

## **People & Places Board – report from Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE (Chairman)**

### **Devolution**

1. Over the summer, the LGA has taken forward a wide-ranging programme of work in support of further devolution and has continued to develop and deliver a bespoke offer of support for areas. This has included working directly with Greater Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and Tees Valley CA. Local support needs have included: implementation of deals, leadership development, governance, constitution development, completion of assurance frameworks, communications, and civic and democratic engagement. Discussions are also currently underway to firm up the LGA's support offer to established combined authorities.
2. On 4 August, LGA officers from across the finance and policy directorate facilitated a day-long workshop attended by councils and officials from DCLG that explored the potential devolution of new responsibilities relating to employment and skills that might arise from the government's proposal for the full retention of local business rates. The discussion from this event was used to inform the LGA's response to Government.
3. On 9 August, supported by senior council representatives, LGA officers attended a workshop facilitated by DCLG to identify key risks and opportunities to devolution arising from the outcome of the EU referendum. The outputs from this discussion have been passed to the Department for Exiting the European Union. In addition, the LGA will be working across Whitehall to ensure full consideration of the potential implications and opportunities for local government.
4. The case for further devolution will be included in the LGA's submission to government in advance of the Autumn Statement on 23 November.

### **Skills and Employment**

5. The board continues to work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on the new Work and Health Programme (WHP). This programme is designed to assist the long term unemployed into work with as much local government involvement as possible. Ten devolution deal areas are currently working bilaterally with DWP on the design of the programme in their local area.
6. The board are working jointly with City Regions Board members on this work, and are continuing to make the case for the current national system to be more integrated and localised, and for the sector to benefit from the devolution deal process. With the Chair of the City Regions Board, Cllr Sir Richard Leese, I met with Penny Mordaunt MP, Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work, on 12 September to discuss the sector's concerns, repeat the LGA's offer and to propose a way forward which could allow the minister to launch the WHP with the backing of local government.
7. Officers are now preparing a response to key employment and skills messages which are expected in the Autumn Statement in November.

### **Leading Places Project**

8. With input and a steer from both the City Regions and People and Places Boards, the LGA is continuing to work with HEFCE and UUK to deliver the [Leading Places Project](#): a programme of leadership development for both the higher education and local government sectors in support of devolution, public service reform and economic growth. The [website](#)

## Councillors' Forum

20 October 2016

for the project is now live, and in September 2016, I wrote an article in the [LGA First Magazine](#) on the project's progress so far.

9. Four of the six pilot areas have now held their Senior Leadership Group Meetings and confirmed their project themes. Notably, the Gloucestershire pilot has identified a theme which will focus on developing the collective leadership necessary to deliver a vision of strategic and economic initiatives to transform Gloucestershire in 2050 and beyond. A countywide challenge group including the rural based Royal Agricultural University and urban based Gloucestershire University are now taking this forward.
10. Arrangements are underway for the peer challenge event on the 21<sup>st</sup> November, giving each pilot area to showcase their work in front of a national audience. The event will provide a clear milestone against which to evaluate progress and to make an early assessment of the value of the approach to strengthening collaborative leadership between councils and universities.

### Superfast Broadband and Mobile Connectivity

11. Board members continue to support councils in their efforts to extend superfast broadband and mobile connectivity. It is clear that access to fast and reliable digital connectivity is no longer a luxury.
12. In September, the LGA [responded](#) to the second reading of the new Digital Economy Bill (announced in the [Queen's Speech](#) in May). Amongst other issues, the LGA welcomed the new requirements in legislation for residents to obtain a new broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO) of at least 10Mbps, whilst emphasising that standards must keep pace with national average speeds. LGA officers will continue to work closely with members to monitor the Bill's progress and take appropriate steps to ensure the concerns of councils are properly reflected.
13. The board-commissioned [Up to Speed Campaign](#) website page continues to receive a high number of visits.
14. Officers have secured national media coverage supporting the board's lobbying lines, including on the placement of mobile infrastructure, which received coverage in [the Daily Mail](#), broadband providers' advertising of misleading "up to" broadband speeds which was covered in [The Telegraph](#), [The Daily Mail](#), [The Sun](#), [The Daily Mirror](#), [the BBC online](#), on ITV's Good Morning Britain and BBC Radio 4's Today programme. The LGA has called on Government to [reaffirm its commitment to enacting the Universal Service Obligation](#) after reports of delays to the Digital Economy Bill receiving national coverage on [BBC online](#). As a result, the government issued a response reiterating its commitment to the USO.

### Rural Issues

15. On 12 July, Cllr Heather Kidd spoke at the Rural Housing Conference on the need for more affordable homes in rural areas to allow rural communities to continue to be sustainable and the potential for partnership work between housing associations, the Rural Housing Network and local government in this area.
16. On 6 September, I spoke at the Rural Conference in Cheltenham on the work of the People and Places Board on key issues in rural areas.

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