

Company Number 11177145

End of Year Board Report

Purpose of report

For information and discussion.

Summary

This report provides an overview of the issues and work the board has overseen during the last year. It sets out key achievements in relation to the priorities for the **People and Places Board** in 2018/19, and looks forward to next year's priorities.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

1. Note the achievements against the board's priorities in 2018/19; and
2. Note the board's proposed priority areas for 2019/20.

Action

Officers to action as appropriate.

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Background and Context

1. The People and Places Board was created to provide a clear voice and resource for non-metropolitan authorities within the LGA.
2. Members are asked to consider the achievements of the board over the last year against the use of allocated resources and to reflect on whether the board is continuing to meet its original purpose in response to the emerging priorities of non-metropolitan areas.

Priorities and Achievements

Post-Brexit England Commission

3. In the last political Board cycle, the People and Places Board established the Post-Brexit England Commission to explore the issues and opportunities facing local areas outside England's major city regions; from large and small towns, to the coastal and rural communities in which 62 per cent of the English population live.
4. To support the work of the Commission, a series of engagement roadshows have been held across the country to gather evidence on the challenges rural and coastal communities are facing, and the local policy levers needed to tackle them. The Commission visited all English regions outside London and heard from over 200 non-metropolitan stakeholders on the opportunities and challenges their rural areas are facing after Brexit.
5. The Commission's interim report provided a firm foundation on which the Commission has further refined its thinking. This will culminate in the publication of the final report at LGA Conference in July.
6. Research was commissioned from Savills Rural Research on understanding the future role for councils in rural land management. This will feature in the Commission's final report.

Devolution

7. The People and Places Board wrote to the Secretary of State to influence the Government's expected Devolution Framework. The Board's main focus was to make the case for parity for those non-metropolitan areas that hadn't been afforded the same freedoms as areas with a devolution deal.

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Skills and Employment

8. The Board works jointly with the City Regions Board to steer our employment and skills work through our Work Local proposals for devolved and integrated employment and skills. During the last political cycle, the Boards agreed to establish a cross LGA Skills Taskforce to forge links with skills industry experts and stakeholders on this agenda. Co-chaired by Cllrs Sir Richard Leese and Mark Hawthorne, the Taskforce convening three themed roundtables between December 2018 and March 2019. Through it, we engaged 28 leading organisations and trade bodies that are key to improving skills and employment in England. A Taskforce [webpage](#) includes video interviews from stakeholders and summaries of each roundtable meeting. We aim to strengthen these links over the next Board cycle. Already we have started to develop follow up work on apprenticeships and the National Retraining Scheme.
9. 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.
10. The LGA Boards will launch a refreshed Work Local proposal at our annual conference in July 2019. This also includes findings from the skills taskforce roundtables.
11. The LGA hosted a skills conference in November 2018. The event was well attended with extremely positive feedback. The sessions ranged from post-16 pathways to supporting age-friendly employment with keynote address by Dr Emran Mian OBE, Acting Director General of Higher and Further Education, Department for Education. We are now planning to host a series of events to explore some of the specific topics.
12. Cllr Mark Hawthorne, Chairman of the Board, was invited to speak at two events as part of the independent Skills Commission's 'Future of the Skills System' inquiry. The LGA used these events to reaffirm our Work Local messages.
13. Following positive discussions last year with the Rt Hon Anne Milton MP, Skills and Apprenticeships Minister, the LGA proactively put forward a plan for LGA politicians and skills leads from councils to engage strategically with DfE on the development of post-16 skills policy and funding. The proposal was well received by DfE officials with a go-ahead to proceed. However more recent discussions with the Department suggest that while political level meetings are expected to continue, plans to engage council skills leads have been watered down. The LGA will seek clarity from DfE on this.

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Trade and Investment

14. As Britain prepares to leave the EU, we have continued to work in partnership with the City Regions Board to inform the LGA's policy work on trade and international investment.
15. A survey of the LGA's membership was undertaken at the end of last year to highlight the depth and diversity of trade and other international links established between councils and global partners, with a view to strengthening the role of sub-national government in future trade and investment activity.
16. The LGA has continued to engage with the Department for International Trade and key national stakeholders on the role for local government in future trade policy. Marian Sudbury, Director of UK Regions at the Department for International Trade (DIT), attended the Board to talk about the Department's sub-national work. The Board discussed with Marian how councils could most effectively contribute to the Department's work and highlighted examples from across the country of the important role for councils in supporting exports and inward investment. 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.

Broadband and Mobile Phone Connectivity

17. The Rural Digital Connectivity Working Group oversaw a range of LGA responses to digital connectivity consultations from Government and Ofcom including:
 - 17.1. An Ofcom consultation on the delivery of the broadband universal service obligation (USO). In the submission the LGA outlined the need for Ofcom to ensure that broadband providers implement a social tariff to ensure no resident experiences hardship paying the market rate for a broadband connection.
 - 17.2. An Ofcom consultation on the new mobile coverage conditions it plans to place on mobile network operators. As part of its formal response the LGA outlined its disappointment that Ofcom had rolled back on its original coverage obligations and increased the deadline for MNOs to meet them from 3 to 4 years.
 - 17.3. A Government consultation on introducing legislation to invoke a "duty to connect" on developers to force them to connect new builds to gigabit capable infrastructure. The LGA's submission detailed local government's support for Government to require broadband providers to connect new builds with full fibre broadband.

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18. The Working Group invited a senior executive from Openreach to their meeting to discuss the USO in greater detail. In conversations with the provider it became clear that until Ofcom has fully examined the responses to its recent consultation there will remain a lack of clarity on how or when the USO will be implemented.
19. The Group has also commissioned a councillors' handbook on digital connectivity. This has been completed and will be published shortly.
20. People and Places Board Chairman Cllr Mark Hawthorne was invited to a mobile connectivity roundtable hosted by consumer organisation Which? and attended by a range of business, rural and consumer stakeholders. There was consensus across the room for the Government and Ofcom to consider regulatory measures such as rural roaming (where a mobile can utilise the strongest signal from any mobile network operator) to incentivise the market to provide excellent coverage in rural areas. The LGA will continue to have conversations with stakeholders with an aim to join up on our lobbying efforts.

Industrial Strategy

21. The People and Places Board has continued to represent the interests of non-metropolitan areas in relation to the key place-based elements of the Industrial Strategy, specifically the Government's Review of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), the introduction of Local Industrial Strategies and the design of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).
22. Having secured a commitment from Government that all areas will agree a Local Industrial Strategy, the Board is committed to supporting the development of these strategies across non-metropolitan England. Specifically, the Board has provided input into the design of the LGA's Local Industrial Strategy improvement support offer, seeking to ensure that this addresses the specific needs of non-metropolitan authorities. 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.
23. We have continued to respond to developments arising from the Government's review of Local Enterprise Partnerships. Activity included a letter to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and 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.

Programme of work and priorities 2018/19

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24. Under the direction of a new Chairman, the board will pursue a programme of engagement with Government and rural stakeholders to take forward the recommendations of the Post-Brexit England Commission including its work on rural land management.
25. The board will continue to make the case for a place-based approach in public policy making, articulating the ambitions of non-metropolitan authorities.
26. The board will continue to take forward the LGA's lobbying work on skills, making the case for the Work Local model and continuing to engage with key stakeholders.
27. The board will seek to ensure the key elements of the Industrial Strategy – Local Industrial Strategies, UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the LEP Review, fit with the priorities and ambitions of non-metropolitan authorities.
28. The board will keep a watching brief on developments on rural broadband, and develop its work on mobile connectivity in rural areas.

Financial Implications

29. All work programmes are met from existing budgets and resources. Additional funding was secured from BEIS to deliver the LIS improvement programme.