

Post-Brexit England Commission – Part 1

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This paper sets out the background to the People and Places Board's Post-Brexit England Commission and outlines a proposed workplan for the next phase of the Commission's work following the successful publication of its interim report in July 2018.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

1. Reflect on the work of the Commission to date (**paragraphs 1-9**)
2. Agree the future policy direction of the Commission including the policy areas on which the final report should prioritise its focus (**paragraphs 10-14**)
3. Note the dates of the Commission's remaining roadshows. (**paragraphs 15-18**)

Action/s

Officers to take forward work in line with members' steer.

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Background

1. Early on in the last political cycle, members concluded that the process of withdrawing from the European Union will continue to fully occupy the attention and resources of national government for many months to come. In turn, this will leave both Whitehall and Westminster with little scope to tackle the major barriers to success and prosperity facing non-metropolitan England.
2. While the last few years have seen national and local government take steps towards addressing these barriers through the deal-based decentralisation of funding and policy responsibility, there is now a strong sense amongst members that, for areas outside the mayoral combined authorities, particularly non-metropolitan areas, devolution has stalled leaving the significant economic and social benefits of greater local control over public services and investment unrealised.
3. Consequently, the People and Places Board decided to establish the Post-Brexit England Commission to develop a refreshed case for devolution to non-metropolitan areas and to re-position councils as a key partner with Government within the context of shaping and supporting a successful post-Brexit England.
4. In order to secure the strong political buy-in of non-metropolitan councils and make best use of existing resources, the Board chose to maintain strategic oversight of this work, but for a broad range of stakeholders to be engaged on the Commission's focus to ensure its outputs are credible, coherent and compelling.
5. Since its 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. In May, it 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.
6. At the LGA Annual Conference in July 2018, the Commission published an interim report detailing its findings to date. [‘The Future of Non-Metropolitan England: moving the conversation on’](#) outlines the ‘perfect storm’ of social and demographic challenges facing rural and coastal communities and identifies seven key challenges which local government can address if given the requisite powers and funding;
 - 6.1. tackling the skills gap;
 - 6.2. building more affordable and suitable housing;
 - 6.3. catalysing better digital connectivity;
 - 6.4. providing support services to help maintain health and wellbeing;
 - 6.5. maintaining and building high quality transport provision and infrastructure;
 - 6.6. supporting businesses to export and attract investment; and
 - 6.7. increasing productivity and securing inclusive growth.
7. As one of the LGA's key Conference publications, the report received a high level of attention from delegates and secured extensive positive coverage in the national media including [the Daily Telegraph](#), [the Guardian](#), [The Times](#) and [the Express](#). Cllr Hawthorne

was also interviewed by Sky News Radio, which supplies news to every commercial radio station in the UK.

8. Since Conference, the report has been downloaded almost 500 times and has also featured in an editorial in [the Yorkshire Post](#) by Conservative Peer Baroness Macintosh.
9. The Commission's interim report is the first major milestone in its programme of work. Its publication, and the attention it has received to date, provides a firm foundation on which to develop the next phase of the Commission's activity which will culminate in the publication of a final report in 2019.

The future focus of the Commission

10. This first board of the 2018/19 political cycle is an opportunity for members to reflect on the activity and achievements of the Commission to date, refresh their overall ambitions for the Commission and consider how the final report might build on the work of the interim report in support of these.
11. The Commission's interim report places firmly on record the challenges and opportunities facing non-metropolitan England post-Brexit, spanning seven key policy themes across the remits of several LGA Boards. In adopting this high-level strategic perspective it provides a clear sense of the expansive and interrelated concerns facing non-metropolitan communities, has successfully gained traction with national stakeholders and the press, and will remain a centrepiece of the Commission's work over the coming political cycle.
12. The publication of the Commission's final report is now an opportunity for members to undertake fresh research and develop new thinking on behalf of the sector in policy areas of importance to non-metropolitan councils, and on which it has the direct remit to engage Government and other key stakeholders in the aftermath of Brexit and in the coming years. To this end, officers have set out four areas which it is suggested the board dedicates the capacity and resource available to the Commission in the coming year.

Areas to actively develop

- 12.1. **The Industrial Strategy** – The Government's announcement that it will agree Local Industrial Strategies with all areas by early 2020, and the inclusion of non-metropolitan areas in the recently announced 'second wave' which will be developed, offers the Commission an opportunity to consider how Local Industrial Strategies will best work in the context of rural and coastal areas. The activity the Board will undertake in this area, as set out in a separate paper, will help inform the work of the Commission and allow officers to engage with non-metropolitan areas developing a strategy in the coming months. In turn, this will help the Commission set out a series of recommendations for those areas that are yet to develop a Local Industrial Strategy by the time of the publication of the Commission's final report
- 12.2. **Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy** – It is suggested officers begin to scope out a piece of research which will explore the future of funding in non-

metropolitan areas, looking in particular at options for successor arrangements to the Common Agricultural Policy and how they might integrate into the new growth funding landscape, post-Brexit.

- 12.3. **Digital connectivity** – With welcome progress made on the Commission’s broadband asks, including the Government’s recent decision to consult on mandating fibre to the premises for all new builds, the Commission could sharpen its focus on mobile connectivity coverage in rural and coastal areas. With support from the Rural Digital Connectivity Working Group, a survey of councils could be undertaken to understand the support they need in this area to help catalyse further connectivity. A representative from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport or Sharon White, Chief Executive from Ofcom, could also be invited to the January Board to discuss the findings of the survey.
- 12.4. **Trade and international investment** – Finally, the Board has led on the LGA’s work to date on how to strengthen the sub-national trade and investment support framework in England. The final report is an opportunity to further develop proposals on how the existing sub-national trade and investment framework could be strengthened to support local businesses export and attract investment, especially the SMEs and micro-businesses which dominate the economy of non-metropolitan areas. This will be aided by the survey of councils members have commissioned on the role of local areas in encouraging exports and establishing international links. It is also proposed that a representative from the Department for International Trade be invited to the November Board to discuss the findings.

Policy areas to keep a watching brief

13. It is suggested the Commission maintains a watching brief over the remaining policy areas covered in the interim report, and on which future LGA activity is being steered by other LGA Boards or working groups, but retains the option to consider them in greater detail in the final report should the need arise. These include:
- 13.1. **Employment and skills** – building on the proposals outlined in the interim report, the newly established LGA Skills Taskforce will advance the arguments in favour of skills and employment devolution, pressing government to fully implement Work Local, the LGA’s positive proposal for change.
- 13.2. **Health and wellbeing** - following the postponement of the Government’s Green Paper on adult social care, the LGA has published its own green paper [‘The lives we want to lead’](#). The consultative document seeks the views of people and organisations from across society, including non-metropolitan councils, on how best to pay for care and support for adults of all ages. Its findings will be used to inform and influence the Government’s green paper and spending plans on behalf of the sector.
- 13.3. **Rural Housing** - The EEHT Board will continue to lead the case for reforming housing, planning and homelessness policy to ensure councils have the tools and resources to meet local housing need. This includes planning and land market reforms to ensure developers build homes that are locally affordable,

appropriate, good quality and well supported by infrastructure, as well as pushing the case for certainty and flexibility for councils to build homes directly.

13.4. **Rural Transport** - The Government has made the future of transport one of the Industrial Strategy's 'grand challenges' and has launched a call for evidence on how changes to mobility will change transport networks and society. This call for evidence will influence a 'future of rural mobility strategy' that will be published at some point after 2018. The LGA intends to reply to this call for evidence with the insights gained through our future transport programme of work. The work will continue for the coming political year and will examine how local authorities will respond to changes in transport technology.

14. **Members are invited to comment on the proposal to make a division between those policy areas to actively develop and those over which to retain a watching brief with a view to producing a final report which develops new thinking on behalf of the sector and on which the Board has the remit to engage Government and other key stakeholders post-Brexit.**

The Commission's Roadshows

15. Over the last political cycle, members made clear the importance of engaging a wide ranging number of stakeholders, approaching public and private sector representatives as a matter of course, but also seeking input from a full cross-section of relevant rural industries, communities, academics and civic groups.
16. To this end it was proposed that the development of the Commission's recommendations are informed by a series of regional roadshows, with an explicit focus on ensuring these engage stakeholders from rural communities across the country, drawing deeply on local experience and expertise
17. Regional events in the East Midlands and South West were held in May 2018 to engage stakeholders on the drafting of the interim report. A summary of those meetings is provided in the Commission's interim report. The next iteration of the Commission's roadshows will be held across the remaining regions of the country between October and December to test and develop the findings of the Commission.
18. The dates of the roadshows are as follows and members can register their attendance on the LGA website – www.local.gov.uk/events.

West Midlands	Thursday 4 October, Staffordshire County Council
North West	Tuesday 16 October, Lancashire County Council
East of England	Tuesday 27 November, Essex County Council
South East	Tuesday 18 December, LGA, Smith Square
North East	Date and venue to be confirmed shortly.
Yorkshire and Humber	Date and venue to be confirmed shortly.

Next Steps

19. Members are asked to:

- 19.1. Reflect on the work of the Commission to date (**paragraphs 1-9**)
- 19.2. Agree the future policy direction of the Commission including the policy areas on which the final report should prioritise its focus (**paragraphs 10-14**)
- 19.3. Note the dates of the Commission's remaining roadshows. (**paragraphs 15-18**)