

Note of last People & Places Board meeting

Title:	People & Places Board
Date:	Tuesday 16 November 2021
Venue:	Hybrid meeting (via Microsoft Teams & Victoria Room, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ)

Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	Chair's Welcome, Apologies and Substitutes and Declarations of Interest The Chair welcomed Members, officers and guests to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Cllr Phillippa Williamson. Cllr Colin Davie attended the meeting as a substitute. No declarations of interest had been received.	
2	National Association of Local Councils (NALC) - Town and Parish Councils The Chair invited Philip Clifford, Senior Adviser, to introduce the report. Philip introduced the report which provided a brief overview of the Board's recent work in relation to Town and Parish Councils. The Chair welcomed Cllr Sue Baxter, Chairman of the National Association of Local Councils, and Justin Griggs, Head of Policy and Communications, and invited Cllr Baxter to speak to the report. Cllr Baxter introduced herself and updated Board Members on the vital role that parish and town councils played during the Covid-19 emergency and outlined the urgent need to invest in increasing the sector's capacity and capability. Following the well-received publication of the research set out within the report, there had been renewed interest in how the LGA and NALC might work together to take forward the themes and recommendations of the work. Board Members made the following comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There were reservations in relation to potential further devolvement of powers and resources to the lowest council level from government.• Concerns had been raised which related to the organisation, planning and training of parish and town councillors, as well as a lack of diversity in their makeup and a democratic deficit.	

- A Board Member expressed the need for clarity and more detailed work in relation to the training and role of the clerk within parish and town councils and added that good governance at a local level was essential.
- A Board Member emphasised the importance of trust in decision-making processes and ensuring that councils had the capacity to achieve targets and deliver to residents.
- In terms of the evolution of double-devolution models, a Board Member said that councillors needed to show parish and town councils how they too could be local leaders with the voluntary sector.

Cllr Baxter responded to Board Members' comments:

- Parish and town councils needed investment to build up capability as NALC did not share in the £20m of improvement funding that the LGA received from government.
- The allowances which were available to individuals who were not Chairmen of parish councils were so low that it excluded individuals who needed to work to earn a living.
- NALC had set up a diversity commission to ensure that parish and town councils became more diverse.
- Holding meetings remotely was much welcomed as it allowed more individuals to attend.

Decision:

- Board Members noted the report.

Action:

- Officers noted Board Members' comments and would continue to shape future engagement with NALC within the context of the levelling up white paper.

3 Community Renewal Fund (CRF) and UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) progress and lobbying goals

The Chair invited Paul Green, Policy Adviser, to introduce the report.

Paul introduced the report which provided an update following the announcement of the successful Community Renewal Fund pilots.

Board Members made the following comments:

- A Board Member raised a concern in relation to the lack of correlation between the comments that were provided as part of the CRF bidding process and the projects that were funded. He emphasised the importance of government being clear and transparent in relation to the role that local authorities would play in the bidding and roll-out process.
- It was feared that the CRF's competitive bidding process would eliminate collaborative working between local authorities.
- The emphasis on learning and enhancing the learning process was

welcomed, with a request that the application and approval process be more transparent.

- Concerns were raised in relation to the bidding process and subsequent communications, the logic around the awards the competitive nature and a potential gap/loss of momentum which could jeopardise projects.

Paul responded to Board Members' comments:

- The competitive nature of the CRF was detrimental and would be made clear to government through engagement with councillors and through improvement work.
- The need for the multi-annual funding stream was essential. Funds would continue to be spent and programmes delivered up to 2023, which provided longevity for long-term investments to be made.

Decision:

- Board Members noted the report.

Action:

- Officers would continue to attempt to engage with Ministers and Civil Servants for a political meeting to highlight anguish with regards to the CRF, alongside the City Regions Board.

4 Green Skills

The Chair invited Jacob Coburn, Adviser, to introduce the report.

Jacob introduced the report which aimed to facilitate initial discussions and next steps in relation to the LGA's activity on climate change. The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport (EEHT) Board requested that a skills and employment dimension paper be submitted, led by the City Regions and People and Places Boards, Cllr Emily O'Brien would present the report at the upcoming EEHT Board meeting.

Board Members made the following comments:

- A question was asked in relation to The Green Skills Task Force which had been announced on 12 November 2020 and concern was raised regarding the lack of local government involvement.
- Green skills needed to be much more on a place-based level, with place-based solutions.
- It was important that the skills agenda was at the forefront of government Ministers' minds, including liaison with local authorities.
- A Board Member raised a concern in relation to building regulation barriers and the need to change building regulations.
- Access to skills and inclusion, good infrastructure, transport, and bursaries for young people should be a key part of the green skills work, through continued engagement with DfE colleagues.
- Focusing on the green skills agenda would inspire care leavers within communities.

- Board Members raised concern in relation to the lack of clarity of the meaning of 'green skills' and all that it entailed.
- Green skills needed to include nature recovery and green agriculture.

Jasbir Jhas, Senior Adviser, responded to Board Members' comments:

- With regards to the Green Skills Task Force, which was announced on 12 November 2020, Jasbir said that the lack of local government involvement was raised within the written evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee, and with government officials.

Decision:

- Board Members noted the report.

Action:

- Officers to re-circulate past and present Green Economy work to all Board Members.

5 Digital Connectivity

The Chair welcomed Cllr Mark Hawthorne, LGA's Digital Champion, to the meeting and invited Esther Barrott, Adviser, to introduce the report.

Esther introduced the report which provided members with three priority areas for digital connectivity policy over the 2021/22 political cycle and sets out proposed actions for discussion with Cllr Mark Hawthorne.

The Chair invited Cllr Hawthorne to speak to the report.

- Cllr Hawthorne highlighted the vast number of changes within government departments as a result of the recent government reshuffle, as well as within Building Digital UK (BDUK) and Ofcom. He emphasised the importance of continued engagement with government ministers and key stakeholders to ensure that the voice and concerns of local authorities are acknowledged.
- The unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic had reminded people of the importance and power of technology and the need to stay connected.

Board Members made the following comments:

- A question was asked which related to government official, Chris Philips' view on the role of local councils in shaping the programme in the future.
- The importance of ensuring that rural areas were not forgotten, particularly in relation to connecting individuals to prevent social isolation and loneliness, was emphasised.
- Further support was needed from central government in relation to recruitment and skills delivery.
- The importance of enabling community projects was emphasised.

Cllr Hawthorne responded to Board Members' comments:

- In light of the recent government re-shuffle, officers continued to liaise with the new ministerial team to highlight the vital work that local government undertook.
- Work to ensure that rural communities did not get left behind would continue, especially in relation to mobile connectivity.
- Much work had already been undertaken in promoting and supporting community schemes, this would be re-emphasised when liaising with new ministerial teams to ensure that the pressure continued.
- The disconnect between planning at a ministerial level and a local level was emphasised.

The Chair suggested that the recommendation be amended from:

"Members are invited to:

1. agree, subject to a discussion with Cllr Mark Hawthorne, the proposed actions for the People and Places Board to pursue over the 2021/22 political cycle as set out in paragraph 21."

to:

"Members are invited to:

1. agree, subject to a discussion with Cllr Mark Hawthorne, the proposed actions for the People and Places Board to pursue over the 2021/22 political cycle as set out in paragraph 21; and
2. **note Cllr Mark Hawthorne's continued involvement with the new ministerial team."**

Decision:

- Board Members noted the report and the amended recommendation as set out above.

6 Business plan 2019-22: 2021 review and update

The report and its appendix were noted without discussion.

7 Updated Terms of Reference

The Chair invited Rebecca Cox, Principal Policy Adviser, to introduce the report.

Rebecca introduced the report which set out Board Members' amendments to the terms of reference and confirmed that Lead Members had approved it as a final version.

Cllr German requested that there be more of a focus on the current climate change agenda within the Terms of Reference.

Decision:

- Board Members noted the report.

Action:

- Officers to amend the Terms of Reference to reflect Cllr German's comments.

8 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

9 Refreshing Work Local

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

Jasbir introduced Tony Wilson, Director of the Institute for Employment Studies on labour market and skills analysis, and Stephen Evans, Chief Executive of the Learning and Work Institute on the Cost Benefit Analysis of a devolved approach, to the meeting. Jasbir then introduced the report.

It was agreed that the item be adjourned to the next meeting in January 2022 to ensure that a full discussion could be had.

Decision:

- Board Members noted the report.

Action:

- Officers to circulate presentation slides to Board Members.