

District Councils' Network

A new voice for district councils in the LGA



Close to people, focused on place

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Dear Colleague

District Councils' Network – January 2012 Update

Given the challenges districts have overcome and will face in the coming years it remains the case that Districts continue to respond constructively and successfully to all the challenges thrown at us and, as Carolyn Downs indicated last week in the 'Municipal Journal', there is no reason to suppose that will change, whatever the 'doom and gloom' merchants suggest.

Local Government Finance

The DCN continues to represent districts at both a political and officer level. Our officers recently attended a private meeting of colleagues within the LGA on Local Government Finance post 2013. The discussions were aimed at informing internal LGA meetings in early February, as a basis for further discussion with Ministers on issues such as: our contribution to 'growth'; what the future local government landscape will look like in terms of service costs and funding requirements; how we continue to get our message across to government on council tax benefit/universal credit; how we get the best (for the customer) from more integrated working with Health on the community budget model; and how we improve our message to the public and to government generally.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) - Good news

Late in 2011 Hampshire County Council approached CLG, seeking to amend CIL regulations to exert greater county control on district activity. I have reinforced our position to CLG that districts can manage the CIL process and I am pleased to say Bob Neil MP has responded and confirmed that he had concluded that 'no further changes in regulations are required - certainly at this stage'. Given that any further review will not take place until 2015, this is a useful breathing space and gives us the opportunity to make the system work effectively.

Events 2012

The survey we undertook on the future of the DCN highlighted that members would like district focused events. We are putting together a full timetable of events that will be available soon. All events (apart from Budget/Treasury Management) will take place at two locations, to assist accessibility across the country. These locations will be Local Government House, Smith Square, London, and Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, East Gate Street, Stafford.

- Neighbourhood Planning (Stafford 3rd April London 4th April)
- Economic Development (20th April Basildon)
- Community Infrastructure Levy
- Housing and related matters
- Health/Wellbeing
- Business Rates - once further clarification has been received from CLG

The Budget/Treasury Management event will be via Webinar.

Planning Survey

In my meetings with ministers it has been helpful to have information on your core strategies. Thank you to all those who have responded to the original survey and the recent reminder. We will continue to use this information to influence the transitional arrangements the government is working on at the moment.

Membership

I am pleased to be able to tell you all that our membership numbers are growing. We can now welcome Tendring, Mid Devon and Torridge into membership. This will take our membership up to 186 out of 201 district councils. Requests to pay the £150 annual membership fee for 2012/13 will be circulated shortly.

DCN Executive

We held a DCN Executive meeting yesterday, Cllr Mark Burns-Williamson, Chairman of the Association of Police Authorities (APA), attended to discuss the implementation of Police and Crime Commissioners and Police and Crime Panels. Clear messages from the presentation and discussion were that your shadow police and crime panels need to be in place by **July** and districts will have a minimum of 10 places on the local panel as a statutory requirement. The DCN will complete a full briefing for members on the Police and Crime Panels and Police and Crime Commissioners.

DCN Assembly

We are holding an Assembly meeting on 7 March at the LGA in London. Sir Merrick Cockell, Chairman of the LGA, has agreed to attend and make a

presentation. Grant Shapps has been invited also, although he has yet to confirm. A session at the Assembly will be devoted to the immediate implications of the implementation of the Localism Act. In addition, there will be workshops on Police and Crime Panels and Local Government Finance.

The following Assembly meeting will be on the 28 June at the LGA Conference in Birmingham. We hope to showcase the work of North Devon and Tunbridge Wells on Community Budgets. The two councils have been selected as part of the community budget pilots.

Both events will be interesting and informative, I hope to see you there.

Consultations

Our Housing Project Officer is working away on the housing consultations currently out. She would be happy to receive any comments you have on the government's proposals. If you have specific comments which you wish to have endorsed by DCN (or information to inform our response) please contact Rebecca Slack on Rebecca.Slack@ne-derbyshire.gov.uk

I know that, as we embark on the new year, the challenges of 2012 are very much those of 2011 - only potentially more severe. The need for mutual support, locally and nationally, has never been more pressing. Let's make sure we continue to do that in 2012.

As we are all very busy people, I had better let you get on with it!

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N Clarke', with a horizontal line underneath.

Neil Clarke
Chairman
District Councils' Network