

Note of last People & Places Board meeting

Title: People & Places Board
Date: Monday 7 April 2014
Venue: Smith Square 3&4, Ground Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	Welcome and introductions from Councillor Hodge Cllr Hodge welcomed members to the meeting and announced apologies for Cllr Jenny Mein. Cllr Hodge reported that he had met with the City Regions Chairman Sir Richard Lees earlier that day and that they were of the same mind regarding changing the Government's agenda on local issues. In follow-up to his introductory letter to Board members, the Chairman said that the proposed remit of the Board was to make the case for non-metropolitan areas and challenge the LGA to ensure the needs of residents represented from these areas were adequately served. Cllr Hodge emphasised that the name "People and Places" was open for debate and welcomed any ideas members might have on a more suitable alternative. Declaration of interests In relation to the Board priorities item Cllr Sian Reid announced that she was Chair of Cambridge Retrofit, a community-scale energy efficiency initiative to retrofit buildings.	
2	People and Places Board work programme Lead members provided a 2 minute presentation on their vision and priorities for the Board. Among the issues and opportunities cited for non-metropolitan areas were: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Working more closely with Local Enterprise Partnerships to stimulate growth and enable a more ambitious approach regarding the maximum numbers of apprenticeships offered. Authorities need the freedoms to align themselves more closely with the needs of local businesses to develop the skills they need.	

- Harnessing the full potential of the Municipal Bond Agency to access cheaper money for infrastructure.
- Increasing transportation for people to and from work to enable local businesses in non-metropolitan areas to thrive.
- Unlocking existing land banks to increase the space available for development and the need to develop effective working relationships with developers to meet housing needs, particularly on affordable housing.
- Recognising variation between sparsely and more densely populated areas in terms of what is meant by delivering affordable housing and what sustainability means to these areas.
- Stimulating greater ambition on housebuilding. This included assessing the effects of the New Homes Bonus in encouraging new houses to be built.
- Developing a narrative around families regarding housing need which recognises the contribution that affordable quality housing makes to enabling families to live and work together, to health outcomes, and to the vibrancy of areas as a whole.

Members made the following points in response:

- While members highlighted that some of the authorities they represented contained both urban and rural elements, it was noted that a cultural of over-simplification existed in central government, with areas often split between “urban or “rural” authorities. The interdependence of metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas was highlighted.
- The case for pushing ahead with infrastructure projects needs to be made more forcefully to ensure that growth is possible. This should include more ambitious projects beyond the reach of developers’ contributions to support increasing housing and employment needs. Some members felt that the Highways Agency could do more to stimulate growth in this area.
- Projects to develop communications infrastructure such as Broadband and mobile phone coverage in less densely populated areas were seen as particularly important for outlying communities as the last 5% of the country not yet reached. Members commented that broadband quality was a particularly significant factor affecting the decision of people with high incomes to move into less populated areas. While some felt that ensuring that the next tranche of money for this project delivered what was expected should be priority, others said that the Board should consider putting proposals to Government on superfast broadband as the next phase of broadband growth.
- Non-metropolitan areas represent an essential part of the UK economy, with manufacturing more likely to seek sites there rather than in large cities. Some members commented that non-metropolitan areas should be negotiating the same type of widescale funding agreement as city deals and using collective bargaining power to establish fixed water/energy rates with suppliers.
- DfT and DCLG colleagues were seen to lack an integrated approach in relation to planning and infrastructure, with not enough consideration of

their co-dependence in stimulating growth.

- On flood defences, some members sought greater powers from Government to address issues in their area.
- The Board needs to ensure it is distinctive from other Boards in the new governance structure. While it was recognised that some overlap would occur on common interests such as growth, members identified a danger of replicating workloads if clear dividing lines were not drawn between areas of focus.
- The Board's priorities should be concentrated on wider strategic issues. This included the need to create a coherent narrative link between areas such as housing quality and quantity, and wider health and social sustainability outcomes.

Cllr Hodge said that lead members would take away the comments raised and try to hone in on the key issues and workstreams for the Board to take forward, avoiding duplication with other Boards.

Action

Officers to develop forward work programme in line with the Board's steer and lead members' discussions following this meeting.

3 The Independent Commission on Growth and Public Service Reform in Non-Metropolitan Areas

Cllr Hodge welcomed Greg Clark MP and Sir John Peace, Chairman of the Independent Commission. He invited Sir John to outline what he saw as the remit of the Commission in relation to the Board.

Sir John emphasised the need for a joined-up strategy between the public and private sector and asserted that business leaders were keen to engage with local authorities on growth. The work of the Commission would provide a platform for challenge and debate to take place on key growth issues such as a need to raise education standards in cities and non-urban areas.

Sir John reported that 5 Commissioners had been selected to date of the 7 envisaged in total. He said that the Commission would look to consult with experts and economists in different fields. However, he asserted that a "one-size-fits-all" approach would be inappropriate and stressed that the final report would review the key social and demographic trends in non-met areas rather than attempt to provide a comprehensive picture.

Members emphasised that Central Government tended to approach growth in broad terms rather than looking to maximise it on an area-by-area basis. Some members questioned the relevance of the current role of the DWP in the service they delivered to individual communities.

Cllr Hodge said that there was a need to get support across government to ensure transformation across local government was possible in providing quality services at lower cost. Members added that new partnership arrangements such as Health and Wellbeing Boards showed that the speed at which change was possible differed across different parts of the public sector. How to implement change across these partnerships at the speed demanded for economic growth was highlighted as an increasingly prevalent issue.

Members saw the Commission as an evidence-led opportunity to present a vision of what UK public services could look like in the medium term. However, they cautioned that the approach would need to incorporate sufficient flexibility to allow for experimentation with new ideas rather than rely only on what had worked in the past. Sir John agreed that innovation was as important as looking at the evidence of what economic potential currently existed.

Cllr Hodge asked Mr Clark to conclude this item by offering his view on the role of the Commission.

Mr Clark made the following points:

- While ostensibly given the title “Minister for Cities”, he did not see his role as confined to a specific brief. The idea that growth stopped at the city limits was absurd.
- There is a big contribution each local place can make to ensuring the nation prospers as a whole and the country is only as strong as the sum of its parts.
- The Government has moved from offering City deals to local growth deals to extend the initiative to every place.

However:

- There is a paradox in bringing together a Commission to look at collective opportunities for non-metropolitan areas as every place is different and inherent risks are posed for local self-determination by a unified approach
- It will take significant time to marshal arguments for changing national policy on a wholesale basis (ie constitutional change)
- While an evidence base may be built that local authorities are capable of delivering at local level, Whitehall may deploy scrutiny measures, such as the public accounts committee to seek broader assurances that it is capable of doing so reliably. This is likely to lead to a much more diluted version of the original proposals put forward.
- Mr Clarke encouraged the Commission to recognise and appreciate difference rather than suppressing it, with flexibility built in to allow authorities to do things in different ways. The role of place in stimulating growth should be made clear.

- Mr Clark cited the example of Lord Bruce-Lockhart's approach to government in 2008 regarding a local initiative to reduce welfare in Kent, which expressed his confidence in the proposal by offering to share the council's risks of failure as well as the benefits of success. While this proposal was not taken forward at the time, Mr Clark indicated that the current climate could be more favourable to such a direct approach with central departments such as the Cabinet Office and the Treasury. He emphasised that doing things in one place presented less risk than across a large number of authorities

Cllr Hodge thanked Mr Clark for his contribution. He commented the differential devolution and how to develop a framework which made sense to all stakeholders would be key issues for the Committee, particularly in the context of delivering services in an increasingly complex stakeholder landscape.

Decisions

Members **agreed** the remit of the Independent Commission and the timescale for publishing its recommendations.

Action

Update on the Commission's interim report to be included as an item on the June Board agenda.

4 Close

Date of next meeting

11.00am, Monday 16 June 2014, Bevin Hall, Local Government Ho

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr David Hodge	Surrey County Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Eion Watts	Bolsover District Council
Deputy-chairman	Tony Egginton	Mansfield District Council
	Cllr Heather Kidd	Shropshire Council
Members	Cllr Sherma Batson MBE	Stevenage Borough Council
	DL	
	Cllr Roger Begy OBE	Rutland County Council
	Cllr Kevin Bentley	Essex County Council
	Cllr Andrew Bowles	Swale Borough Council
	Cllr Gillian Brown	Arun District Council
Cllr Neil Clarke MBE	Rushcliffe Borough Council	
Cllr Stan Collins	South Lakeland District Council	

Cllr Paul Diviani	East Devon District Council
Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE	Gloucestershire County Council
Cllr Michael Jones	Cheshire East Council
Cllr Christopher Knowles- Fitton	Craven District Council
Cllr Vince Maple	Medway Council
Cllr Kenneth Meeson	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Cllr John Pollard	Cornwall Council
Cllr Sian Reid	Cambridge City Council
Cllr Alan Rhodes	Nottinghamshire County Council
Cllr Izzi Seccombe	Warwickshire County Council
Apologies	
Cllr Jennifer Mein	Lancashire County Council