

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

The future of rural England

1. Savills Rural Research team joined the Board to discuss research they have undertaken on behalf of the Board on understanding the role for councils in rural land management. This will feed into the final report of the Post-Brexit England Commission, established to explore the issues and opportunities facing local areas outside England's major city regions. Copies of the report will be available at the LGA stand at Annual Conference, and the 'Leading People: Leading Places' session on 3 July will mark the official launch of the publication.

Rural digital connectivity

2. The LGA has is producing a Councillors' Guide to Digital Connectivity to provide members looking to expand their knowledge in the area. It explores the main issues and challenges facing rural areas and includes hints, tips and case studies from experienced councillors who have already undertaken work to get their communities better connected. It also provides a brief overview of Government policy and a glossary of widely used terms. It will be available online before the end of June.

Industrial strategy

3. Together with the City Regions Board, the People and Places Board has overseen the LGA's joint work with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to support local areas in the development of local industrial strategies. The LGA has held well-attended masterclasses on inclusive growth, effective collaboration with businesses and stakeholders, and developing a place based narrative. It also hosted a series of action learning sets with officers from around the country. Write-ups from these events alongside learning notes and a good practice toolkit to support the creation of a robust evidence base will be available on the LGA website by late June.
4. We have also continued to respond to developments arising from the Government's review of Local Enterprise Partnerships. Recent activity has included responses to work led by the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee into LEP progress. This has included a focus on strengthening LEP accountability, particularly in light of changes to LEP board composition

Trade and investment

5. Following a request from People and Places Board members, Marian Sudbury, Director of UK Regions at the Department for International Trade (DIT), presented to the Board in March on the Department's regional offer. The Board discussed with Marian opportunities to strengthen DIT's working with regions through LEPs and councils, and the approach to developing distinctive branding and approaches for all English regions, building on the Northern Powerhouse and the Midlands Engine.

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6. This activity at the Board has been supplemented by Parliamentary activity including written questions on trade from the LGA Chairman and a meeting between Cllr Kevin Bentley and Graham Stuart MP, Minister for Investment.
7. The final report of the LGA's Post-Brexit England Commission will include a focus on trade and investment and will make recommendations to Government that seek to strengthen the role of councils in non-metropolitan England on trade and investment, building on good practice across the country.

Skills and employment

8. Cllr Mark Hawthorne, Chairman of the Board, was invited to speak at two Skills Commission events as part of the Commission's 'Future of the Skills System' inquiry. The LGA used these events to reaffirm our Work Local campaign.
9. Dr Deirdre Hughes, a former member of the National Careers Council, was invited to discuss with the Board the importance of careers advice and guidance and give a critique of the current system. This was to help inform the LGA's work to lobby for localisation and devolution of careers advice, which is a key aim of LGA Work Local.
10. The final LGA Skills Taskforce roundtable, established by this Board and the City Regions Board, took place on 28 March. It focused on 'The future of work: how changing skills needs of sector-specific industries will play out in the local economy'. A total of 22 leading stakeholders, industry and sector representatives attended. A write up of the roundtable can be viewed on our [skills taskforce page](#).
11. The Government's National Retraining Scheme, set up to advise and reskill adults vulnerable to economic change is being developed now by the DfE, CBI and the TUC (the National Retraining Partnership). Councils and combined authorities can play a role in supporting this. To this end we – the LGA, Learning and Work Institute and the National Retraining Partnership – organised a roundtable in May which included a mix of combined authorities, councils, stakeholders and industry leads to get a better understanding of the scheme and inform its development.
12. The LGA and 23 leading signatories wrote an [open letter](#) to the Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP, Secretary of State for Education, which called for a series of reforms to support councils and combined authorities to deliver quality apprenticeships locally. This included calls on the Government to pause plans to begin clawing back unspent Apprenticeship Levy funding following delays to the standards in adult care, early years and building control against which the Levy funds must be spent. The letter was featured in the Financial Times. The LGA has [welcomed](#) a Public Accounts Committee [report](#) raising concerns about the apprenticeship programme, having previously [submitted written evidence](#) to it.

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