



People & Places Board

Agenda

Tuesday, 12 September 2023
1.00 pm

Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and
Online

People & Places Board
Tuesday, 12 September 2023

There will be a meeting of the People & Places Board at **1.00 pm on Tuesday, 12 September 2023**
Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online.

LGA Hybrid Meetings

All of our meetings are available to join in person at [18 Smith Square](#) or remotely via videoconference as part of our hybrid approach. We will ask you to confirm in advance if you will be joining each meeting in person or remotely so we can plan accordingly, if you wish to attend the meeting in person, please also remember to confirm whether you have any dietary/accessibility requirements. 18 Smith Square is a Covid-19 secure venue and measures are in place to keep you safe when you attend a meeting or visit the building in person.

[Please see guidance for Members and Visitors to 18 Smith Square here](#)

Catering and Refreshments:

If the meeting is scheduled to take place at lunchtime, a sandwich lunch will be available.

Political Group meetings and pre-meetings for Lead Members:

Please contact your political group as outlined below for further details.

Apologies:

Please notify your political group office (see contact telephone numbers below) if you are unable to attend this meeting.

Conservative:	Group Office: 020 7664 3223	email: lgaconservatives@local.gov.uk
Labour:	Group Office: 020 7664 3263	email: labgp@lga.gov.uk
Independent:	Group Office: 020 7664 3224	email: independent.grouplga@local.gov.uk
Liberal Democrat:	Group Office: 020 7664 3235	email: libdem@local.gov.uk

Attendance:

Your attendance, whether it be in person or virtual, will be noted by the clerk at the meeting.

LGA Contact:

Emma West
emma.west@local.gov.uk

Carers' Allowance

As part of the LGA Members' Allowances Scheme a Carer's Allowance of £9.00 per hour or £10.55 if receiving London living wage is available to cover the cost of dependants (i.e. children, elderly people or people with disabilities) incurred as a result of attending this meeting.

People & Places Board – Membership 2023/24

[Click here for accessible information on membership](#)

Councillor	Authority
Conservative (11)	
Cllr Martin Tett (Chairman)	Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Louise McKinlay (Vice Chairman)	Essex County Council
Cllr Eddie Reeves	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Marc Bayliss	Worcestershire County Council
Cllr Kris Wilson	Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council
Cllr Hilary Carrick	Westmorland and Furness Council
Cllr Colin Noble	Suffolk County Council
Cllr Rachel Bailey	Cheshire East Council
Cllr Jordan Meade	Gravesham Borough Council
Cllr Tim Oliver	Surrey County Council
Cllr Victoria Wilson	Staffordshire County Council
Substitutes	
Cllr Lewis Cocking	Broxbourne Borough Council
Cllr Sonia Wilcox	Lichfield District Council
Cllr Phillip King	Harborough District Council
Labour (4)	
Cllr Amanda Serjeant (Deputy Chair)	Chesterfield Borough Council
Cllr Lisa Brown	Cumberland Council
Cllr Simon Henig CBE	Durham County Council
Cllr Damien Greenhalgh	High Peak Borough Council and Derbyshire County Council
Substitutes	
Cllr Sam Carling	Cambridge City Council
Cllr Linda Smith	Oxford City Council
Liberal Democrat (4)	
Cllr Caroline Leaver (Vice-Chair)	Devon County Council
Cllr Emily Smith	Vale of White Horse District Council
Cllr Michael Mullaney	Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
Cllr Alex Wagner	Shropshire Council
Substitutes	
Cllr Oliver Patrick	Somerset Council
Independent (4)	
Cllr Emily O'Brien (Deputy Chair)	Lewes District Council
Cllr Kevin Etheridge	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Cllr Caroline Topping	Suffolk County Council
Cllr Julian Dean	Shropshire Council
Substitutes	
Cllr Carolyne Culver	West Berkshire Council

Agenda

People & Places Board

Tuesday, 12 September 2023

1.00 pm

Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online

Item	
OPEN SESSION	Page
1. Chair's Welcome, Introductions, Apologies and Substitutes, Declarations of Interest	
2. Minutes of the last meeting	1 - 8
3. People & Places Board Terms of Reference	9 - 12
4. People & Places Board Draft Work Programme 2023/24	13 - 18
5. Digital Update	19 - 28
CONFIDENTIAL SESSION	Page
6. Employment and Skills	29 - 48
7. Councils' Future Role in Driving Growth and Prosperity	49 - 82

Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday, 14 November 2023, 1.00 pm, In Person Meeting – 18 Smith Square, London

Minutes of last People & Places Board meeting

People & Places Board

Tuesday, 6 June 2023

Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as [Appendix A](#).

Item	Decisions and actions
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1 Welcome, Apologies and Substitutes, Declarations of Interest

The Chair welcomed Members, officers and guests to the meeting.

Apologies were received by Cllr Greenhalgh and Cllr Tett. Cllr Norman attended as a substitute.

No declarations of interest were made.

2 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2023 were agreed as an accurate record, subject to the following amendments being made:

- Cllr Norman to be marked as present.
- Cllr Dean to be listed as a Committee Member, in place of Dr Roberts.

3 Supporting Economic Inclusion

Bushra Jamil, Adviser, introduced the paper which set out an overview of the six guiding principles to realise economic inclusion in employment and skills, and the key tasks and roles that local government would undertake.

Members made the following comments:

- The importance of working in collaboration and the provision of training and support opportunities, was emphasised.
- The need for more data related to the costs associated with the lack of transport and connectivity across all areas of the country was expressed.
- A Member referenced regional disparities and expressed the need to invest in data to improve educational outcomes for young people in years to come.
- There was a view that economic inequality was often overlooked, and that a lack of social mobility and investment in transport meant a lack of opportunity.

- It was noted that four of the six Economic Inclusion Principles set out within the report stated, 'Local Government may want to...' as opposed to 'Local Government will/shall...'. The need to make the wording stronger and clearer was emphasised.
- A Member felt that the document lacked discussion regarding communities, families, schools, the voluntary community space and social enterprise sector. The importance of investment into adult social care was highlighted.
- In relation to transport cost and connectivity, a Member expressed the need to reference trains in addition to buses.
- A Member emphasised the importance of neurodiversity.
- In reference to Principle 1, a Member expressed the need to amplify the strategic plans being used to identify and target specific industries and sectors, which had the potential to create jobs and economic opportunities for individuals that may be excluded from the local economy.
- In reference to Principle 4, a Member emphasised the importance of councils and combined authorities proactively working in partnership to encourage local procurement, and requested that this be strengthened within the paper.
- A Member felt that there should be more emphasis within the paper on the effects that poor transport links, limited job opportunities and weak connectivity have on mental health.

Decision:

Members **noted** the report.

Actions:

- Officers to invite Tracy Blackwell, Chair of the Purposeful Finance Commission and CEO of PIC, to the next Board meeting to discuss the Levelling-Up agenda.
- Officers to check legal history to see if the title wording of four of the six Principles could be altered to bind councils to undertake such work.
- Officers to consider bringing a paper to a future meeting of the Board which focuses on collaboration and partnership working.

4 Digital Update

Philip Clifford, Senior Adviser, introduced the paper and provided an update on the Board's digital work over the 2022/23 cycle. He invited **Cllr Mark Hawthorne**, LGA Digital Champion, to discuss the digital agenda.

Cllr Hawthorne set out the following key points:

- Digital inclusion:
 - Discussions had recently taken place with Helen Milner, OBE, Group Chief Executive of Good Things Foundation, regarding lobbying matters and building strong coalition.
 - Government's Digital strategy needed to be updated to keep pace with digital transformation.

- Digital connectivity:
 - The newly appointed Rural Connectivity Champion had announced part of the UK-wide infrastructure strategy, which had been lobbied for tirelessly.
 - Whilst the strategy outlined £40m to be provided for regions and local authorities across the UK to establish themselves as '5G Innovation Regions', there were many questions left unanswered and therefore conversations were ongoing.
 - The LGA continued to lobby in relation to improving the measurement and reporting of mobile coverage.
 - The LGA continued to work in close partnership with the Digital Infrastructure Advisory Group.
- Digital switchovers:
 - There had been a significant amount of positive media in relation to the digital switchovers.
 - The rising concern for the sector in relation to the 2G/3G sunset continued to be explored by the LGA's research team to ensure that potential impacts were clear and addressed.
- Stakeholder engagement:
 - The Digital Connectivity Forum had recently set up a piece of work which focused on the way in which local authorities could improve their role as connectivity enablers.
 - Industry were calling for local government-funded digital champions.
 - The LGA had been invited to join the National Digital Connectivity Alliance through its Wireless Infrastructure Strategy to discuss connectivity matters further.

Members made the following comments:

- Concerns were raised in relation to the digital switchovers, particularly around isolating the elderly and other vulnerable people.
- The importance of retrofitting homes to support new technology and ensuring that masts were appropriately located was emphasised.
- A Member supported the view that there should be a national standard for the collection of data.

Decision:

Members **noted** the report.

5 Britain's Leading Edge

Cllr Linda Taylor, Leader of Cornwall Council, provided an update to the Board in relation to the recent work of Britain's Leading Edge. She presented a series of slides and invited Members to have a wider discussion about collaboration opportunities.

Members made the following comments and asked a number questions:

- Members raised concerns in relation to rural inequalities and emphasised the importance of ensuring that all areas were treated fairly and equally with appropriate access to services for all.
- A question was asked which related to investment in rural and coastal areas ahead of the upcoming general election.
- The importance of sharing information and partnership working was emphasised.
- A question was asked which related to the partnership working arrangements between Leading Edge, Coastal Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and the SPARSE network.
- A question was asked about lobbying back to central government to reinvigorate fishing industries.
- The importance of representing the needs of remote and regional communities and councils well in all aspects of work was emphasised.

Cllr Taylor responded to Members comments and questions, setting out the following points:

- There was a significant amount of potential to solve recurring issues within many areas, specifically around food, critical minerals, and alternative sources of energy, through Britain's Leading Edge.
- Inequality continued to be evident, specifically within rural areas, Britain's Leading Edge would help to ensure that the levelling-up profile was raised and present across the whole of the country and to provide fairer funding and investment into such areas.
- Work with Coastal communities and the sharing of good practice continued.
- Regarding the Fishing industry, food security had recently become a serious issue as a result of the war in Ukraine, and funding was needed to tackle food-related issues.

Decision:

Members **noted** the report.

6 People & Places Board Annual Report

Rebecca Cox, Principal Policy Adviser, introduced the report which summarised the Board's activity over the past year. It set out key achievements in relation to the priorities for the Board in 2022/23 and looked forward to next year's priorities.

Members made the following comments:

- Regarding the Board's future priorities, A Member requested that the subject of rural inequality, specifically relating to connectivity and transport issues, be included.
- The need to ensure that emphasis on non-metropolitan towns was not lost was expressed.
- A Member requested that the subject of coastlines be included.

Decision:

Board Members **noted** the report.

Actions:

Officers to take Members comments and requests into account for inclusion within the Board's future priorities.

7 Update on the health and devolution working group with NHS Confederation

Philip Clifford, Senior Adviser, introduced the paper and provided an update on the newly formed health and devolution working group established by NHS Confederation and co-sponsored by the LGA following its first meeting in April 2023.

Members made the following comments:

- The importance of low-level architecture was emphasised, and the need for ICSs to appoint a place-making officer who local planning authorities could contact for their input and comments and planning applications, was expressed.
- A Member sought clarification in relation to the devolution deals in combined authorities, as mentioned within the report.
- In relation to issues with accountability, A Member asked whether there had been any developments within ICBs which led to direct accountability without the need to liaise with local authorities.
- The importance of community wealth building in lifting areas economically and recruiting staff living within the area was emphasised.
- The green plans set out within ICBs needed to be integrated with local authorities' green plans.
- The need for more democratic accountability within the NHS and local accountability in decision making was emphasised.

In response to a question, Philip explained the purpose of the report in greater detail and said that it focused on devolution deal areas, focusing specifically on local authorities' new powers and how they fit with ICSs. He added that the Community Wellbeing Board, People & Places Board and City Regions Board were all discussing the topic.

Decision:

Members **noted** the report.

Action:

Officers to provide an update to Board Members once the report had been presented to the City Regions Board on 7 June.

8 Supporting Economic Growth and Prosperity Update

Philip Clifford, Senior Adviser, introduced the paper and provided an update for Members on the work of the Board in supporting local

economies.

A Member expressed the importance of government having clarity about whether all LEPs would be disbanded regardless of their individual funding positions, or whether their funding would stop, and being clear about where the saved monies would be allocated to.

Philip said that government's levers to disband LEPs were limited and agreed that further clarity was needed to ensure that it did not cost the public purse.

Decision:

Members **noted** the report.

9 Growth Funding Update

Philip Clifford, Senior Adviser, introduced the paper and provided an update on recent work to improve the provision of growth funding from national to local government highlighting correspondence with the Secretary of State relating to the Levelling Up Fund.

A Member emphasised the importance of submitting bids to government, even if not successful every time.

Decision:

Members **noted** the report.

10 Growth & Prosperity Update

Philip Clifford, Senior Adviser, introduced the paper and invited **Steve Hughes**, Associate Economist at WPI Economics, to present a series of slides on the interim findings of WPI Economics' research into councils' role in driving growth and prosperity. The slides also set out information related to the Local Growth and Prosperity Framework background, interviews, roles and activities, recommendations and next steps.

Members commented on the report and presentation slides. Their comments included information related to The Green Book reform, the correlation of information collected by size, the importance of risk-taking and place-shaping and the role that procurement undertakes in driving growth.

Steve responded to Members' comments.

Decision:

Members **noted** the report and supporting presentation slides.

11 Green Jobs and Skills

Paul Green, Adviser, introduced the paper which provided a summary of progress from the Local Capacity and Capability sub-group and proposed

a policy narrative for a green jobs framework.

Members commented on the report. Their comments included information related to the working relationship between national and local government, Net-Zero requirements for funding, the importance of investing in skills, building and workforce, green jobs, energy sources and associated costs.

Paul responded to Members' comments.

Decision:

Members **noted** the report.

Action:

Officers to send two links to Members outside of the meeting (Climate Change Hub and ONS Green Jobs Definition).

12 **Community Land Trusts**

Rebecca Cox, Principal Policy Adviser, introduced **Joe Fyans**, Head of Research at Localis, and invited him to present a series of slides on Localis' work on community land trusts and interim findings.

Members commented on the report and presentation slides. Their comments included information related to the wider housing need across the country, consultations, and the management of short-term lets.

Decision:

Members **noted** the report.

Action:

Officers to provide further information to Members outside of the meeting in relation to a Localis Advisory Panel meeting scheduled to take place on 14 June.

Any other business

Members of the Board thanked the Chair for his hard work and dedication to chairing the Board and supporting the work of the Board.

The Chair thanked Members for their kind words and equally expressed his thanks to all Members who stood down/ had not been re-elected.

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
	Cllr Emily O'Brien	Lewes District Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Amanda Serjeant	Chesterfield Borough Council
Members	Cllr Marc Bayliss	Worcestershire County Council
	Cllr Peter Butlin	Warwickshire County Council
	Cllr Hilary Carrick	Cumbria County Council
	Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen	Breckland Council
	Cllr Jordan Meade	Gravesham Borough Council
	Cllr Eddie Reeves	Oxfordshire County Council
	Cllr Barry Wood	Cherwell District Council
	Cllr Simon Henig CBE	Durham County Council
	Cllr Erica Lewis	Lancashire County Council
	Cllr Caroline Leaver	Devon County Council
	Cllr Michael Mullaney	Leicestershire County Council
	Cllr Kevin Etheridge	Caerphilly County Borough Council
	Cllr Julian Dean	Shropshire Council
Apologies	Cllr Martin Tett	Buckinghamshire Council
	Cllr Damien Greenhalgh	High Peak Borough Council and Derbyshire County Council
In Attendance	Cllr Steve Norman	Lichfield District Council

People and Places Board Terms of Reference

Purpose of Report

For direction.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

The People and Places Board provides a forum for local authorities that are not metropolitan to debate economic growth and public service transformation in their areas. Members are asked to consider the Board's draft terms of reference and make any comments.

LGA Plan Theme: Stronger local economies, thriving local democracy

Recommendation(s)

That Board members agree the terms of reference. Members are invited to express an interest in the digital connectivity role (para 9) and to agree the proposals for some in person meetings (para 18).

Contact details

Contact officer: Rebecca Cox

Position: Principal Policy Adviser

Phone no: 07921 604 237

Email: rebecca.cox@local.gov.uk

People and Places Board Terms of Reference

Background

1. The People and Places Board provides a forum for local authorities that are not metropolitan to debate sustainable economic growth, including the importance of decarbonisation and biodiversity recovery, and public service transformation in their areas.
2. Excluding rural and non-metropolitan policy and digital connectivity, the Board works jointly with the City Regions Board.
3. At the LGA Board's July meeting, as part of a portfolio update to some LGA Boards, members agreed that the People and Places and City Regions Boards take on 'strategic transport and housing' as part of their remit. This change is underlined in paragraph 4 below. The Board Chairman will meet with the City Regions Chair and Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board Chair (formerly Economy, Environment, Housing and Transport) to ensure the work programmes are complementary.

Remit

4. The People and Places Board brings together senior and authoritative elected members from non-metropolitan authorities (county, district/borough, and non-metropolitan unitary councils), and is reflective of those in Combined Authorities or seeking devolution deals. The role of the Board is to develop greater clarity on the role of non-metropolitan authorities in enabling sustainable economic growth for the long-term prosperity and wellbeing of residents, and on how devolution and transformation of public services can enable that.
5. Its remit is to consider how planning and infrastructure provision, publicly-funded skills and employment programmes, digital connectivity, and strategic transport and housing might be better deployed in a non-metropolitan setting to drive sustainable growth leading to greater prosperity. The Board will consider the role of non-metropolitan leaders in responding to the climate and ecological emergencies, including the role of agriculture and nature restoration, and building capacity around the green economy. It will also consider how people services and health and care integration, together with greater use of pooled funding, might help to improve wellbeing and drive transformation in services.

Operational accountabilities

6. The Board will seek to involve councillors in supporting the delivery of these priorities (through Forums, policy grouping, Special Interest Groups (SIGs), regional networks and other means of wider engagement); essentially operating as the centre of a network connecting to all councils and drawing on the expertise of key advisors from the sector.
7. The People and Places Board will be responsible for:
 - 7.1. Ensuring the priorities of councils are fed into the business planning process.

- 7.2. Developing a work programme to deliver their brief, covering lobbying, campaigns, research, improvement support and events and linking with other boards where appropriate.
 - 7.3. Sharing good practice and ideas to stimulate innovation and improvement.
 - 7.4. Representing and lobbying on behalf of the LGA, including making public statements on its areas of responsibility.
 - 7.5. Building and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders.
 - 7.6. Involving representatives from councils in its work, through task groups, Commissions, SIGs, regional networks and mechanisms.
 - 7.7. Responding to specific issues referred to the Board by one or more member councils or groupings of councils.
8. The People and Places Board may:
- 8.1. Appoint members to relevant outside bodies in accordance with the Political Conventions.
 - 8.2. Appoint member champion and spokespersons from the Board to lead on key issues.
9. Lead members agreed that Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE continue as the digital champion, reporting regularly to the Board. Lead members suggested the Board appoint a digital connectivity lead to work with Mark between Board meetings. Members interested in taking on this role are asked to let their lead member know in advance of the Board meeting.
10. In the last cycle, Cllr Emily O'Brien was appointed the green jobs champion to support the Board's work on the Government's Green Jobs Delivery Group and associated sub-groups, which will continue to meet through the autumn. Lead members agreed that she continue in this role.
11. An equalities champion is due to be appointed to all Boards in the autumn.

Work programme

12. The Board to set its own work programme which is agreed at the start of each meeting cycle in early Autumn.

Quorum

13. One third of the members, provided that representatives of at least 2 political groups represented on the body are present.

Political composition

14. The composition by political party is recalculated each year and reflects the political proportionality of the wider group of councils from which their membership is drawn.

15. The current composition is:

15.1. Conservative group: 11 members

15.2. Labour group: 4 members

15.3. Independent group: 3 members

15.4. Liberal Democrat group: 4 members

16. Substitute members from each political group may also be appointed.

Frequency

17. Meetings to be five times per annum.

18. While LGA meetings now offer hybrid facilities, lead members expressed support for the idea of designating two meetings as 'in person if possible,' while retaining hybrid facilities for those who are unable to attend in person. This would support closer working relationships between Board members.

Reporting accountabilities

19. The LGA Executive Advisory Board (EAB) provides oversight of the Board. The Board may report periodically to the EAB as required, and will submit an annual report to the Executive's July meeting.

Next steps

20. Officers to publish the final terms of reference.

People and Places Draft Work Programme 2023-24

Purpose of Report

For direction.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

This paper sets out a brief overview of the Board's work and asks members to comment on the Board's priorities and its work with other representative bodies.

LGA Plan Theme: Stronger local economies, thriving local democracy

Recommendation(s)

That members comment on and agree the draft work programme and priorities.

Contact details

Contact officer: Rebecca Cox

Position: Principal Policy Adviser

Phone no: 07921 604 237

Email: rebecca.cox@local.gov.uk

People and Places Draft Work Programme 2023-24

Background

1. The People and Places Board represents the non-metropolitan members of the LGA (rural, coastal, and town areas). It also works in partnership with the City Regions Board on a number of cross-cutting issues such as devolution, local economic growth and skills and employment support.
2. In discussing the run up to the next general election in the last Board cycle, members were keen to see progress on the Board's policy priorities and also to see a greater recognition at a national level of the needs and potential of non-metropolitan councils. This paper contains a brief update on work across the Board's core policy areas and asks for lead members' views on the draft policy priorities agreed at the end of the previous Board cycle. We would also be keen to hear members' early thoughts on the new inclusion of strategic housing and transport in its remit.
3. There are a number of LGA Special Interest Groups and other representative bodies relevant to the Board's work, including:
 - Britain's Leading Edge
 - Coastal SIG
 - County Councils Network
 - District Councils' Network
 - SPARSE/Rural Services Network.

The Board's relationships with these groups varies according to the work programme and tends to be driven by the priorities of the day. This might include, for example, presenting to the Board, working with officers on particular policy issues or nominating members for steering groups. A steer from members on how they would like to work together over the next year would be helpful.

Local Government White Paper

4. At the annual conference in July, the LGA launched its ['Make it Local'](#) report. The report sets out a range of clear offers from local government in the areas that pollsters are reporting as the biggest issues of concern for the public, and therefore are likely to be prominent in national parties' manifesto proposals. Alongside the LGA's ongoing work to influence party manifestos, we will be working with the sector to develop more detailed proposals for a new or returning government to implement. Proposals for the White Paper will be discussed at the Executive Advisory Board on 7 September.

Policy update

Rural and non-metropolitan policy

5. In the last Board cycle, members discussed the importance of non-metropolitan areas to levelling up, including strengthening the rural economy, developing rural infrastructure, delivering rural services and rural-proofing policy. They also met with a number of other organisations, including Defra, to consider opportunities for lobbying on behalf of non-

metropolitan areas in the run up to the next general election. Members suggested that this incoming Board consider this as part of their work programme for this Board cycle.

6. Following the publication of Government's positive [Unleashing rural opportunity](#) report we understand that Defra are working on a further report, and officers have spoken favourably about the possibility of the Board hosting an event focused on non-metropolitan areas, with a suggestion that the Secretary of State would also be interested.

Growth and prosperity

7. The role of local government in local economic growth and prosperity is increasingly seen as critical to supporting the national economy, but more can be done to support councils and devolved areas in their efforts. The People and Places and Cities Board commissioned WPI Economics to review councils' current roles and responsibilities and put forward recommendations for improvement. The final draft will be available for the September Board meeting and can be used to bolster our lobbying activity for party manifestos and the White Paper.
8. Earlier this month Government confirmed [its decision to withdraw funding to Local Enterprise Partnerships \(LEPs\) and move their functions to local government](#), supported by some revenue funding in 2024/25. Government also published its plan to [simplify grant funding](#) to local government. We also expect Round 3 of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) to be announced in the coming months. The Board might wish to undertake work in these areas to ensure positive outcomes for local government; we also have an outstanding offer to meet the Levelling Up Minister Dehenna Davison MP to discuss Government's plan for the third round of the LUF.

Skills and employment support

9. The LGA, councils and devolved authorities and partner local government representative bodies are united in their view that the status quo in designing, commissioning, and delivering employment and skills activity needs to change. The sector has a time-limited opportunity to influence all political parties that the LGA's Work Local approach can address the challenges and opportunities faced by people and places, and that it can be implemented across all places over time. A returning Government or new administration will want to adopt policies that it can move forward with at pace and with limited budgets. We need to both work through the operational level detail needed to turn our agreed policy lines into reality, as well as communicate our messages in a clear and simple way.
10. We have upcoming research on economic inactivity, one of the biggest labour market challenges, due to be published in the autumn. Officers continue to work with the Departments for Education, Work and Pensions, and Health and Social Care to promote a place-based approach. Following agreement by the previous Board, officers are scoping a piece of work to evidence how the fragmentation of the transport system impacts access to education, training and employment opportunities. Following a successful first meeting with the Skills Minister, the Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP earlier this year, we will look to secure a follow up meeting as agreed. Government's working groups on green jobs will put forward their recommendations in the autumn; there are

opportunities to undertake work on the workforce needs of delivering low carbon energy security and reducing the nature and land skills gap.

11. A separate paper on skills and employment support is included later in this meeting for a fuller discussion.

Devolution and Levelling Up

12. It is positive that all national parties have signalled a commitment to further devolution to local government. The LGA-sponsored [Devolution APPG](#) will continue to promote the opportunities for devolution with Parliamentarians, building on the People and Places and City Regions Boards' Levelling Up Locally Inquiry. The City Regions, Community Wellbeing and People and Places Boards are part of the time limited health and devolution working group established in April 2023 and co-sponsored by NHS Confederation and the LGA. It will meet for a final time in September to agree recommendations, which could feed into the LGA's White Paper work.
13. The LGA, through its improvement and support work, also works with combined authorities and existing and aspiring devolution areas to support them and share learning and best practice.

Digital connectivity

14. In the last Board cycle the Board expanded its remit to consider the role of councils in tackling digital exclusion and the need for a joined-up approach from Government to support this. It also playing a leading role in highlighting councils' concerns on the switch from analogue to digital phone lines and the impact on users of telecare services and others. This work is ongoing, alongside rising concern about similar issues relating to 2G and 3G switch off with mobile networks, and we have surveyed councils over the summer about this. Lead members also suggested the Board consider the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the role of councils and councillors.
15. The Government's recent [UK Wireless Infrastructure Strategy](#) had a number of positive features including recognition of the need for local authority digital champions, the creation of a Rural Connectivity Champion, investment in 5G 'innovation regions' and the need to improve the measurement and reporting of mobile coverage. Cllr Mark Hawthorne met Simon Fell MP, the new Rural Connectivity Champion, and was able to influence his upcoming a paper for the Defra and DSIT Secretaries of State. If members agree, influencing the actions arising from the strategy would be a useful focus for the Board's work.
16. A separate paper on digital connectivity is included later in this meeting for a fuller discussion.

Proposal

17. At the end of its 2022-23 Board cycle, members proposed the following draft priorities for the next Board:
- 17.1. Making the case for investment in rural areas ahead of the upcoming general election.

- 17.2. Rural-proofing emerging government policy including on connectivity and transport.
 - 17.3. Influencing national policy on levelling up and devolution, including a focus on non-metropolitan areas and widening the scope of powers available.
 - 17.4. Embedding our Work Local proposals into national policy, including specific policy proposals to support green jobs and net zero, including opportunities for roles in food, farming, forestry and nature restoration; and exploring attainment disparities in rural and non-metropolitan areas.
 - 17.5. Streamlining local growth funding and implementing the learning from existing funding programmes.
 - 17.6. Supporting councils with the transition of LEPs to local government and removing barriers to councils' abilities to support local inclusive growth.
 - 17.7. Aligning digital infrastructure and digital inclusion policy through joined-up national policy development and support for local leadership.
18. Members are asked to comment on whether:
- 18.1. These are the right priorities – is anything missing, or is anything there that can now be de-prioritised? For example, to support the inclusion of strategic housing and transport we might take a lighter-touch approach to devolution.
 - 18.2. Any priorities need to be updated to reflect current challenges and opportunities.

Implications for Wales

- 19. Many areas of the Board's policy are devolved, however we undertake to work with the WLGA to share learning as necessary.

Financial Implications

- 20. The work described can be undertaken from within the Board's budget.

Equalities implications

- 21. The Board has sought to reflect the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion throughout its work programme, including the particular needs of communities in non-metropolitan areas. An equalities champion is due to be centrally appointed to the Board in the autumn.

Next steps

- 22. Officers will take forward the work programme in line with members' direction.

Digital Update

Purpose of Report

For direction.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

This report provides People and Places board members with an update on the board's digital work over the 2022/23 cycle ahead of a wider discussion with the LGA's Digital Champion, Cllr Mark Hawthorne, about areas of priority for the upcoming board cycle.

LGA Plan Theme: ***Stronger local economies, thriving local democracy***

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to **note** the policy context and the overview of work undertaken by the People and Places Board in the 2022/23 board cycle.

Members are also asked to **provide a steer** on the priorities for the 2023/24 in **paragraph 32**.

Members are asked to nominate a digital lead to act as a conduit between the work of the board and Cllr Hawthorne's wider work as the LGA's Digital Champion, providing regular updates at board meetings.

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Background

0. The board continued to expand its work around digital connectivity and inclusion throughout the 2022/23 cycle, following the [Levelling Up White Paper](#) setting out Government's targets that by 2030 the UK will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for the majority of the population. This paper provides an update for members on the board's digital workstreams and sets out some early thinking on artificial intelligence (AI). The update will be presented by Cllr Mark Hawthorne the LGA's Digital Champion.
1. Cllr Mark Hawthorne is Leader of Gloucestershire County Council and a member of the LGA's Economy and Resources Board. Cllr Hawthorne is the current LGA Digital Champion, shaping future LGA digital policy, working in partnership with the People and Places Board and attending relevant meetings with digital stakeholders both with board members and on behalf of the board.
2. Following a steer from Lead Members to have a named People and Places board member with responsibility for the LGA's digital work, members are asked to nominate a digital lead to work closely with Cllr Hawthorne on the 2023/24 digital work programme.

Broadband

Gigabit Rollout

3. Councils play a leading role in supporting digital connectivity and are best placed to understand the digital needs of their areas. They supported the delivery of the Superfast Broadband Programme, providing almost £750 million of the £1.7 billion invested and have built up a pool of internal expertise to help facilitate both roll-out and take-up.
4. The current broadband rollout, Project Gigabit, is centrally managed by Building Digital UK (BDUK). Due to the scale and centralised management of this programme, the board took the decision to focus on highlighting the risks of not utilising the expertise of councils in targeting communities most in need, driving demand stimulation and providing digital upskilling rather than to push for a direct role in delivery.
5. The LGA's call for fully funded 'digital champions' captures these calls and has attracted support from across the mobile and broadband sector. As set out

below this is something the LGA proposes to continue to push for throughout the 2023/24 cycle.

Digital phone switchover

6. Officers continue to raise concerns about the impact of upgrading infrastructure. The planned transfer of all analogue lines (also called the public switched telephone network or PSTN) to digital internet-based infrastructure will see analogue-based products completely phased out by 2025 and replaced with an all-digital network. Telecare devices such as personal alarms and fall detectors are largely analogue products putting the 1.7 million people who rely on technology enabled care at the most risk.
7. In the 22/23 Board cycle, the LGA undertook a [digital switchover readiness survey](#) exploring councils' awareness, planning and implementation of the digital switchover. The results were published in early 2023. Officers have continued to run monthly [switchover working group](#) meetings to discuss challenges and share good practice between regions.
8. The LGA's [digital switchover hub](#) has been updated in collaboration with industry and Government partners and the LGA has recently developed a [digital switchover toolkit](#). The toolkit contains assets aimed at residents to raise awareness of the upcoming switchover. The assets include draft social media posts, text to include in bulletins or on a website, and three versions of a printable A4 leaflet with easy-to-understand information and directions. Officers continue to encourage key stakeholders to share the assets and, in response to this work, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) has asked the LGA to support with the development of guidance for local authorities on the digital phone switchover.
9. The transition from analogue to digital technologies has created new opportunities for criminals to target vulnerable residents. For example, criminals may use phishing emails, fake websites, or phone calls to trick residents into providing personal information. There is also the potential for increases in criminality through rogue traders selling equipment, charging for unnecessary work, or trying to pressurise vulnerable members of the community into new contracts related to the digital switchover. Officers have been working with colleagues in the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Team and the National Trading Standards Scams Team to create recommended actions for councils to reduce the risk of scams. The guidance will be hosted on the Digital Switchover Hub in early autumn, and it is accompanied by case studies.

Mobile

2G/3G sunset

10. The [2G/3G sunset](#), whereby all mobile operators have agreed to switch off 2G and 3G by 2033, is a rising concern for the sector as it will affect residents on networks using older mobile devices and services. By retiring 3G and 2G, the radio frequencies can be repurposed for faster, more energy-efficient 4G and 5G services. Each mobile provider is setting its own timetable for its 3G network switch off and Vodafone has already started turning off 3G. Those with older devices that do not allow 4G or 5G will have to upgrade to continue to access mobile data and there are concerns that some devices, particularly those being sold from a third-party seller (such as online marketplaces or in a supermarket), might not support the 4G network. Other devices such as care alarms, security alarms and payment terminals might also use the 3G network and therefore could be affected by the switch off.
11. A lack of communications from industry remains a key challenge, with public awareness levels low, and concerns remain around affordability of new devices. As a result, the LGA's research team has developed a survey to explore potential implications of the switch off for the sector. The survey has been running for the last month and will close mid-September. Its results will be used to inform the board's lobbying position in the 2023/24 cycle. LGA officers and LGA Digital Champion Cllr Mark Hawthorne continue to engage with key stakeholders on the issue, meeting with the DSIT leads, Ofcom, and the mobile operators' body Mobile UK on a regular basis.

Mobile coverage

12. [Government's UK Wireless Infrastructure Strategy](#), published earlier this year, recognises the need to improve the measurement and reporting of mobile coverage, a longstanding ask of the People and Places Board. It highlights that it is 'frustrating when a user's experience does not match up to expectations and the reported coverage' and as a result the strategy calls on Ofcom to improve mobile coverage reporting, including in rural areas.
13. Cllr Hawthorne and LGA officers met with DSIT's mobile coverage team earlier this summer to understand how the Department intends to work with Ofcom to improve reporting. While conversations are still in preliminary stages, it was agreed the LGA would be involved in shaping the work and officers will ensure local government plays a leading role influencing the wider outcomes of the strategy.

5G

14. The Levelling Up White Paper outlined the Government's ambition for most of the population to have access to a 5G signal by 2027. The subsequent Wireless Infrastructure Strategy highlighted the role the 5G Testbeds and Trials (5GTT) programme played in highlighting the benefits that 5G can bring. Building on this, the strategy set out a £40 million fund for regions and local authorities across the UK to establish themselves as ['5G Innovation Regions'](#) to promote innovation through investment in, and scaled adoption of, 5G and other advanced wireless technologies. Given the importance of good mobile connectivity in rural areas officers will continue to work with DSIT to ensure the benefits and challenges of rolling out 5G to more remote communities are fully explored.

Masts

15. The installation of telecoms infrastructure would normally count as development and require planning permission. However, communications network operators have certain permitted development rights. These are rights to make specified changes to a building or land without the need to apply for planning permission from the local planning authority.
16. As of April 2022, new ground-based mobile masts up to 30 metres in non-protected areas and up to 25 metres in protected areas are permitted. Regardless of whether planning permission is required, operators need to obtain agreement from the landowner to build mobile masts on private land. Further changes include buildings able to host smaller masts in unprotected areas without prior approval and reduce need to build new masts and existing mobile masts strengthened without prior approval so they can be upgraded for 5G and shared between mobile operators. The full list of [changes to the permitted development rights can be found here](#).
17. Officers will continue to engage with the ADEPT Digital Connectivity Working Group, a task and finish group focussing on the delivery of improved broadband and mobile connectivity with membership comprising local government digital leads across the country to understand any implications for the sector and feed this back to DSIT and industry.

Digital leadership

Inclusion

18. Following a competitive bidding process, the Board commissioned DMS Research and Consulting to explore the role of councils in tackling digital exclusion. The research formed two parts – data analysis and stakeholder consultations. The data analysis combined Ofcom Connected Nations datasets for coverage and performance with over a hundred socio-economic datasets to explore the correlations between thousands of variables to understand how connectivity has changed over time. Following this several stakeholder consultations were undertaken with council officers and members, the Department for Science Innovation and Technology (DSIT), Building Digital UK (BDUK), the Digital Connectivity Forum (DCF) and Good Things Foundation.
19. The [final report](#), published in the last board cycle, outlined a number of recommendations for Government. These included: the need to clarify ministerial and executive leadership on digital inclusion, bearing in mind the cross-cutting nature of the issue; creating and maintaining a new framework with national level guidance, resources and tools that support local digital inclusion initiatives, replacing the Digital Inclusion Strategy of 2014; and developing mechanisms for more effective cross-department coordination in tackling digital exclusion.
20. Cllr Mark Hawthorne wrote to the Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure at DSIT, Julia Lopez MP, sharing the report, highlighting the recommendations for Government, and asking for a meeting to discuss the findings in further detail and officers are following up securing a meeting with the Minister with DSIT officials. A press release was published and picked up by the [national](#) and [trade](#) press.
21. There are growing calls for Government to publish an updated Digital Inclusion Strategy. Helen Milner, Chief Executive of Good Things Foundation [wrote a think piece](#) endorsing the report's recommendations and reinforcing the important role councils play in addressing digital exclusion and the need for Government to work with the sector and wider organisations to create impact at scale to fix the digital divide. The [House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee published a report](#) in June which found Government has 'no credible strategy' on tackling digital exclusion. The LGA submitted evidence to inform the report and responded to its publication with a [press release](#).

Digital champions

22. There is also growing support for the board's longstanding call for Government to recognise the importance of, and fully fund, local authority digital champions to help coordinate delivery locally, recruit extra capacity and respond to surges in local roll out activity. Government's recently published [UK Wireless Infrastructure Strategy](#) recognises the role of digital champions and digital coordinators to provide strategic leadership on the local authority's digital infrastructure strategy. [Mobile UK published research](#) suggesting local authorities which have prioritised digital connectivity and appointed digital champions have had significant success in speeding up rollout and improving relationships with telecoms companies.
23. Most recently the Digital Connectivity Forum published a [report looking at the role of local authorities as connectivity enablers](#). The report recommended Government allocates funding to local authorities to support the role of a digital champion with a mandated job description/skills level to ensure consistency across all local authorities. Cllr Hawthorne and officers will continue to align calls with the DCF and Mobile UK and lobby Government over the 2023/24 board cycle.

Wireless Infrastructure Strategy

24. The UK Wireless Infrastructure Strategy introduced [Simon Fell MP as Government's Rural Connectivity Champion](#) reporting to both DSIT and the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Secretaries of State to remove local barriers for deployment and promote digitally based innovation in rural areas. Cllr Mark Hawthorne met with Simon Fell in August to discuss how the sector can work in partnership to support the role and outlined the LGA's key digital asks. Simon Fell is bringing a paper to the DEFRA and DSIT Secretaries of State in the autumn suggesting key short, medium, and long-term priorities for Government to support rural communities with digital connectivity and the conversation with Cllr Hawthorne helped inform this piece of work.
25. It is suggested the board invites Simon Fell to a future meeting to understand his key priorities, discuss the challenges facing rural areas, and highlight the role of local government in improving rural connectivity.
26. The UK Wireless Infrastructure Strategy also proposed a Digital Infrastructure Advisory Group, comprising a selection of regional digital leaders to advise

Government on how places can act to promote investment in and adoption of digital connectivity. Officers are currently working with DSIT to ensure the group does not duplicate the well-established ADEPT Digital Connectivity Working Group (see para 18).

Artificial Intelligence

27. In 2019, the LGA's Research team explored the [sector's use of predictive analytics](#). It was found that the use of this technology was at an early stage, and there were challenges with councils' understanding of artificial intelligence (AI) and/or predictive analytics. Since 2019 there have been significant technological developments, especially recently in the field of generative AI. These tools are now widely accessible and include large language models (for example Chat GPT). With these technological developments, like many organisations globally, councils are starting to consider and make use of AI in a broader number of contexts including cyber security, software development, in translation services, through virtual assistants and productivity tools.
28. Work on AI is already taking place across the LGA, including by the Cyber Digital and Technology (CDT), Research, Leadership and Localism, Partners in Care and Health, and Policy teams. The remit of the LGA's Innovation and Improvement Board extends to cyber, digital, data and technology and the board has been leading on the LGA's work on AI to date, responding to a Government consultation on ['A Pro-Innovation Approach to AI Regulation'](#). Officers will ensure join-up between LGA Boards and bring updates on the LGA's wider work on AI to the People and Places Board where appropriate.
29. At the same time there is an opportunity for the People and Places Board to play a leading role in this agenda. The sector is enthusiastic about the opportunities AI presents in both increasing council capacity and providing intelligence and insights that will improve public services. There is also a risk that if councils do not use AI, they would fail to meet resident expectations and that local government could be left behind. To date the Improvement and Innovation Board have begun to consider the risks associated with AI and the need to manage them as well as the digital ethics of the deployment of AI and how councils can embed this within governance structures and project management processes. The potential for AI in developing insight and intelligence to strengthen decision-making in local public services is enormous and therefore there is an opportunity for the People and Places Board to complement the work of the Improvement and Innovation Board with wider place-based work.

Members might like to consider exploring how AI is used in political decision-making, considering both opportunities and risks.

30. Members are encouraged to reflect upon their own uses and understanding of AI within their local authorities and provide a steer on whether they might like to jointly pursue a piece of commissioned work with the Improvement and Innovation Board to support councillors in this area.

Proposals

31. Members are asked to note the background information and digital work undertaken through the 2022/23 board cycle. Members are also asked to provide a steer on whether they agree with prioritising the following key areas in the 2023/24 cycle:
- The board uses the results of the 2G/3G sunset survey to inform its lobbying position and develop support for the sector, joining up with its work on the digital phone switchover.
 - Government's Rural Connectivity Champion, Simon Fell MP, is invited to a future board meeting to set out his key priorities, discuss the challenges facing rural areas, and the role of local government in improving rural connectivity.
 - A new workstream is developed around AI, including commissioned work exploring the role of AI in political decision-making, following a steer from members.
 - The board continues to engage government and key stakeholders on its established priorities, including: digital inclusion; local authority digital champions; and, access to high-speed digital connectivity in rural areas.
32. Members are asked to nominate a digital lead to act as a conduit between the work of the board and Cllr Hawthorne's wider work as the LGA's Digital Champion, providing regular updates at board meetings.

Next steps

33. Following a steer from members around whether they are happy with the proposed digital work in the 2023/24 board cycle, officers will take forward the work stream.

Implications for Wales

34. Digital infrastructure policy is a devolved responsibility. However, officers will look for opportunities to ensure alignment of work with the Welsh Local Government Association, such as around the digital PSTN switchover.

Financial Implications

35. The Board's digital activities are supported by budgets for policy development and improvement.

Equalities implications

36. The Board's work considers the impact of digital exclusion on marginalised communities and groups with protected characteristics, and it continues to lobby Government to ensure emerging digital policies and programmes will meet the needs of individuals and communities nationally and at a regional and local level in England.

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