

Chair's Report

Local Growth Campaign – Staffordshire CC Town Hall Summit

1. On 5 March I chaired a Town Hall Summit alongside Cllr Philip Atkins, Leader of Staffordshire CC to discuss the importance of transport and connectivity to economic growth. Staffordshire was especially chosen as a venue for this discussion, being the location for the i54 South Staffordshire business park where the county council and Wolverhampton City Council are investing £40 million to build a motorway junction onto the site. Jaguar Land Rover is currently building its new engine plant at i54 and this week announced it will be doubling the size of the plant to create 1,400 jobs. We were pleased that the Under Secretary of State for Transport, Norman Baker MP, was able to join us and stayed to listen to a good debate where the case for devolved decision-making that enables councils to work quickly with partners to seize growth opportunities was well made.

Bristol Skills and Growth Roundtable

2. On 21 March, hosted by Bristol City Council, Cllr Mike Haines, chaired a roundtable discussion about the skills agenda and the link to economic growth. The meeting was arranged as part of this year's growth work programme and heard reports back from the skills pilot areas in Bristol, Wolverhampton, Derby and the Isle of Wight. The meeting heard how councils are bringing local partners together to ensure that local skills gaps are addressed and employment opportunities pursued. This information will be used to inform our on-going discussions with BIS about what further support councils and their partners need to address the skills mismatch in their local places and to inform a planned joint skills summit with BIS later in the year.

Meeting of all Board Chairs

3. I attended a meeting of all Board Chairs with the LGA Chairman at which we discussed how we bring together all the important work that the Boards are doing to promote councils' role in growth. As a result, the LGA is currently consulting on a series of policy papers looking at a New Model for Local Government. One of the key papers looks at the council role in driving growth. At the last Board meeting, we reviewed some of the thinking and whilst pleased at the direction of travel on economic devolution with a range of schemes from Heseltine's single pot to City Deals, we had a real concern about the fragmented initiatives which are developing. We need to be very robust and honest on this issue and ensure that we offer a more coherent approach to the current outbreak of "initiative-itis".

City Deals

4. On 18 February, the Government announced that it will enter negotiations with all 20 cities who had been invited to bid for Wave 2 City Deals. The Government will now work closely with cities to develop the proposals in more detail and to negotiate a final deal. They will aim to complete deals in three rounds over the next year. The new deals are due to be signed on a staggered basis: in the next few months, the second in the autumn and the third by the end of the year/early 2014. Meanwhile, the Cities Policy Unit have been undertaking work to develop a core package/menu of options that cities will be able to draw down from to support and enhance their bespoke part of the deal. The menu of

options is due to be published in March. We have submitted a joint proposal with the Centre for Cities which puts forward a comprehensive proposal for the core package which maximises councils' ability to drive growth.

5. I responded to the announcement saying, "The announcement is very positive and reflects the Government's increasing recognition that local areas are best placed to drive economic growth. We need to accelerate the pace and scale of devolution and make deals available to all areas that want them. The Heseltine Review identified £58 billion of Government funding for growth that could be better used if localities made the investment decisions rather than civil servants in Whitehall. There is clearly varying degrees of buy-in from different government departments. We hope that the March Budget will carry through the promise of the Autumn Statement by confirming that all of the tools and levers needed to drive local growth will be made available to councils, local businesses and their partners."

Budget and Spending Review

6. In the run up to the Budget, we have also been meeting with officials from a range of government departments to press for the devolution of growth-related funding on the scale recommended by Lord Heseltine through the single pot and to signal the roll-out of local growth deals to all areas that want one. The LGA's outline submission for the next Spending Review, which is intended to be sent to Government ahead of the Budget, reinforces the case we have been making for a new deal on local growth.

High Streets

7. Cllr Mike Haines has been discussing with the National Association of British Market Authorities (NAMBA) the LGA's support for the national "Love Your Local Market" campaign. This campaign runs over the coming months in the lead up to a Love Your Local Market Fortnight in May. He has also accepted the invitation of Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Minister, Mark Prisk, to represent the LGA on DCLG's High Streets Forum.

Cycling All-Party Parliamentary Group

8. Cllr Roger Symonds gave evidence to the [Cycling All Party Parliamentary Group](#) (APPG) as part of the APPG's inquiry titled "Get Britain Cycling". Further information on the inquiry can be found [here](#). The LGA's written evidence to the inquiry, focused largely on the benefits for cycling which could be delivered if the Department for Transport were to implement Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 (TMA). Cllr Symonds called for a culture change to tackle intolerance of cycling and raise awareness and highlighted the need for political will and financial investment. He encouraged the APPG to back the LGA's call for implementation of Part 6 of TMA, which could help councils improve safety levels for cyclists through better enforcement of, for example, cycle lanes.