

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

### **Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill**

1. People & Places Board Members have continued to work with the City Regions Board to lead the LGA's lobbying on the Cities & Local Government Bill (the Bill) as it continues through Parliament to ensure that the Bill facilitates the most flexible, locally-led negotiations. Royal Assent was expected in December, but will now be early 2016.
2. Recently, the Government tabled a number of amendments regarding "consents" to Combined Authorities. Government also tabled a new amendment giving the Secretary of State (SoS) the power to take back health functions, after they have been devolved, without local consent. These Government amendments have triggered a great deal of concern in the sector and the LGA has been briefing MPs<sup>1</sup> based on steer from both Boards. Officers have also produced a briefing on the implications of the new amendments to the Bill for member authorities.<sup>2</sup>

### **Devolution: LGA Support Offer**

3. Take up of the LGA's devolution support offer, drawn up with direction from the People & Places and City Regions Boards, has been very good, and officers have received positive feedback from councils on the range of services that have been used. Andrew Campbell (Associate Director) has met with groups of councils in every part of the country and his connections have been particularly valuable in helping local areas gain insight into the thinking of Whitehall departments as they prepare for their challenge sessions with Ministers.
4. The [DevoNext hub](#) continues to receive positive feedback from the sector with a number of new features added in the past few weeks, including:
  - 4.1. A short video to explain what combined authorities are.
  - 4.2. Links to the September proposals and summaries of the devolution deals that have been announced.
  - 4.3. Links to useful resources developed by local authorities.
  - 4.4. Links to research and analysis to bolster the evidence base for bids.
  - 4.5. Infographics illustrating the benefits of devolution for businesses and what could be gained by devolving skills and employment support.
5. The LGA has also organised several well-attended events on devolution including:
  - 5.1. A national conference on communicating about devolution in Birmingham on 21 October.
  - 5.2. A joint national conference with SOLACE on governance in a new world on 27 November.
  - 5.3. Two events for elected members to explore place-based leadership in the context of devolution as part of the LGA's Leading Edge and Leaders' Programme.
  - 5.4. The first meeting of a new network the LGA has established to support council officers working on devolution.
6. As most places move to an implementation phase, officers will receive steer from members on how best to focus current resources on implementation and sharing emerging practice.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/briefings-and-responses/-/journal\\_content/56/10180/7318899/ARTICLE](http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/briefings-and-responses/-/journal_content/56/10180/7318899/ARTICLE)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/briefings-and-responses/-/journal\\_content/56/10180/7611125/ARTICLE#sthash.SsqilYOO.dpuf](http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/briefings-and-responses/-/journal_content/56/10180/7611125/ARTICLE#sthash.SsqilYOO.dpuf)

### **The evidence base for devolving employment, skills and welfare**

7. The People & Places and City Regions Boards commissioned the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (Inclusion) to develop a devolved employment model for the most disadvantaged jobseekers including Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) work-ready claimants which could be flexible enough to apply in all areas across England. The proposal was submitted to Ministers in early November by myself, alongside Sir Richard Leese CBE and Cllr Izzi Seccombe, to influence Spending Review decisions.
8. The Spending Review announced a new specialist Work & Health Programme (WHP), to replace Work Programme and Work Choice contracts in 2017, for claimants with health conditions or disabilities and those unemployed for over two years. This announcement reflects many principles set out in the LGA proposal (but we understand it will be a much smaller programme with low levels of funding). Given that so many decisions are yet to be taken, the LGA is at the forefront of discussions with the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) to influence these. In response to a letter from the Employment Minister Priti Patel, Sir Richard Leese and I are seeking a Ministerial meeting to take forward LGA ideas. A roundtable session with councils and DWP will take place at the end of January.
9. In speaking at a national Universities UK event on 20 October on the implications of devolution, I highlighted the history of partnership working between universities and local areas and the future key challenges both partners will have to tackle together such as the chronic skills shortages in key industries across the country, such as construction.

### **Superfast Broadband and Mobile Connectivity**

10. As part of the Board's Superfast Broadband and Mobile Connectivity work programme, we are undertaking a nationwide survey of councils involved in both the Government-funded Mobile Infrastructure Project and the Superfast Broadband Programme to assess each programme's performance to date, reflect back to Government any lessons learnt from the sector, and shape Board activity in this area going forward.
11. I met the Chair of the Culture Media and Sport Committee, Jesse Norman MP, as part of his Committee's Inquiry into 'Establishing World-Class Connectivity throughout the UK, and used the meeting as an opportunity to highlight the LGA's submission to the Inquiry, and lobby the Chair to receive an LGA representative to submit oral evidence in person.
12. Separately I also met with senior Government officials from Broadband Delivery UK, to share the emerging findings of the survey the Board had commissioned, and discuss ways that Government and the LGA could work together going forward. Chris Townsend (Chief Executive) and Andrew Fields (Head of Operations) from Broadband Delivery UK will be attending the January Board meeting for them to us on the progress of the Superfast Broadband Programme and how the Government is seeking to expand provision to the most hard to reach residents across the country.

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