

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

Post Brexit England Commission

1. Since June 2016, Brexit has dominated the national political agenda and looks set to do so for at least the next five years. However, many of the critical issues facing the country, such as flat-lining productivity, are likely to continue to prove resistant to uniform interventions from the national level. While the last few years have seen national and local government take steps towards addressing these challenges through the decentralisation of funding and policy responsibility, there is now a strong sense that devolution is at risk of stalling with the attendant opportunities for reform lost in places outside the mayoral combined authorities, particularly non-metropolitan areas. In light of this, the People and Places Board agreed to establish a Post Brexit England Commission.
2. The Post Brexit England Commission will be resourced by the Local Government Association, supported by an external advisory panel and commissioned research. Lead Members have agreed to a broad timeline of the Commission, which includes a launch event in late February or early March 2018, the publication of an interim report at the LGA Annual Conference in July 2018, and the publication of a final report in early 2019. The Commission is also set to host regional roadshows across Britain, led by Members of the People and Places Board. Currently, LGA officers are planning for the upcoming launch event taking place in London.

Industrial Strategy

3. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) published the Industrial Strategy White Paper on Monday 27 November 2017. The White Paper is structured around five pillars: Ideas, People, Infrastructure, Business Environment and Place.
4. In order to establish how the Government's approach to place-based growth relates to the role of councils, LGA officers met with officials from BEIS, the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Communities and local Government (CLG). Consequently, Joe Manning – Deputy Director of Industrial Strategy at BEIS - attended the People and Places Board on 28 November 2017, providing an overview of the themes included in the White Paper to members and signalling a strong commitment to engage councils as the Strategy moves towards implementation.
5. The White Paper places strong focus on "Place" as one of the foundations of productivity and the building block of local industrial strategies. Places in England with a Mayoral Combined Authority will have a single Local Industrial Strategy led by the mayor and supported by Local Enterprise Partnerships. For parts of the country without a mayor, the development of the Local Industrial Strategy will be led by the Local Enterprise Partnerships.
6. As a result, a joint national review of the Local Enterprise Partnerships is now underway, led by Jake Berry MP (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy), Margot

James MP (Department for Communities and Local Government), and Andrew Jones MP (HM Treasury). Ahead of this review, myself, along with the Chairman of the Environment, Economy, Transport and Housing Board, requested a representative be included in this review, to ensure voices from non-metropolitan areas are heard. This request was accepted, and lead member Cllr Western represented the LGA and People and Places Board in this capacity, with the next meeting date scheduled for January 2018.

Digital Connectivity

7. The People and Places Board has helped establish local government as a credible and respected voice in the field of digital connectivity. While members are keen to build on this position and continue their focus on improving digital connectivity for residents in non-metropolitan and rural areas in all formats (including mobile phone connectivity), the wide-ranging scope of the People and Places Board's 2017/18 work programme means there is limited capacity to undertake further detailed work in this area within the structure of the current board cycle. As such, at the last Board on meeting 28 November 2017, members agreed to the establishment of a working group to allow members to continue to contribute to the LGA's work on digital connectivity outside of the board's formal work programme.
8. In light of resource constraints identified above discussions have taken place with the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) on their capacity to undertake this role, which they have agreed to. A draft terms of reference has been seen by the Leading Members, which outlines how the group will agree its remit and resource its activities. Membership of the group is currently being finalised and the first meeting is expected within the next month.

Skills and Employment

9. Following on from the last forum, a meeting has been scheduled in January 2018 with the Rt. Hon. Anne Milton MP (Minister of State for Skills and Apprenticeships), with Leading Member Cllr. Brown, and Sir Richard Leese CBE, Chair of the City Regions Board. This meeting aims to discuss the valuable role councils can play in supporting the Department of Education to both join up existing and new elements of a careers support system more effectively across places, balancing national priorities with the varying needs of local communities and businesses, including small and medium-sized enterprises. The meeting with the Minister will be an excellent opportunity to broaden and deepen our political and operational relationship with the Department of Education, so we can work together to deliver an effective skills system.
10. A Work Local campaign plan to step up engagement with decision makers and influencers, has been agreed by Lead Members of both Boards. The aim is to enable councils and combined authorities to be progressively at the heart of planning and commissioning employment and skills provision around local need.

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