

People and Places Board – Draft Work Programme 2018/19

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

This report sets out a draft work programme for the period to July 2019.

Recommendations

Board Members are asked to consider the draft programme and, subject to their comments and amendments, agree that it be confirmed as the People and Places Board's work programme for 2018/19.

Action/s

Officers to incorporate Member's comments into the work programme.

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Overview

1. The People and Places Board represents the interests of non-metropolitan local authorities. It provides a forum for leaders from across England to discuss place-based issues of common priority and a platform from which to advance the policy interests of more rural and coastal areas at the national level. Together with the City Regions Board it covers a wide range of policy areas, in contrast with the majority of other LGA boards which focus on particular agendas such as social care, community safety or finance.
2. The Board was established within the context of a national Government actively in favour of devolution to local areas, most notably through a series of devolution deals with groups of councils across the country.
3. While open to all areas, through the process of inviting proposals, assessing these across Whitehall and subsequently agreeing individual deals, the Government expressed both a clear preference for a specific model of devolved governance, a Mayoral Combined Authority, and exhibited a relatively narrow focus on cities and city regions.
4. As such, there are now ten signed devolution deals and seven Mayoral Combined Authorities. Of these, only Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and North of Tyne might be considered to contain substantial non-metropolitan areas and only Cornwall and London have managed to secure a deal without establishing a combined authority.
5. Both the Board's membership and policy focus reflect this context, with limited representation from those areas at the forefront of national Government's devolution agenda and a cross-cutting work programme that seeks to: ensure the opportunities of devolution are open to all areas; prioritise particular policy areas where the case for further devolution might best be made; and, capture those place-based issues most relevant to rural and coastal communities.
6. The next few months are likely to see both Whitehall and Westminster continue to be dominated by preparations relating to the UK's Withdrawal from the EU on 29 March 2019. In anticipation that the UK's departure will be followed at some point before May 2022 by a General Election there are signs that political parties and their aligned think-tanks are already beginning to develop policies suitable for inclusion in future party manifestos.
7. Throughout this period the onus will be on local government to continue to make the case for devolution. The People and Places Board has a crucial role to play in shaping this agenda and the draft work programme set out below, provides a framework for achieving this over the short, medium and longer term.
8. Members are asked to consider this report and, subject to their amendments, agree that it is confirmed as the People and Places Board's work programme for 2018/19.

Strategic priorities for 2018/19

9. It is proposed that the primary objective of the People and Places Board remains the devolution of power and resources to local government across England. However, recognising that few members of the Board are likely to be actively engaged in delivering devolution deals and the importance of maintaining a focus on issues specific to non-metropolitan and rural areas it is proposed that the strategic priorities for the year ahead are both broad and forward looking.
10. For those issues that lie outside these identified priorities, but which the Board's membership believe to be of particular relevance to non-metropolitan authorities it is proposed that in the first instance the priority will be to determine which LGA policy board, if any, has responsibility for this issue and what opportunities there are to contribute to ongoing and future activity.
11. The exception to this general approach will be those areas of interest shared with the City Regions Board, which represents the interests of urban authorities. In these cases, as is currently the case with skills and employment policy it is proposed that the presumption will be in favour of seeking to establish a joint position.
12. Reflecting the national context, the composition of the Board and its particular place-based focus it is therefore recommended that the 2018/19 work programme has three components:
 - 12.1 **Pushing for devolution now** – advocating for devolution through national Government's place-based growth agenda i.e. the Industrial Strategy and on a Department-by-Department basis, such as skills and employment support devolution and sub-national trade and investment reform
 - 12.2 **Building the case for future devolution** – using the Post-Brexit England Commission as a platform to advance a refreshed case for devolution to non-metropolitan areas, re-positioning councils as a key partner with Government in shaping and supporting a successful post-Brexit England;
 - 12.3 **Strengthening non-metropolitan economic resilience** – pushing for parity of treatment in Government policy and investment across all parts of England, with a targeted focus on issues of particular priority, reflecting the extent of the Board's wider work-programme, such as digital connectivity and the opportunity to reform the Common Agricultural Policy.

Pushing for devolution now

13. Despite the apparent 'pause' in the Government's devolution agenda there remain opportunities within the short to medium term to push for the transfer of power and resources to local areas.
14. First and foremost amongst these opportunities is the Government's Industrial Strategy, which represents both the firmest commitment by national government to a place-based

growth agenda and the greatest opportunity for engagement across Whitehall and with local anchor institutions such as universities and the NHS.

15. The Industrial Strategy has three place-based components: the Local Enterprise Partnership Review, Local Industrial Strategies and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. While the precise relationship between reforms within each of these elements has yet to be clearly articulated it is understood that outside the Mayoral Combined Authority areas Local Enterprise Partnerships will play a crucial role in accessing devolved funding for local growth, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and securing Departmental collaboration on local policy interventions such as skills and employment support.
16. Given the importance of this agenda to non-metropolitan authorities it is proposed that the People and Places Board take a leading role in this area, working closely with the Local Enterprise Partnership Network and agreeing where possible common positions relevant to Local Industrial Strategies, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Local Enterprise Partnership governance.
17. Second, the seven mayoral combined authorities represent the current high-point of national Government's approach to local devolution, with the next significant development expected to be the eighth Mayoral Election which will take place in North of Tyne in May 2019. However, the 2017 Conservative Manifesto also proposed a new Common Devolution Framework, widely interpreted as a mechanism for securing devolution outside the combined authority governance model.
18. While the precise relationship between the Devolution Framework and the Industrial Strategy is as yet unclear, early indications suggest that it may provide an opportunity to explore public service reform and elements of devolution that sit outside the economic growth agenda.
19. Within the context of a newly appointed Secretary of State, one yet to set to set out his position regarding future devolution, there is a significant opportunity to influence the design of this framework for the benefit of non-metropolitan authorities. As such it is proposed the Board seek to secure a meeting on this subject as a matter of urgency.
20. Third, alongside the City Regions Board it is proposed that the People and Places Board will continue to advance the role of local government in driving inclusive growth on a Departmental basis, reflecting both the priorities of members and the potential traction to be gained with Ministers.

21. Priority areas of work over the next year for the Board to consider and contribute to in this category include:

21.1 Influencing the design and roll-out of the Industrial Strategy, which has three key place-based components – the Local Enterprise Partnership Review, Local Industrial Strategies and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Ensuring areas across the country have an equal opportunity to develop ambitious and credible plans for growth that garner the support of Government, are backed by robust local governance arrangements that make the most of existing partnerships and are underpinned by devolved funding for growth that better reflects the need of local communities.

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21.2 Influencing the development of the Government's 'Devolution Framework', now expected to be published in the autumn and drawing on the experience of councils with devolution deals to ensure those without a deal are best able to make the most of this opportunity.

21.3 Continuing to advance the arguments in favour of skills and employment devolution, pressing government to fully implement Work Local, the LGA's positive proposal for change, working with the Department for Education to deliver the post-16 skills partnership through the combined authorities and non-combined authorities working groups and using the LGA's Skills Taskforce to build an expanded coalition of stakeholders outside the local government sector to support the LGA's proposals for skills and employment devolution.

21.4 Developing the LGA's approach to trade and international investment, by working with the Department for International Trade to understand and strengthen the existing sub-national trade and investment landscape, building an evidence base of place and sectoral priorities for future trade deals and agreeing with Government how the views and international relationships of local government might be harnessed during these deals.

Building the case for future devolution

22. In anticipation of both the opportunities and challenges following Britain's departure from the EU, the inherent limitations in the medium term resulting from the current national political context and the time required to develop credible and coherent policy proposals the People and Places Board took the decision at the start of the 2017/18 work programme to establish the Post-Brexit England Commission to develop a refreshed case for devolution to non-metropolitan areas and re-position councils as a key partner with Government in shaping and supporting a successful post-Brexit England.

23. Since its formal launch in February 2018, the Commission has built a broad coalition of partners from across local government, Parliament, business and the public and housing sectors.

24. In May, the Commission began a series of roadshows across the country, to gather evidence on the challenges rural and coastal communities are facing and the local policy levers needed to tackle them.
25. At the LGA Annual Conference in July 2018, the Commission published its interim report detailing the significant social and demographic challenges facing rural and coastal communities and identifying seven policy areas in which power and resources might be devolved to councils in order to provide better outcomes for residents and businesses.
26. The report attracted significant positive press coverage at the national and local level and attracted widespread support for the Commission's objectives.
27. Over the year ahead the Commission will continue to gather evidence, develop compelling policy proposals and build the stakeholder networks necessary to successfully advance the case for ambitious local devolution ahead of a final publication in 2019.
28. The key area of work over the next year for the board to consider and contribute to is:
 - 28.1 Shaping and supporting the Post-Brexit England Commission as it moves towards publication of a final report in 2019. Noting that the Commission contains both discrete elements of policy as well as acting as a framework for considering wider questions, such as the constitutional position of England within the United Kingdom.

Strengthening non-metropolitan economic resilience

29. While the Board's diverse membership, strategic priorities and allocation of resources reflect its creation as a platform to advance the case for devolution to all parts of the country, both the clear urban locus of implemented devolution deals and the comparatively scant attention paid at the national level to issues affecting deeply rural as well as coastal areas have, over successive political cycles, encouraged members to provide national leadership on issues of particular relevance to their non-metropolitan communities.
30. Priority areas of work over the next year for the Board to consider and contribute to in this category include:
 - 30.1 Digital connectivity – steering the work of the Rural Digital Connectivity Working Group
 - 30.2 Common Agricultural Policy – exploring the potential to develop new thinking relating to the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy

Next Steps

- 31 **Members are asked to consider this report and, subject to their amendments, agree that it is confirmed as the People and Places Board's work programme for 2018/19.**