



The future DCN Priorities Survey November 2011

To ensure we are responsive to our members we have carried out a survey to establish what priorities they would like us to be working towards and what we should be asking of government. A summary of the views can be found at the end of this report.

We asked our members what their top three asks to government would be. This was to establish what shape our future lobbying should take and how we can influence future government policy.

The responses were varied and covered almost every area of service delivery within district councils. However there were a number of common themes, including;

Raising the awareness and understanding of the role of districts with both central government and local communities. It was clear from the results that districts feel that central government does not always recognise their distinct role, their achievements or their unique position as being at the centre of local communities.

Planning and planning reform featured highly. Councils are concerned that the national planning framework leaves them open to unwanted development, that central government is not listening to them and for a decision and clarity around planning fees.

District Councils are concerned about the impact of welfare reform, including both the universal credit proposals and council tax benefit localisation. Concerns have been voiced around the cost and community implications.

Local government and finance was also raised, views that rural areas are not receiving a fair financial settlement, that the resource review does not go far enough and that stability in funding is needed.

Throughout the responses there was a feeling that while districts are working through huge reductions to their budgets they are also dealing with a large quantity of new policy, regulation and legislation. There is a feeling that funding needs to follow legislation, government needs to consult further before announcing new policy and to understand the longer term implications of their proposals.

To continue to develop the DCN and ensure it provides the services that member councils want we asked what services would districts like the network to provide and/or initiatives do you suggest we undertake and promote as a network?

While many respondents suggested work that we are already doing this tells us that we need to improve our engagement with our members and ensure we inform them of the work we are doing on their behalf. This includes ensuring members have a chance to comment on consultation responses, policy papers and position statements.

It was suggested that we could further promote the work of district including examples of innovative best practice, of where we have successfully made savings, sharing this work not just between ourselves but to government, the LGA and other national organisations.

Increased networks and networking was proposed, including establishing policy networks in different services and providing regional networks.

More information on government policies, consultations, meetings and interaction. Through briefing notes and summaries, districts are looking for information on how policies and consultations will impact on them rather than the local government group as a whole.

When asked if members wanted more events similar to the ones held in October almost all respondents said yes. The areas that districts would like to see events on;

- The implementation of the localism bill
- Delivery of council tax benefit localisation and universal credit
- Local enterprise partnerships
- Health and wellbeing
- Planning reform and
- Shared management teams and services.