation on which to base our lobbying to central government and other agencies. Clearly, it would be an advantage to increase that number further and your support within your own regional networks would be appreciated. A list of non-members is attached to the minutes of the first DCCEN meeting of the new term, circulated separately from this letter.

During the last eighteen months, we have secured increasing participation from member Chief Executives in the work of the DCN, with different colleagues leading on a variety of issues, supporting a lead Member from the DCN Executive. This has enabled us to secure:

- a commitment from government to the local (districts) determination of planning fee levels
- additional funding to support concessionary fares (now administered by county councils in two-tier areas)
- a commitment on reform of the housing subsidy arrangements
- influence over the content of the consultation document on the recently published Local Government Resource Review

Importantly also, we have finally secured funding from the winding up of the (former) Association of District Councils, which will provide an annual income to the DCN of £217k - a significant contribution, given that our annual subscription (a mere £150 per council) raises less than £30k per year!

### Priorities for 2011/12

For the coming year we have redrafted the business plan, which is now more focussed than previously. Management of that plan will be in the hands of our Secretary, Paul Lankester (Stratford on Avon). The main priorities are:

- influencing consultation on the Local Government Resource Review - using regular meetings with senior officials at CLG
- implementation of universal credit/council tax benefit reform - to ensure the needs of individuals locally are fully met within a national scheme
- ensuring that the implementation of the planning fees' commitment is truly local, with simple guidance, not centrally dictated
- influencing reforms on planning, housing and open public services

All these reforms will have a major impact on district councils and the communities we serve; so, it is vital that we influence them to secure what our communities need. There is strong evidence that CLG in particular is listening and we need to maintain that positive dialogue.

### Support for DCN

The DCN officers for 2011/12, in addition to myself, are:

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Vice-Chairs: | David Buckle (South Oxfordshire/Vale of White Horse) |
|              | David Cook (Kettering)                               |
| Secretary    | Paul Lankester(Stratford on Avon)                    |
| Treasurer    | Mark Hall (Oadby and Wigston)                        |

In addition, we are seconding (on short-term, part-time bases) officers from our member councils to provide practical professional support to our work, under the direction of a lead chief executive. The names are listed against the appropriate priority in the business plan on our website: [www.districtcouncils.info](http://www.districtcouncils.info), which contains a great deal of information about the DCN, our responses to government consultations and over two hundred case studies of excellent work undertaken by district councils.

The District Councils' Network is **YOUR** network. It exists to work on behalf of all district councils in the country, not for itself, and your active engagement with the Network is essential, if it is to actively and effectively represent your needs. However, the Network must also reach out to its membership and, being London based, whilst essential to maintain necessary contact with government officials and other professional/delivery agencies, creates problems in this regard.

To address this issue, I hope to meet with colleagues on your own patches in coming weeks and to bring meetings of the Chief Executives' Group to your area during the year, rather than having them all based in London. Invitations to your regional/sub-regional meetings to explain our work and gain your active support will be welcomed.

I hope that this letter and those which follow are helpful. If you want to get in touch on any matter, please contact me by telephone or email, or contact Emma Tucker, the DCN Manager, on 0207 664 3049 or [emma.tucker@local.gov.uk](mailto:emma.tucker@local.gov.uk).

I look forward to your support - and our success - in 2011/12.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Atkinson', written in a cursive style.

Steve Atkinson  
Chair  
District Councils' Chief Executives Network 2011/12