

## Minutes of last People & Places Board meeting

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**Title:** People & Places Board  
**Date:** Friday 23 September 2022  
**Venue:** Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online

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### Attendance

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

### Item Decisions and actions

#### 1 Welcome, Apologies and Substitutes, Declarations of Interest

The Chairman welcomed Members and officers to the meeting.

Cllr Morris Bright chaired the first half of the meeting and explained that Cllr Kevin Bentley would be chairing the second half. Cllr Steven Norman and Cllr Julian Dean attended the meeting as substitutes.

Apologies for the absence were received from Cllr Judy Billing and Cllr Kevin Etheridge.

No declarations of interest was received.

#### 2 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

#### 3 Terms of Reference

Rebecca Cox, Principal Policy Adviser, introduced the paper and invited comments from members.

Rebecca noted that the Terms of Reference (ToR) gave some options for expressing boards' interest around climate sustainability issues, that were newly included in the ToR last year.

Members made the following comments:

- There should be a rephrasing word around decarbonization and carbon neutrality.
- Wording should align with that for the City Regions Board.
- Broadening the terms of reference to cover rural issues in support of all other functional boards.

#### Decision:

- That the Board's terms of reference be agreed.

#### Action:

- Officers to feedback on the comments from members.

#### **4 Work Programme**

Rebecca Cox introduced the paper and noted that Lead Members are interested in bringing Defra to future board to have a deeper discussion about rural proofing. Phillip Clifford, Senior Adviser, updated members on levelling up.

Members made the following comments:

- Rural employment, seasonality, and the nature of it being different than other types of employment could be specifically highlighted particularly around youth and employment of people under 25 years in non-city, rural towns.
- Joint work with the Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport (EEHT) Board to do work around affordable housing and planning reforms.
- Food security and food production should be in the work programme.
- Local nature recovery strategies were missing in the rural proofing section.
- Since the pandemic, there had been an acceleration in the depletion of rural housing due to second homes and holiday homes.
- Rural perspectives on cost-of-living issues will be helpful.
- Local authorities could work with training and education providers to make public transportation access easier for students.

**Decision:**

- That the proposed work programme for the 2022/23 political cycle be agreed.

**Action:**

- Officers to discuss with the EEHT board to check where the opportunities to collaborate are during similar work programme group discussions and feedback on the other issues raised.

#### **5 The Future of Growth Funding**

The Chairman invited Phillip Clifford, Senior Adviser to introduce the paper.

Members made the following points:

- The possibility of breaking down the Rural England Prosperity Fund into themes (on retrofitting, nature restoration, regenerative farming, etc.) rather than focusing on general growth.
- It was positive that UK Shared Prosperity Fund had been given to district-level areas but expressed concern regarding some of the recent government hints that more would be going to county levels along with business support.
- There were issues requiring joint working with City Regions Board on this.
- Councillors had proved in the last two years how effective decision making had been local level during the vaccine rollout, which

central government should apply this to growth funding.

**Decision:**

- That the recommendations be agreed.

**6 The role of councils in supporting ‘economic inclusion’: Unlocking talent to level up**

The Chairman invited Bushra Jamil, Adviser, to introduce the paper.

Bushra asked members if there is any specific issue councillors and local authorities are dealing with and anything they would like officers to explore in the paper.

The Chairman thanked Bushra for a great piece of work.

Members made the following comments:

- There might be a role for local authorities to promote and understand employment rights in terms of supporting inclusion, especially for young workers coming into the workplace and rights around breaks and unpaid shifts.
- The Good Work project within the paper was highlighted and should be promoted as it has some good examples and practices.
- Working for nature is good for mental health and will increase inclusion in the rural sector by bringing people back closer to the land and asked if this could be incorporated into the paper on green and retrofit skills.
- LGBTQIA+ people living in very rural areas, people with different housing types, and people from certain socio-economic groups should be taken into consideration in the equality survey.
- Councils can be key stakeholders in stimulating employment in local areas by helping employers hire locally.
- Councils can enable things to happen and cited a good example of a Stansted airport how they can intervene, enable, and help others come together to promote local employment.
- Including rural deprivation and rural exclusion as one of the categories in the survey.
- Adding more research into rural and agricultural skills was recommended since they are separate from the local authorities and agricultural colleges fall under the Defra.

**Decision:**

- That the paper be noted.
- That the approach to the new Equalities Minister and the plan to have officials come to future board meeting to discuss the paper be agreed.

**Action:**

- Officers to incorporate members’ comments into the paper.
- Officers to ask members of policy team that is leading on the survey if they included the LGBTQIA+ and other groups in the survey and share the feedback with the board.

- Officers to invite the new Equalities Minister to a future board meeting.

At this point in the meeting the Chairman, Cllr Kevin Bentley took the chair.

The Chairman provided an update about his meeting with the Minister regarding investment zones. Investment zones will be announced in early October. The Chairman clarified that the first 38 local authorities were those who expressed an interest before a letter was sent to all, and no authority was excluded.

## **7 Digital connectivity and inclusion**

The Chairman invited Cllr Mark Hawthorne, the LGA's digital champion to provide updates on digital connectivity and inclusion.

Cllr Hawthorne outlined the LGA's digital work to date and proposed work programme for the upcoming board cycle. This included: continued lobbying for digital connectivity champions; a new workstream looking at the intersection between digital inclusion and digital infrastructure; and the LGA's involvement on the Digital Connectivity Forum and other key stakeholder groups. He indicated he would like to hear members' views on issues to help shape the agenda for the next 12 months.

Members made the following comments:

- Concern was expressed about the public switched telephone network (PSTN) switchover due to the lack of resilience within the existing broadband network. People need access to emergency services and to make emergency calls.
- There is a need to look at the way digital exclusion affects people who have no online access.
- There are some concerns regarding the infrastructure around the 5G rollout.
- 5G works well in metropolitan areas given its short range, however, in rural areas, 4G might be better and have a much longer reach.

Cllr Hawthorne made the following comments in response to members' comments:

- He noted the switchover is overseen by individual providers and there is no clear timeline. This issue is being raised and the LGA is lobbying Government as a matter of urgency.
- Digital exclusion is a key focus of the new work programme. Lots of groups that are already doing a great amount of work on this including tackling digital poverty and removing the barriers to help people become digitally enabled. COVID-19 also accelerated digital take-up.
- Updates on infrastructure would be provided later.

### **Decision:**

- That the report be noted, and officers would proceed with the proposed work programme.

## 8 Retrofit Skills

Paul Green, Policy Adviser, introduced the item with the following points:

- Currently, LGA is specifically focused on retrofit but will be looking at natural scales, use of land management, etc., at a future date.
- The LGA would like to explore some further lines with members, particularly around the need for a longer-term funding solution.
- Retrofit provides an opportunity for well-paid jobs, particularly for younger people and anyone who needs retraining. Moreover, retrofitting can be helpful for SMEs in construction, thereby promoting business development in the longer term.
- The LGA will be working towards a stakeholder engagement roundtable around the end of October/early November and can come up with some consensus for lobbying lines through this opportunity.

Members made the following comments:

- Retrofit skills need to be mainstreamed into all construction courses.
- It should be delivered through local government who are trusted partners; councils should be the active partners to the government rather than outsourcing it to those who have no knowledge about the local landscape.
- Retrofit skills need to be specified more clearly so that members understand what skills are included or being missed.
- It would be interesting to look at how local needs and national needs are balanced.
- Officers were asked to look at what joint work is happening with institutes and apprenticeships that have green advisory panels and how members could be linking them up.
- There is no specific NVQ in retrofit and the LGA should be pushing for a framework of grade standards.
- Derbyshire's example regarding colleges struggling to recruit high quality lecturers with specific skills and knowledge was mentioned.
- Many career advisers do not know about green jobs, green skills, and courses available and could Councils have a signposting role in this area.
- Members should focus on what Councils can do to attract people to local areas to build local skills and local resilience.
- Electricity generation need, flagging that in some areas existing electricity networks cannot cope.

The Chairman noted the importance of involving education providers in this discussion.

Paul Green noted that he was invited to an event where there are various small SME representatives from construction, and roofing organizations.

### **Decision:**

- That the report be noted.

### **Actions:**

- Officers to emphasize retrofit skills clearly so that councillors can

know how to explain to people the skills required.

- Officers to incorporate the members' comments.
- Officers to check whether a green jobs champion, incorporating the retrofit work, can be appointed. (Cllr Roberts and Cllr O'Brien volunteered.)
- Officers to finalize the dates of roundtables in the next week or two and send them out to members.

## **9 Housing Supply and Nutrient/Water Neutrality**

The Chairman invited Hillary Tanner, Adviser, to introduce the paper and acknowledged that it is a big issue for the local government because it is going to start affecting housing targets.

Hillary set out the following points:

- In terms of policy inquiry, two issues were raised: (1) water neutrality (over-extraction of water, a specific problem around the West Sussex area) with a roundtable discussion on this next week (2) nutrient neutrality – there will be a separate section on 6 October 2022 with nominations sought from members).
- Roundtable discussion will include a combination of council representatives, and different stakeholders including charity, environment, and regulatory sector, government departments.
- The LGA is reviewing some written evidence they collected from councillors and stakeholders as a part of policy inquiry. Its outcomes are expected to be some recommendations that will be fed back via the EEHT board.

Members made the following comments:

- This was an important workstream the LGA is engaging in and highlighted that all connections should be properly explored by the central government.
- It was also necessary to fully understanding underlying causes for water quality issues and how they are dealt with, rather than only considering them as obstructions.
- A moratorium on new build would end unneeded construction in the green belt and the areas of outstanding natural beauty and limit pollution and sewage.
- Water companies' financing model needs to be looked at as it is standing in the way of a lot of work that can be done quite simply to prevent pollution and sewage from pouring into rivers/lakes.
- Pollution by water companies and pollutants from the farming industry needs to be addressed.

### **Decision:**

- That the report be noted.

### **Action:**

- Officers to collect the members' comments.

- Officers to come back and reflect after the roundtables to share the feedback.
- Members whose areas are affected to contact Hillary and contribute to the roundtables.

**Appendix A - Attendance**

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Kevin Bentley	Essex County Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Morris Bright MBE	Hertsmere Borough Council
	Cllr Emily Smith	Vale of White Horse District Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Simon Henig CBE	Durham County Council
	Cllr Emily O'Brien	Lewes District Council
Members	Cllr Lynne Doherty	West Berkshire Council
	Cllr Marc Bayliss	Worcester City Council
	Cllr Hillary Carrick	Cumbria County Council
	Cllr Jordan Meade	Gravesham Borough Council
	Cllr Eddie Reeves	Oxfordshire County Council
	Cllr Martin Tett	Buckinghamshire Council
	Cllr Phillippa Williamson	Lancashire County Council
	Cllr Barry Wood	Cherwell District Council
	Cllr Damien Greenhalgh	High Peak Borough Council and Derbyshire County Council
	Cllr Amanda Serjeant (Deputy Chair)	Chesterfield Borough Council
	Cllr Caroline Leaver	Devon County Council
	Cllr Stan Collins	Cumbria County Council
	Cllr Sue Roberts	South Oxfordshire District Council
	Cllr Robert Banks	Lewes District Council
Apologies	Cllr Judi Billing MBE	Hertfordshire County Council
	Cllr Kevin Etheridge	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Substitutes	Cllr Steven Norman	Lichfield District Council
	Cllr Julian Dean	Northumberland County Council