

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

Post Brexit England Commission

1. The Commission's Interim Report – 'The Future of Non-Metropolitan England' – was launched at an evening fringe event at the LGA Annual Conference on 4 July. The event was well attended and capped widespread press coverage that highlighted many of the longstanding challenges identified by the report, including: a lack of affordable housing, patchy mobile and broadband connectivity, and an ineffective national employment and skills approach.
2. Following on from the two regional roadshows that took place on 9 May in Taunton and 11 May in Nottingham, four more have now been planned:
 - 2.1 South East / London: Thursday 20 September;
 - 2.2 North East: Wednesday 26 September;
 - 2.3 West Midlands: Thursday 4 October;
 - 2.4 Yorkshire and Humber: Tuesday 9 October;
 - 2.5 North West: Tuesday 16 October; and
 - 2.6 East of England: Wednesday 14 November.
3. Over the summer period officers will begin work to identify and commission key elements of the final report, due to be published early next year, in anticipation of a discussion with members of the People and Places Board at the first meeting of the new cycle in September.

Industrial Strategy

3. At LGA Conference, I spoke at the 'Local Industrial Strategies – the role of Local Leadership' plenary. This proved an engaging session which explored the role of local councils, both in driving local industrial strategies, tackling the productivity challenge, and their potential to deliver inclusive growth for all parts of the country post-Brexit.
4. Alexandra Jones, Director of Industrial Strategy, BEIS, attended the last Board on 12 June 2018. Alexandra updated Members on progress with the design and implementation of the place-based policies announced in the Industrial Strategy, including Local Industrial Strategies, the Strength in Places Fund and the LEP Review.
5. Members may recall the LGA hosted a roundtable event with the LEP Network on 15 March, attended by representatives of the People and Places, City Regions, and Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport (EEHT) Boards as well as LEP Chairs. Following on from this event, the LEP Network and the LGA wrote to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, setting out our joint offer to work with him and his Department on securing an ambitious Industrial Strategy that works for the whole country.

7 June 2018

6. Subsequently, in the light of the limited information that has emerged regarding the process and principles underpinning key elements of the Industrial Strategy we have written again to the Secretary of State requesting further clarity regarding the geographic extent, scope and timings of local industrial strategies, as well as requesting a meeting before Parliamentary recess.

Rural Digital Connectivity Working Group

7. The Rural Digital Connectivity Working Group recently met with Ofcom to share their concerns regarding the current level of mobile connectivity available to rural residents and explore areas where the regulator, local government and the communications sector can work in partnership to catalyse improvements.
8. Members used the opportunity to emphasise that councils would be better placed to have more meaningful discussions with mobile operators on improving local connectivity if Ofcom supplied more accurate local coverage reports that reflect consumer mobile experience on the ground. Ofcom have agreed to maintain a dialogue with the Group in the coming months.

Skills and Employment – Work Local

9. At the last Councillors Forum, the Rt. Hon. Anne Milton MP (Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills) talked about the latest DfE skills policy reforms. It was clear from the Q&A session which followed that the discussion could have gone on for longer. We will look for further opportunities to do this.
10. Immediately afterwards the Forum, Sir Richard Leese and myself met her to discuss how the DfE, LGA and our members can work together more effectively on the design, commissioning and delivery of post 16 skills. This was the LGA's second meeting with her since February. It was a positive meeting, at which we agreed next steps to support more collaborative working.

Higher Education

11. In light of the conclusion of the second phase of the Leading Places programme as well as recent changes to national higher education governance, the City Regions and People and Places Boards have jointly agreed to refocus the LGA's higher education engagement activity. This engagement will now focus primarily on the Industrial Strategy, and related activity will include the continued delivery of improvement support to local partnerships, engagement with the UPP Civic University Commission and the exploration of strategic collaboration on cross-sector priorities such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Contact officer: Alex Thomson
Position: Principal Policy Adviser
Phone no: 0207 664 3312
Email: alex.thomson@local.gov.uk