

Note of last People & Places Board meeting

Title: People & Places Board
Date: Tuesday 16 March 2021
Venue: Online via Microsoft Teams

Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	<p>Chair's Welcome, Apologies and Substitutes, Declarations of Interest</p> <p>The Chairman welcomed Members, officers, and guests to the meeting.</p> <p>Apologies had been received from Cllrs Doina Cornell, Eddie Reeves, and Marc Bayliss. Cllrs Barry Wood, Colin Davie and Geoff Knight attended as substitutes.</p> <p>No declarations of interest had been received.</p>	
2	<p>Note of last People & Places Board meeting</p> <p>A Board Member referred to the 'Action' point under the 'UK Shared Prosperity Fund Paper' item and suggested that it be changed from:</p> <p><i>'Officers to continue to lobby for local government to be driving by local government.'</i> to: <i>'Officers to continue to lobby for the funding to be driven by local government.</i></p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2021 were agreed as an accurate record, subject to the change above being made.</p>	
3	<p>Update on "Devolution Deal to Delivery"</p> <p>The Chairman welcomed Phil Swann and Lisa McCance, Directors – Shared Intelligence, to the meeting and invited them to introduce the update.</p> <p>Lisa presented a series of slides to Members which set out progress to date, early findings, and next steps.</p> <p>Following the presentation, Members asked a number of questions and raised the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• From both a County Council's perspective, and from the perspective of new Councillors, is this reorganisation still going to give us the benefits that we all thought it would give in the first	

place?

- Have you had a look at potential opportunities for local authorities to be given devolution powers?
- This feels slightly outdated and that government's agenda has now changed. We've seen government's appetite for top-down spatial plans, we've seen them moving towards top-down housing targets and we've seen a lot of central direction from Whitehall coming back into the narrative.
- As a country, we have to move quickly to come out of the Covid-19 pandemic. I question whether local authorities can move quickly to achieve an agreed position on devolution and whether it's on the backburner or whether there is a place for devolution as levelling-up is rolled out.
- There's a great deal of consensus across the Board with regards to devolution and all of the challenges associated with it.
- The government need to be aware of matters within unitary authorities around the country.
- Devolution needs to continue, we can't go on with the current local government structures that we have, we need to reform and ensure that the levelling-up agenda is delivered.
- We need to use the stalling of devolution to push the next conversation with government through options regarding accountability and also work within the framework that the government agenda has set out.
- I think that there is a switch from devolution as a subject to recovery as a subject and that that is where the emphasis needs to be.
- We need to be sure that this debate keeps up with the changing landscape.
- The government have always had a lack of capacity to focus on more than a small number of geographical areas at a time, which they have publicly acknowledged.
- Based on the evidence which has been gathered, was there a desire for a Mayor title with Mayor responsibilities, or metro Mayors which have slightly different responsibilities?
- Does the map of the various local government tiering systems across the country actually reflect the re-organisations that are taking place in different areas?
- The Chairman referred to a message in the Microsoft Teams chat which stated that the Devolution and Recovery white paper could return post May 2021.

In response to the points raised by Members, Phil and Lisa stated that:

- In terms of the delay to the Devolution and Recovery white paper, there has been a significant shift with regards to recent budget announcements and how that affects responsibilities and increasingly competitive funding pots. We're also conscious of the review of the LEPs which may or may not come forward and how that's will feature in terms of the role of the combined authorities.
- We are looking at other alternatives that could benefit from a more structured sense of devolution into different parts of the system in different areas if the answer isn't a combined authority. We've also looked at areas such as Oxfordshire in terms of housing and at the Cornwall model.
- We are capturing learning from the devolution aspects that might be of use to authorities that are thinking about how to respond to the changing agenda.
- With regards to Mayors and metro Mayors, it's not only responsibilities which differ, it's their style and way of working too. In terms of structures and local arrangements, we've looked now in some detail at all 9 combined authorities and there are 9 significantly different stories which reflect the 9 different places that the authorities are in, so I don't think that there is one set of lessons. We're very aware of the changing political landscape, our ambition is to extract learning from the experience of the 9 combined authority areas and the local authorities in those areas and present it back to you in a way that will help you promote the interest of local government in this changing context.
- Covid-19 recovery has prompted some of the combined authorities to think in detail about what the next steps for the Mayor will be, their responsibilities and the need for a new conversation to provide some alternative or different thinking.

Decision:

Members noted the report.

4 Devolution and Local Governance Reform Update

The Chairman invited Philip Clifford, Senior Adviser, to introduce the update.

Philip introduced the report and referred to the continued degree of uncertainty regarding the timing of the Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper. The LGA had continued to keep the issue in the national spotlight and maintain a watching brief on the related, but distinct, issue of local government reorganisation. He additionally provided a brief update following the launch of the Devolution APPG Inquiry into the role of national government in making a success of devolution in England.

The Chairman encouraged Board Members to look at the APPG work to ensure that local government were shaping devolution and local government reform.

Decision:

Members noted the report.

Action:

Officers to circulate a guide to local government reorganisation to Board Members.

5 Strengthening Rural and Coastal Recovery and Resilience

The Chairman welcomed Mark Pragnell, Director, and Rebecca Munro, Consultant, from Pragmatix Advisory to the meeting and invited them to introduce the report.

Mark Pragnell introduced himself and presented a series of slides to Board Members which outlined structural challenges, immediate challenges of Covid recovery and challenges and opportunities of longer-term revitalisation in relation to strengthening rural and coastal recovery and resilience.

Following the presentation, Members asked a number of questions and raised the following points:

- There must be more of a focus on public transport in rural communities. A number of areas across the country have lost a significant number of bus services in recent years due to the councils being unable to fund bus subsidies. We must ensure that the hard to reach communities are not forgotten about otherwise they will be socially isolated. There is no point offering free transport to young people when there are no buses running to certain areas.
- We must continue to push for adequate broadband in rural, hard to reach areas.
- Given the £3b allocated for bus activity across the country, could we factor connectivity issues into our work?
- We need to be mindful of the new ways of working and support a need for different housing. Whilst it's ok to work from home during a pandemic, we can't do it forever. We need to look carefully at different ways of economic counting to reflect the new reality.
- With regards to micro and nano businesses that our rural and coastal areas provide, have you considered the freeports that they have on our rural communities? I understand that there will be challenges, but there will also be opportunities.

In response to the points raised by Members, Mark stated that:

- The general theme seems to relate to the work that we're undertaking in circumstances where services are currently deemed to be improper and unviable in the market place and require subsidy, what we're seeking to do with this project is turn the language and discussion around and move it away from it being about how one subsidises to deliver services, but how one starts to think about investing in the opportunities that rural and coastal now have as a contributor to UK PLC.
- The best solution for services that are unviable is to see background economic growth which makes them viable and requiring less of a subsidy, what we are seeking to do is provide that narrative and evidence base.

Decision:

Members noted the report.

6 New UK subsidy control regime

The Chairman invited Dominic Rowles, Deputy Head of Brussels Office to introduce the report.

Dominic introduced the report which set out information which related to the government's consultation on a new subsidy control regime for the UK, ahead of issuing primary legislation.

Members made the following comments:

- Promoting community cohesion and social benefits is vital. What we've seen in terms of the volunteer response during the covid-19 pandemic is that it has brought communities together and I am concerned that councils will no longer be in a position to provide the relative grants.
- Road maintenance is very important, whilst different areas have different experiences in terms of managing their reduced budget, road maintenance should be a priority for councils.

Dominic responded to the comments made by Members:

- The roads and the highways issues are important. We need to ensure that the central government funding settlement is robust and then we need to be sure that we have the local flexibility to spend that funding on the initiatives.
- This paper has been submitted to the City Regions Board and LGA Exit taskforce as well as the People & Places Board.

Decision:

Members noted the report.

Action:

Members of the Board must submit their final comments on the draft response to Dominic Rowles by 31st March.

7 Budget update

The Chairman invited Philip Clifford, Senior Adviser, to introduce the update.

Philip introduced the report and said that the budget contained a suite of announcements pertinent to the government's levelling up agenda. Four areas believed to be of particular interest to Members of the People and Places Board were funding for growth, local enterprise partnerships, the plan for growth, and jobs and skills.

Decision:

Members noted the report.

Actions:

Officers to work more closely to engage with the LEP network and with central government re LEP review and potentially invite a guest from the LEP network to a future meeting of the People and Places Board.

Officers to ensure that the appropriate arrangements are made in relation to writing to the Employment Minister to discuss Kickstart and the introductory meeting on skills with Gillian Keegan, MP.

8 People and Places Board Update paper

The Chairman invited Sonika Sidhu, Principal Policy Adviser, to introduce the update.

Sonika introduced the update which provided Members of the Board with a brief update on issues and policy areas not covered by other items on the agenda.

Decision:

Members noted the report.

9 Equalities update

The Chairman invited Sonika Sidhu, Principal Policy Adviser, to introduce the update.

Sonika introduced the report which outlined how the Board would address equalities issues in its policy work. The report also provided Members with potential future policy areas within which officers see potential to broaden the focus on equalities.

Decision:

Members noted the report.

Action:

Officers to ensure that future items which relate to equality, diversity and inclusion are further up on the agenda.

10 Further Education White Paper

The Chairman invited Jasbir Jhas, Senior Adviser, to introduce the report.

Jas introduced the report. The purpose of the item was to support an early discussion with Board Members on the key proposals set out in the White Paper.

Decision:

Members noted the report.

Action:

Officers to send reminder to all Board Members asking them to send any comments on the FE white paper discussion document to Jasbir Jhas by Friday 26th March.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Kevin Bentley	Essex County Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Morris Bright MBE	Hertsmere Borough Council
	Cllr Simon Henig CBE	Durham County Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Heather Kidd	Shropshire Council
	Cllr Bob Jennings	Epping Forest District Council
Members	Cllr Rachel Bailey	Cheshire East Council
	Cllr Hilary Carrick	Cumbria County Council
	Cllr Neil Clarke MBE	Rushcliffe Borough Council
	Cllr Keith Glazier	East Sussex County Council
	Cllr Martin Tett	Buckinghamshire County Council
	Cllr Bradley Thomas	Wychavon District Council
	Cllr Rob Waltham MBE	North Lincolnshire Council
	Cllr Sue Woodward	Staffordshire County Council
	Cllr Leigh Redman	Somerset County Council
	Cllr Kyle Robinson	Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
	Cllr Sarah Osborne	East Sussex County Council
	Cllr Stan Collins	Cumbria County Council
Cllr Helen Grant	Richmondshire District Council	
Apologies	Cllr Marc Bayliss	Worcester City Council

Cllr Eddie Reeves
Cllr Doina Cornell

Oxfordshire County Council
Stroud District Council

In Attendance

Lincolnshire County Council
Lancaster City Council