

# COUNCILLORS GUIDE 2025



# Your Network



The County Councils Network (CCN) represents 37 county and unitary councils across England. We are a councillor-led, cross-party organisation that works on behalf of our member councils and their communities to ensure they have a strong voice with national government, and to help deliver positive change for those authorities and the residents they serve.

CCN is the only national voice for the county and larger unitary authorities in England. We represent the cities, towns, rural and coastal communities that make up your areas. Whilst recognising that a strong and unified voice for local government is important, county and rural areas have different challenges and we provide a significant counterbalance to the organisations representing the interests of councils in London and metropolitan areas.

Importantly, CCN is your network: it is our councillors who shape our priorities and research. This guide provides you with the key information on the role and purpose of CCN, alongside how councillors can get involved with the activity of the network to support you in the vital role you play in your local communities.

**CCN will strive to support you over the next four years and be your council's national voice.**

## Follow us



## Contact us



# Engaging with us

## Why engage with CCN

- **Deliver for your local area:**  
Over the past few years, CCN has helped deliver hundreds of millions in extra funding for its members, and has led the policy agenda on a host of issues for county and unitary councils. Our councillors have been at the heart of this success.
- **Help shape government policy:**  
As a national advocacy body, the CCN regularly meets with government officials and ministers, and has a strong media and public affairs profile – and has helped to shape and influence policy on behalf of its members.
- **Networking and best practice:**  
For those nominated onto CCN Council, the group meets four times a year and the network's Annual Conference and various events offers the opportunity for councillors from across the country to share common experiences and discuss solutions to collective challenges.

## How to engage with CCN

- **Visit our website and social media:**  
The CCN website contains all of CCN's research, publications, press releases and general information. Our main two social network sites are LinkedIn and X.
- **Sign up to our newsletter:** Our regular newsletter contains the latest updates and research, straight to your inbox. Sign up [here](#).
- **Attend our conference and events:** Our Annual Conference takes place every November, and CCN organises several networking events a year. See below for the dates of our forthcoming events.

## Dates for your diary

- **Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2025:** LGA Conference  
Drinks Reception  
  
Location: Museum of Liverpool
- **Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> Sept 2025:** Annual Parliamentary Reception  
  
Location: Terrace Pavilion, House of Commons
- **16-18 Nov 2025:** CCN Annual Conference 2025  
  
Location: Marlow, Buckinghamshire

## June 2025: Spending Review

June's Spending Review will be a pivotal one for local government, as it will set out the total amount of central government funding allocated to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Much of this central government grant is then distributed for councils' day-to-day spending.

**With speculation that non-protected departments will receive a funding reduction as a result of the review, CCN will warn against any possible reductions, illustrate their potential impact, and argue for an increase in resources for CCN members.**

## Summer 2025: SEND white paper

The government has committed to reforming the SEND system, following strong CCN advocacy showing that the system doesn't work for children and families, schools or local authorities. The indications are that a white paper on SEND reform will be published this summer.

**The CCN will be making the case for reforms that address the cost and demand pressures for councils, ensure that more mainstream schools are able to cater for SEND pupils, and that the system works better for young people.**

## Summer 2025: Children's services reform

Councils have long argued that the children's services system is becoming unsustainable, with CCN members increasingly having to focus on crisis care rather than prevention. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill aims to reform the system and is currently going through Parliament.

**With CCN research showing that councils could be spending £12bn a year on children in care by 2030, it is vital reforms come with funding which allow councils to focus on prevention and stopping families getting into crisis, alongside addressing market dysfunction.**

## Autumn 2025: Planning and Infrastructure

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill is currently going through Parliament, and aims to speed up and streamline the delivery of new homes and critical infrastructure, supporting the government's ambitions to build 1.5m homes, alongside proposals to fast-track certain planning applications.

**CCN is already lobbying MPs and Peers to secure changes to the legislation. Whilst CCN's member councils understand the need for more homes, they say the government's housing targets are unrealistic and undeliverable and we will continue to emphasise this: arguing that county areas are taking on a disproportionate burden.**

## Autumn 2025: Devolution and reorganisation

Final proposals on the areas selected for priority devolution and/or reorganisation will be submitted take place in September and November, and then government has indicated decisions on which proposals will be implemented will be take in early 2026.

**CCN will be supporting its members as it develops its proposals on reorganisation, alongside evidencing the risks and costs of splitting up existing counties into smaller unitaries. The network will continue to advocate for further funding and powers for county areas as part of devolution.**

## Winter 2025: Council finances

Winter 2025 will be an important time for local government finance, with the government's Fair Funding Review set to conclude, alongside the 2025/26 local government finance settlement setting out how much central funds councils receive over the next three years, rather than the usual one year.

**Over the next few months, the CCN will be illustrating why the fair funding review needs to be evidence-based and transparent, and will argue that county and unitary councils face some of the biggest demand-led spending pressures, particularly in care services. Alongside this, the CCN will argue for a fair share of resource for county areas in the local government finance settlement.**



CCN  
COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

## Manifesto

## For Counties

[www.manifestoforcounties.co.uk](http://www.manifestoforcounties.co.uk)

The CCN's cross-party **Manifesto for Counties** is an interactive standalone website, setting out detailed proposals the network want the new government to adopt and then implement during this Parliament.

This is an ambitious blueprint. It outlines how sustainable but empowered county and unitary authorities can work in partnership with the government to deliver their domestic agenda, while tackling some of our nation's greatest economic and social challenges.

[Click here to visit the microsite.](#)

The CCN aims to articulate the challenges and opportunities of its member councils, alongside their priorities, to the government and other key organisations. This is primarily done through original and impactful research alongside a strong media and public affairs activity, and in meetings with ministers, MPs, peers, senior government officials, and other key individuals.

The network works on a cross-party basis, articulating the priorities and issues facing our member councils as agreed in a yearly work programme, alongside day-to-day advocacy in responding to announcements, policies, and consultations.

In recent years, the network has produced high profile pieces of research that have led the sector debate and outlined the case for counties across a whole host of policy areas, such as the future of adult social care, housing and planning, devolution, councils' financial pressures, and local government reorganisation.

At the heart of our advocacy over recent years has been a number of successful campaigns to outline the importance of county and unitary councils on a range of national agendas, most recently set out in our *Manifesto for Counties*. This set out detailed proposals the network wanted the new government to adopt and then implement during this Parliament. This ambitious blueprint was supported by extensive policy development, research and advocacy delivered over the course of the past twelve months.

**Over the next few pages, we set out some of the key successes of our campaigns on behalf of member councils over recent years.**

# Delivering for you

2021



July

## New unitary councils

The network helped support new unitary councils in Somerset, Cumbria and North Yorkshire; working closely with each authority closely as they were announced, set up and came into existence.

October

## £1.6bn secured

The 2021 Spending Review announces £1.6bn extra for councils, following strong CCN lobbying in the lead-up to the event highlighting the financial challenge facing its members.

2022

March

## Roads maintenance

The government reversed its plans to reduce road maintenance budgets following CCN advocacy highlighting that the proposed reduction equated to not filling over 11m potholes,

September

## Winter care funds

The government announced £500m for adult social care pressures for winter 2022/23, following CCN research on how much inflation was adding to costs

June

## SEND deficits

The CCN raises the alarm first on special educational needs deficits, warning that a dramatic rise demand was leading to unmanageable deficits. By 2024, these deficits stood at £4bn nationally.

July

## County devolution

Following years of CCN advocacy, the government announces a change in focus for devolution and pledges to deliver devolution deals for county areas.

November

## Children in care

Dramatic CCN research revealed the number of children in care could reach 100,000 and recommended a more preventative and family-focused approach. These are now being developed by the current government in its Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

May

## Adult care reform

The first-ever modelling of proposed adult social charging reforms, produced by the CCN, found that the government had underestimated costs by at least £10bn - opening a dialogue between government and councils.

## November •

### Funding secured

Following the October delay to the social care reforms, government announces that £3.2bn earmarked for the reforms will now go to frontline social care services: a key CCN request.

## 2023

## March •

### Roads funding secured

With inflation at double digits, CCN highlights the pressure on road maintenance budgets. This led to government announcing an extra £200m for roads - with 75% of funds going to counties.

## August •

### Securing LEP functions

The government dissolves Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and gives their functions to upper tier councils, following a CCN report in August that recommended take this course of action.

## November •

### Devolution milestone

A major milestone is reached as two thirds of England agree a devolution deal, following strong CCN advocacy calling on government to offer flexibility for county areas that then felt a mayor was unsuitable.

## 2024

## • October

### Care reform delay

The network secures a delay to the introduction of the the social care charging reforms to give councils more time to prepare, after numerous pieces of advocacy from the CCN highlighting costs and timescale issues.

## • March

### Keeping up the funding pressure

CCN research highlights that county areas will need to save £1bn in 2023/24 despite council tax rises, illustrating the scale of the challenge for councillors and shaping the narrative on 'councils in crisis.'

## • June

### Housing coalition

CCN joined a coalition including planners and housebuilders to publicly warn the government's Infrastructure Levy could result in less funds being available for infrastructure for local areas. The levy was never implemented.

## • August

### EV infrastructure

Following a 2021 CCN report on the lack of electrical vehicle infrastructure in counties and persistent lobbying, figures revealed the number of publicly-available chargers in counties had increased by 69%.

## • January

### £500m in extra funds secured

A campaign organised by the CCN which led to 40 MPs signing a letter to the Prime Minister, highlighted how under-pressure local authorities were heading into 2024, helping to secure an extra £500m for local government for 2024/25.

## July •

### Care reform

Following dramatic CCN research that revealed councils had serious concerns over the deliverability and affordability of planned social care charging reforms, government announced it was no longer proceeding with the policy.

## November •

### Children's services reform

Following years of CCN advocacy, the government announced it was to undertake the 'biggest reforms in a generation' of children's social care. CCN's key asks such as a focus on prevention and addressing market dysfunction have been taken on by the Labour administration.

## February •

### Devolution priority

Ten CCN members were announced as being on the devolution priority programme, putting them on the fast track for devolution or reorganisation. CCN had argued for county areas to have a strong showing on the programme and continues to support member councils developing proposals.

## • July

### Landmark SEND report

A landmark CCN report concluded that special educational needs services (SEND) do not work for young people, families and councils alike. Government responded by committing to reform and has pledged to incorporate many of the report's key recommendations.

## • December

### Strategic planning success

The government announced it was looking to bring back strategic planning powers back into the planning system, which will join up planning and infrastructure better. This had been a key CCN request for a number of years.

2025

## • January

### Fair Funding Review

CCN has begun campaigning for county and rural areas ahead of the upcoming fair funding review, showcasing why it is vital that county and unitary councils receive the funding they need to deliver vital services.

## • March

### SEND crisis

With just 12 months until SEND deficits are to be added to council budgets, CCN has warned of a 'financial catastrophe' and has called for urgent clarity.



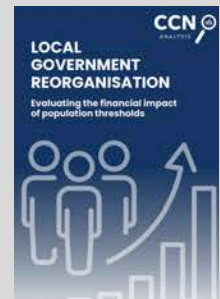
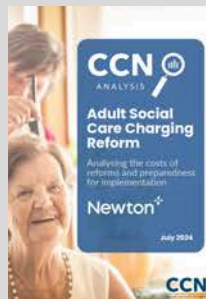
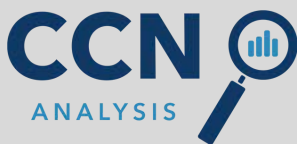
# Key publications & research 2024/25

Utilising our dedicated commissioning budget, CCN commissions a range of external research, resulting in the publication of several major independent reports. CCN worked with the most established consultancy and research organisations this year.

## COMMISSIONED RESEARCH

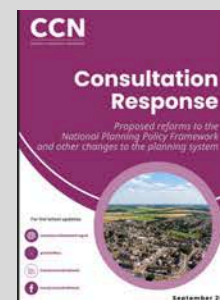


CCN Analysis and County Spotlight publications are internally produced research reports published throughout the year. They seek to provide the latest data analysis and policy commentary on local economies, service demand, council finances and the wider public sector landscape.



With the election of a new government and a reinvigorated national policy making agenda, there has been a significant increase in the number of formal government consultations and parliamentary select committee inquiries that CCN has needed to respond to on behalf of member councils.

## CONSULTATIONS



# Supporting you



## Our Vision

To ensure CCN is an influential and respected network, advocating innovative policy solutions on the challenges facing local government and the wider public sector.



## Our Aim

To ensure counties have the powers and resources to meet the needs and aspirations of their residents on issues of particular importance to our councils and their communities.

Alongside CCN's research, advocacy and policy development we offer a wide range of services to our member councils. Alongside big-ticket advocacy and campaigns, our policy team provides proactive on-the-day briefings and information on new policies and set piece events such as the budget as soon as they are unveiled.

A core part of CCN business is to ensure that our councils hear from policy makers in Westminster to help shape national policy. We facilitate a variety of meetings, events and host an Annual Conference for councillors to debate and discuss particular issues and hear from expert speakers and Ministers.

The CCN team is always on hand to answer policy queries and provide our member councils with expert advice on developments nationally, while supporting a wide range of policy-specific dedicated officer networks.

A key element of our support is disseminating and highlighting the work of member councils through the sharing of best practice. CCN produces a regular report series *County Spotlight*, which shines a light of the innovative work of our member councils in key policy areas, whilst case studies regularly feature in major CCN reports and research.

More widely, our communications and public affairs activity ensure that the county voice is heard on the national stage.

**Below, we summarise the key aspects of our support to member councils.**

# Support to member councils

At a glance.....

## Policy development & research

CCN produces research and responds to government consultations, putting forward a strong evidence base to government. This year we produced 12 policy and research publications across a wider range of policy areas, which have collectively been downloaded over 35,000 times.



...publications, consultations & submissions in 2024/25



.....media stories & articles  
a 54% annual increase

## Media & Communications

With our well established media profile, CCN is the voice for counties in the national press and on prime-time TV and radio, alongside a constant presence in the trade press and journals. CCN has had our most successful year to date, including 291 national media hits across all outlets.

## Public Affairs & Engagement

Through our public affairs support CCN is the gateway to Whitehall and Parliament for member councils, while building strong relationships with stakeholders across the local government, public and private sectors. Over the past 12 months we continued to provide evidence to select committees and contribute to national events.

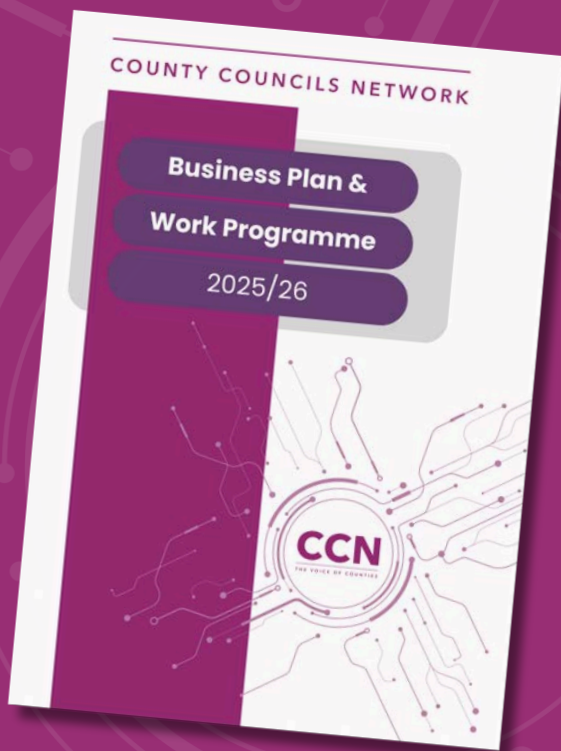


...meetings with members of the House of Commons and Lords since the election.

# The year ahead

**The CCN's 2025/26 business plan sets out our priorities – and more – in full detail.**

Download it by clicking the image.



## ➤ Your views

If there are other areas of work and policy you would like us to focus on, please let us know using the details on page 2 or on page 17.

Building on our **Manifesto for Counties**, for the next twelve months CCN has agreed five key priorities to influence key debates and policy areas on behalf of its member councils, alongside showcasing the power and influence of local authorities in people's everyday lives.

This forms the basis of the network's Business Plan & Work Programme 2025/26, which was agreed in March this year. Following detailed engagement with member councils, our five priorities reflect the most important issues facing our county and unitary authorities and the residents and businesses they serve.

Since the General Election, the government have set out a wide-ranging reform agenda. This is impacting every aspect of local government policy, from the planning system to local government finance, adult and children's social care to devolution and local government reorganisation.

CCN prioritises our national advocacy on these key reform programmes above all other CCN related activity, recognising the need to balance detailed engagement on active policy implementation and support for member councils, while continuing to produce sector-leading research that shapes and influences the wider local government agenda.

**Below we summarise our five priorities and associated work streams for the year ahead.**

# The year ahead

**CCN**  
THE VOICE OF COUNTIES

## OUR CURRENT PRIORITIES

### Finance

With councils under significant financial pressure, CCN will be advocating for financial certainty, alongside investment to meet service pressures, and ensuring that funding reforms are able to meet the service needs of county and unitary authorities.



Long-term sustainable funding



Delivering fairer funding



Supporting improvement and efficiency



Fiscal devolution and freedoms

### Adult Social Care

Adult social care is the biggest area of spend for councils, and by giving these authorities the right powers, alongside keeping adult social care a local service, county and unitary councils can drive forward reforms to make services work better for care users.



Keeping social care a local service



Sustainable and fair funding



Improving workforce retention



Reforming ICS and hospital discharge

# Children's services & SEND

Reform is on the horizon in both children's services and SEND. Here, it is vital these changes address the root causes of spiralling costs and demand for both services, councils giving a platform and funding to drive through long-lasting change.



Tackling high-cost children's placements



Investing in prevention



Rebalancing and reforming SEND



Addressing costs of school transport

# Devolution & local growth

With government committing to 'devolution by default' the CCN will be advocating to ensure its members' potential is truly unlocked by devolved powers and reorganisation, alongside arguing that that these areas are the lynchpins of economic growth.



Extending and deepening devolution



Reorganisation that is sustainable



Addressing regional investment imbalance



Climate change powers

# Housing, infrastructure & transport

Thriving communities need sustainable housing development, supported by good quality infrastructure. With all areas needing to generate good levels of economic growth, CCN will continue to highlight the challenges within planning system reforms, as well as arguing for investment and powers in transport and infrastructure.



Addressing planning reform issues



Reviving county buses



Powers and funds for county roads



Tackling the rise in homelessness

# Governance

## Management Committee

proposes the annual budget, business plan and audited accounts for approval by CCN Council and oversee all aspects of CCN day-to-day business.

## Executive Committee

advise Management Committee on the annual budget, work programme and overall direction of CCN. Spokespersons are allocated to specific policy areas to lead the delivery of the CCN work programme and act as the networks' voice in the media and parliament.

## CCN Council

Meets four times a year to approve the annual budget, business plan and audited accounts. Members of CCN Council have the opportunity to attendee meetings and engage with high-profile speakers, including Government Ministers.

## How does CCN work?

CCN is a cross-party member-led organisation, with elected councillors at the heart of driving the organisations advocacy. The network has three layers of governance.

- **Management Committee** is the elected body comprising the CCN Chair and Vice-Chairs from each of the political groups. The group with the largest political representation proposes a candidate for Chair at the AGM.
- **Executive Committee** consists of Management Committee members and 10 Spokespersons. The overall balance of membership of the CCN Executive will be politically proportionate in line with the total political balance of CCN authorities, with Group Leaders nominating Spokespersons to lead on policy portfolios.
- **CCN Council** is the third part of our governance structure. A much larger body of up to 150 councillors, each member council nominates up to four elected members to serve on the CCN Council. Top-up places are used to ensure political proportionality.

Following May's local elections CCN's political balance will be updated using the Rallings and Thrasher model, with new members of CCN council appointed ahead of the CCN Annual General Meeting in September 2025

# Officer team

The CCN officer team of eight are based on the fifth floor of the Local Government Association's building, 18 Smith Square, in Westminster.

## Click 'contact for' to email a specific member of the team

The close proximity of CCN offices to the decision-makers and influential organisations within Westminster has enabled the network to secure regular meetings and briefings with high-profile individuals, while ensuring your voice is heard in Whitehall, Parliament and the LGA.



**Simon Edwards**  
Chief Executive

Contact for: strategic direction, partnerships & member relations



**James Maker**  
Director of Policy & Communications

Contact for: corporate policy, finance & LGR.



**Jonathan Rallings**  
Senior Policy Advisor

Contact for: adult and children's services, education & SEND



**Peter French**  
Senior Policy Advisor

Contact for: housing, planning, infrastructure & transport



**Hannah Chard**  
Partnership & Events Officer

Contact for: events & sponsorship



**Alun Hughes**  
Senior Policy Advisor

Contact for: economic growth and devolution



**James Holden**  
Senior Corporate & Public Affairs Advisor

Contact for: corporate management, external & public affairs



**Ian Burbidge**  
Senior Media & Communications Officer

Contact for: press and communications

**CCN is the largest grouping of upper-tier authorities in England by population and landmass. What makes CCN the natural home for county and unitary authorities of significant size and scale, and what binds our network together, is not only the services our councils provide, but the uniqueness of the places our councillors represent.**

**86%**

**of England's landmass, some 11m hectares**

**26m**

**residents, some 46% of England's population**

**39%**

**of all council expenditure**

**£760bn**

**GVA generated in counties**

**11.8m**

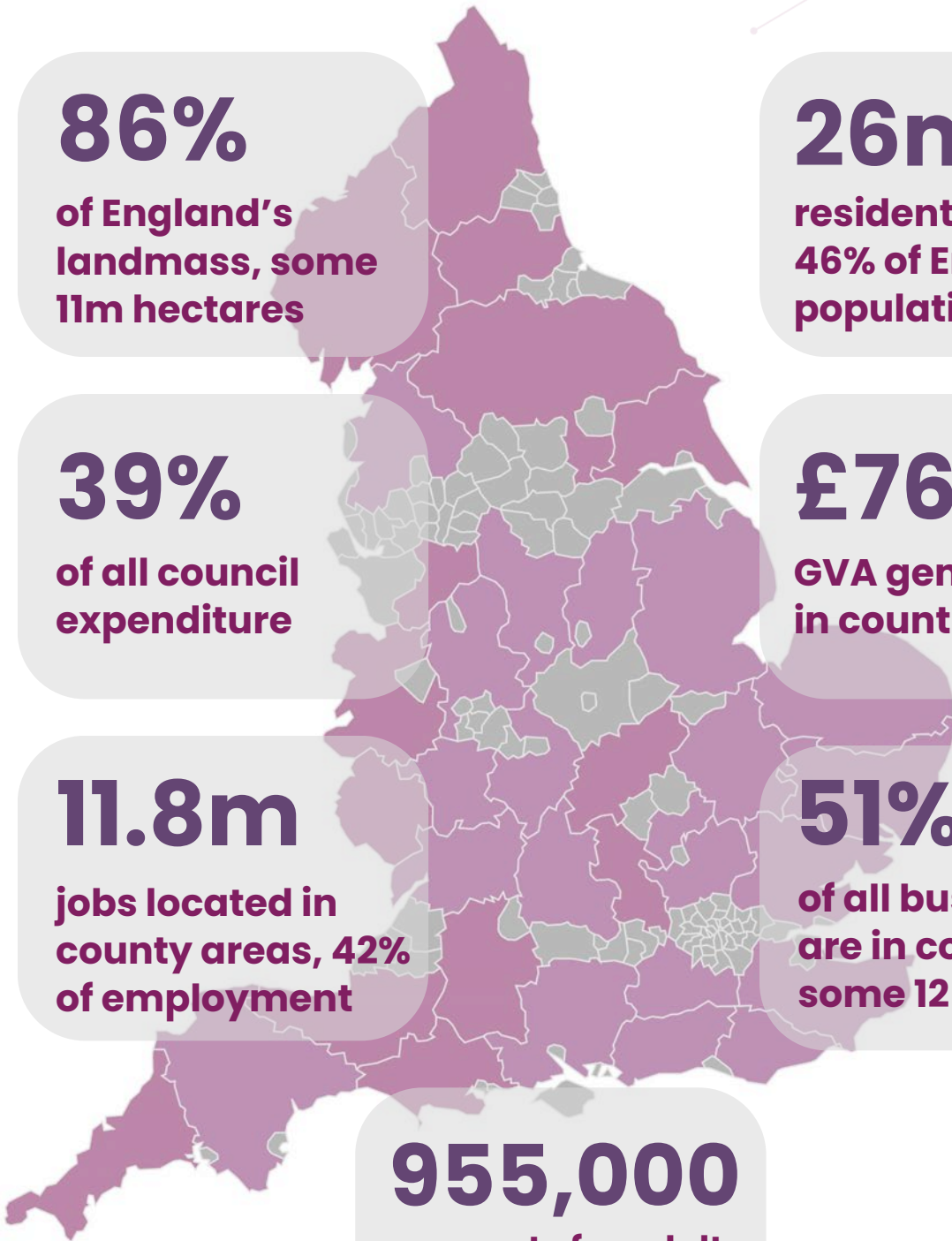
**jobs located in county areas, 42% of employment**

**51%**

**of all businesses are in counties, some 12 million**

**955,000**

**requests for adult social care support a year in counties**



# CCN

COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

CCN is the voice of England's counties. Representing the local authorities in county areas, the network is a cross-party organisation which develops policy, commissions research, and presents evidence-based solutions to issues on behalf of the largest grouping of councils in England.

In total, the 20 county councils and 17 unitary councils that make up the CCN represent 26 million residents, account for 39% of England's GVA, and deliver high-quality services that matter the most to local communities.

To discuss this document or CCN in more detail, please contact:

**Simon Edwards**

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