

19 January 2012

Item 3

Economy and Transport updates

Purpose of report

For noting and comments.

Summary

This paper outlines the latest updates on priority areas of the Board.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the updates and comment.

Action

Officers to action as agreed.

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Economy and Transport updates

Economy

Mary Portas Review

1. The Mary Portas review was published on 13 December 2011. Members of the Economy and Transport Programme Board pre-empted the review with a press statement criticising the level of engagement with local government, and set out the LGA's plan for tackling decline on the high street. It received widespread coverage in the press. Cllr Peter Box was quoted in almost every daily news paper, including the Times, Telegraph, Independent, Guardian, Sun and the Mirror. Cllr Shona Johnstone appeared on BBC 1 o'clock news and BBC News 24 as well as various BBC regional radio stations. Cllr Chris White, Chair of the Culture, Tourism and Sport Programme Board was also interviewed by Sky News and ITV News.
2. The Portas review made a number of recommendations, some of which seem generally positive, including: strengthened role for local partnerships; increased responsibility on landlords; and new measures to tackle clustering and to fill empty shops. But it also made recommendations that would hold back council efforts to revitalise town centres, for instance: more free parking, with a national car parking league table; giving secretary of state power to decide on out of town developments; allowing anyone to trade on the high street.
3. Officers are working on a new phase of high street work and developing a proposal that focuses on high streets as a cultural, community and social hub. This work will be brought to the Board for discussion.

Driving local economic growth - development support

4. A programme of training and development support for leaders, portfolio holders and officers on driving local economic growth is underway. The programme includes two events for elected members and two for officers. The first member development workshop took place on 9 January at Local Government House.
5. The workshops are designed to give space to members to discuss issues relating to the leadership challenges and opportunities of local growth. Leaders and cabinet members came together from the Greater South East and beyond to discuss sub-regional working, leadership and changes to their own and their council's skills set as well as the culture needed to promote private sector growth. Economy and Transport Programme Board member Cllr Kevin Lynes provided a powerful case study of the role that public sector leaders and councils in Kent played in mitigating the impact of Pfizer's decision to withdraw from Sandwich. The case study from Kent

Item 3

was followed by one from Gloucestershire that focused on the commissioning of council-led economic development funding and issues of governance. Both contributed to very positive feedback and lessons from the first workshop will feed into the planning for the second one which will take place in Manchester on 19 March.

6. The first officer event took place at Local Government House on 5 December and the follow-up officer event is planned for 20 March in Leeds. These face-to-face events are complemented by the online Driving Local Economic Growth Community of Practice (CoP) which recently hosted an online discussion on Influencing Skills Provision. Outputs from workshops will also be shared on this (CoP) <http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk/c/4993164/home.do> and on the website when this year's programme is complete.

Post Offices

7. Economy and Transport Programme Board Vice and Deputy Chairs Cllr Shona Johnstone and Cllr Mike Haines met with Ed Davey MP, Minister for Postal Affairs and Paula Vennells, Managing Director of Post Office Limited on 9 January to discuss engagement between local councils and Post Office Limited.
8. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss:
 - 8.1 the purpose and timeline for the strategic partnership between the 25 pilot councils and Post Office Limited – 24 councils have accepted the offer from the Post Office
 - 8.2 the involvement of councils and communities in the modernisation of the post office network and the role of the post office in providing a “front” office for both central and local government, including ID verification
 - 8.3 the role councils could play in helping to represent the consumer interest in the producer/consumer mutual the government proposes for the Post Office Limited.
9. The Minister and Post Office Limited agreed to look at the number of rural areas involved in the pilots. The LGA offered to convene a meeting of the pilot areas. The Minister agreed it would be helpful to meet again before the LGA's annual conference.

Skills

10. The Board discussed the decentralisation of skills at the last meeting.
11. In the paper on city deals – Unlocking growth in cities (December 2011) – the Government offers cities the opportunity to create a City Skills Fund to enable cities and colleges to work together to tailor the provision of adult skills (i.e. post 19) and

Item 3

the opportunity to establish City Apprenticeship Hubs to help develop new apprenticeships in small businesses.

12. The LGA will respond to these proposals in our green paper on Local Growth. The National Foundation for Educational Research has been commissioned to explore the evidence on skills mismatches in the economy to strengthen our argument for decentralisation to target skills provision more effectively at local labour market demand.

Youth engagement

13. The Hidden Talents campaign – run jointly with the Children and Young People Programme Board – is gaining momentum.
14. A Youth Summit is being held on 14 February for around 30 young people in partnership with British Youth Councils. Lead members from both boards have been invited. Young people will be invited to set out their ideas about how to improve youth engagement and test ideas emerging from the local growth campaign and from the Children and Young People Programme Board.
15. Research has been commissioned to understand:
- 15.1 the dynamics that are driving the current high levels of youth unemployment – for example, looking at the trends in engagement in learning and the impacts of demographic change
 - 15.2 fragmentation in the policy and funding landscape including the rules around eligibility
 - 15.3 the mismatch between skills and training provision and employer demand.
16. A paper is being written setting out the problems and our headline solutions looking at the difficult issues both Boards have raised – for example around careers advice, employment practices, quality of apprenticeships and so on. This will be available towards the end of January.

Transport

DfT Seminar

17. At the last meeting of the Economy and Transport Programme Board the item on transport referred to the development of a real time project on devolution. As part of the partnership working with the DfT, officers are preparing a ministerial seminar with the Secretary of State Justin Greening MP and Norman Baker MP with lead members of the LGA.

Part 6 Traffic Management Act

18. At the last meeting members raised concern about Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act and the Government's refusal to grant local authorities the enforcement powers contained in Part 6 which relate to moving traffic offences. Members also questioned the robustness of DfT's consultation. The letter attached at **Appendix A** was sent to Norman Baker MP from the Chair. At the last meeting members also asked to see the letter Norman Baker MP sent to authorities by way of consultation. This has been received recently and is attached at **Appendix B** along with the list of authorities which were consulted. Four of the twenty authorities consulted are not highways authorities. Officers are working to establish why some councils appear not to have responded.

Blackpool

19. Following Cllr Peter Box's meeting in Blackpool to discuss highways maintenance, the LGA has promoted the work undertaken in Blackpool through its *first* publication. The importance of the Blackpool work on prudential borrowing supported by better surveying techniques has been highlighted through the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme. This programme is supporting the use of the Blackpool approach in other authorities.

Potholes

20. In April 2011 a review of potholes was announced by Norman Baker MP under the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme. The final report is due next year, but a progress report has been published. The progress report identifies the key principles and strategies regarding potholes, and a number of areas for further work. These include providing improved guidance to local authorities on prioritising key roads, adopting a whole-life approach to road maintenance and using the right technology and materials. The LGA is working closely with DfT officials on this issue and have raised the Boards' concern about the need for rapid action after any period of bad weather.

Road Safety

21. LGA principal advisers have been briefed to work with the Road Safety Foundation (RSF) at regional level.

22. Officers recently met the Executive Director of the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety, Robert Gifford, to explore ways of working together more effectively, in particular by linking PACTs to the Local Sustainable Transport Fund community of practice and CIVINET.

2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

23. Transport issues will be a significant determinant of the success of the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games. Transport planning for the Games has been underway since 2006. The latest Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) Transport Plan was published in June 2011. Local authorities have a key role in making the transport plan work, along with other key organisations including TfL and Network Rail.
24. The LGA has established a 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Task and Finish Group, chaired by Cllr Stephen Castle, to ensure that all parts of the organisation are supporting local authorities to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by the Games. Cllr Shona Johnstone represents the Economy and Transport Programme Board on the Task and Finish Group. The Group met on 15 December and reviewed a transport issues paper (attached at **Appendix C**).
25. There are a number of issues that are concerning to local authorities, both inside and outside London. As can be seen from the Task and Finish Group's transport issues paper many of these relate to the flow of information to local authorities and also the impact of decisions relating to transport that will have a knock on effect in local authority areas.
26. Nick Lester from London Councils will update the Task and Finish Group on transport issues at its meeting on 18 January.
27. Following the next meeting of the Group, there will be a more comprehensive list of transport related issues on which local authorities will need support and on which the Economy and Transport Programme Board can usefully make representations. These might include:
 - 27.1 better access to area based information on ticket holders during each day of the Games
 - 27.2 better liaison with transport operators
 - 27.3 better access for councils to ODA/TfL transport teams
 - 27.4 greater involvement in the decisions around the timing and length of road closures related to the Olympic Torch route.
28. The Economy and Transport Programme Board might also have a role in helping to disseminate information and good practice to local authorities in the run up to the Games.
29. There are other issues which local authorities and the Economy and Transport Programme Board will have much less influence over. These will include decisions on train operators timetables.

Microtrenching techniques for broadband

30. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has released guidance for councils on the use of microtrenching techniques for the roll out of broadband. While the technique can be quick and cheap, it must only be used where appropriate to avoid damaging road surfaces unnecessarily and leading to large maintenance costs further down the line. There is some pressure on authorities to agree contracts to roll out broadband quickly and it is therefore suggested that officers responsible for road maintenance pro-actively contact the relevant department in their authority to ensure that those dealing with these contracts are aware of the risks that can be associated with this technique and the guidance on its application.
31. The guidance can be found on the Department for Culture, Media and Sport website: http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/Microtrenching_guidance_NOV2011.pdf