

Note of last People & Places Board meeting

Title: People & Places Board
Date: Monday 14 March 2016
Venue: Smith Square 1&2, Ground Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	Welcome, Introductions and Declarations of Interest The chair welcomed members to the meeting and noted apologies. There were no declarations of interest. It was agreed that the Devolution Update agenda item would be moved to the exempt session at the end of the meeting.	
2	Employment and Skills: Update Paper Eamon Lally (Senior Adviser) introduced the paper. He updated members on the LGA's lobbying position on employment and skills. He drew the board's attentions to work the LGA was undertaking with the Department of Work and Pensions on the Work and Health Programme. He also highlighted developments for the adult education budget, apprenticeships and the future of Job Centre Plus. He informed the board that officers would also be working with the City Regions Board on this area. In the discussion which followed, members raised the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There was concern about the potential impact of the government apprenticeship levy. Reduced workforces made it difficult for local government to take on more apprentices and it was unclear how government would spend the levy.• Local government should continue to voice its concerns on the skills shortages problems to central government. Businesses were frequently unable to recruit apprentices because of a lack of candidates with the right skills. This situation had not been fully noted in the report.• The report needed to take account of the problems of the lack of transportation in rural areas for young people trying to get to college. Distance learning was not always an alternative, as an area needed good mobile and broadband provision for this to work. There were additional problems with recruiting staff to train apprentices in rural areas, because of the housing crisis.	

- Work in this area also needed to take into account that many people would need retraining at some point in their lives. Work could be done to better make use of existing skills.
- There was concern that there was some reticence from government departments in allowing local government to work on this area. It was argued that it was important for areas outside devolution agreements to be able to influence the process, and that the provision of good skills training should not be dependent on being part of a devolution deal.
- Colleges currently decided what skills/training courses were on offer and did not necessarily teach the skills most needed. The desire to rank highly in the educational league tables encouraged educational institutions to focus on sending their students to sixth form and university. There was not enough value placed on apprenticeships as an alternative. Local government and LEPs needed to help connect companies and schools/colleagues and assist them in generating people with the right skills. The area needed better planning, co-ordination and delivery. It was emphasised that the LGA People and Places and City Regions Boards needed to present a common front in this area.
- There was a further question raised over who would deliver the post 16 education and training institutions area based reviews.

Actions:

1. LGA officers would circulate the article in the Sunday Times on a mismatch in higher education.
2. The chair would set out the board's position on this area in the Skills and Employment Meeting between People and Places and City Regions Boards Lead Members.
3. The MSO would type up notes before this joint meeting.

Decisions:

1. Members **noted** the report.
2. Members **agreed** that officers would continue to work with government departments and find opportunities to engage with ministers and LEPs on this.
3. Members **agreed** that officers would set out reasons in a green paper on why local government should be involved in this area.

3 LGA Transport Policy

Kamal Panchal, Senior Adviser, introduced the paper, which had been requested by the LGA Leadership Board. He discussed funding, highlighting that although capital budgets had upheld well, there was still a problem with fragmented funding and a mismatch between capital and revenue. He advised the board that requests in devolution deals for funding/ specific powers had included bus franchising and traffic management powers. In the deals announced so far, six or seven had

included offers of franchising/regulating buses. Franchising, however, would not be a solution in all areas. He advised the board that the LGA would continue to call for full funding of the statutory concessionary bus scheme.

On air quality, affected areas included Birmingham, Nottingham, Leeds, Derby and Southampton. The government intends to impose clean air zones in these places and set a clean air zones framework for other areas.. However, this would need local flexibility to effectively deal with local circumstances.

In the discussion which followed, members raised the following points:

- Some areas were calling for more control over rail and bus franchising. There were problems when bus operators cut routes and rail companies closed ticket offices without consultation. Members felt it would be useful to have more influence in this area.
- Members felt that there was a communication issue between Network Rail and local government and that the relationship would benefit from being formalised.
- On air quality, there needed to be a more cohesive approach than setting a clean air zone standard in only five cities. Members asked who would take responsibility for air quality management, as in some two-tier areas responsibility was divided. The issue needed to be resolved by one organisation.
- A smart ticketing system combining tickets for rail and bus would make travel considerably easier in some areas and members asked the LGA to consider advocating this. There were also calls for tickets to be interchangeable between rail operators for increased flexibility. It was highlighted however, that some companies did not have the funding to do this and this was a problem that had not been addressed.
- There needed to be major spending on transport infrastructure but there was currently not enough money for local government do this. Members commented that it was difficult to maintain local transport services, let alone improve them. It was felt that local government needed to highlight this problem.
- Members discussed the pothole fund and asked when this would be released. Non-metropolitan areas maintained miles of road, but had little funding to do this. This had not been mentioned in the report. There was also no funding for dealing with drains and removing water from roads to make sure the network was resilient. There were frequent problems with HGV vehicles and buses becoming stuck in rural places.

Decision:

1. Members **noted** the report and the work being led by the EEHT Board.

Actions:

1. LGA officers to feedback members' comments to EEHT Board.
2. LGA officers to submit a revised transport paper to the LGA Leadership Board.

4 Update Superfast Broadband

Daniel Shamplin-Hall, Adviser, introduced the paper and provided an update on LGA activity. He advised the board that there would be a Superfast Broadband Conference on Thursday 17th March 2016. During this, solutions would be explored for reaching the final 5% of the country not covered by superfast broadband. This would be an opportunity to hear about other market test pilots, other network providers and councils with experience of procuring solutions. On mobile connectivity, he informed the board that the government had obligated mobile operators to extend coverage across the country by 2017. The LGA would work with mobile network operators in this area.

In this discussion which followed, members raised the following points:

- Members expressed their concern that many rural areas are still cut off from superfast broadband. It was felt that enforcement fines needed to be put in place to deal with this.
- The quality of broadband was also discussed as it could take a long time to get a connection after a cabinet went up in a rural area. It was felt that there was less incentive to speed up this process where low numbers of people lived. Community funding was discussed and groups that had self-funded their broadband.
- Members felt that some mobile phone operators lacked understanding on how to engage with local communities. Local authorities needed to help mobile phone operators to reach these communities.

Decision:

1. Members **noted** the report.

Actions:

1. LGA officers to put together feedback from members on this area.
2. LGA officers to send a note on the Superfast Broadband Conference to members.

5 LGA Devolution Support Activity

Decision:

1. Members **noted** the update.

6 Devolution Update (Confidential)

Andrew Campbell, Associate Director, introduced the report. He advised the board that a “green paper” on devolution for the LGA Conference had been discussed at the last LGA Leadership Board. It was felt that the LGA should be pushing the government to take devolution further. He discussed changes to business rates and the possibilities offered by further fiscal devolution in the future. He asked what further powers authorities should be seeking at the combined authority level and for members to give the LGA a steer on this.

Public engagement in the devolution debate was also discussed, as was the impact on the LGA. Changes to the role of regulators, national agencies and arm’s length bodies in local places was also touched upon. He proposed coming back to update the board at regular intervals.

In the discussion which followed, members raised the following points:

- The green paper would need to set out a vision and an agenda for devolution. Local government should pitch what devolution could achieve and make recommendations to government.
- Members questioned the relevance of “devolution plus” when many felt that full devolution had not yet been achieved. Some deals needed to be revisited and reflected on. The LGA could also assist some areas in helping to reach agreement on deals. It was felt the fundamental building blocks of devolution would need to be in place before other issues were considered.
- Devolution plus would need to make the case for policies such as devolved control of stamp duty and the introduction of a tourism tax, but also emphasise that responsibility should bring freedom. The green paper should pitch the principles of this. Members also highlighted the complexities of devolving Stamp Duty, particularly in more rural areas.
- Members felt devolution had been partly undermined by the Housing and Planning Bill as some powers had been taken back into government. There needed to be a joined up approach and better relationships between local government and other public bodies.
- Many authorities were still uncomfortable with the idea of an elected mayor. Members asked the LGA to consider a survey across LGA membership to get a sense of views on this. The differences and obstacles in governance models and what would work for cities and rural areas also needed to be considered.

- There were still problems engaging with local MPs on the devolution agenda and members felt they were at times having to convince MPs of the government's policy. The green paper would need to tackle this issue.
- Members highlighted the importance of taking a phased approach to devolution deals (as in Greater Manchester). Central government could be reluctant to give power and money until it was clear local government had the ability to manage them.
- The problems with communicating with the public on devolution were highlighted. It had been difficult to engage with the electorate in a meaningful way due to the fast-changing nature of the discussions.
- Some of the deals proposed to date had formed very large areas whilst others had been small. The green paper would need to set out a coherent framework and highlight some of the inconsistencies in the government's approach. It was also felt that there would need to be a balance in what was offered to areas both with and without a mayor. It was suggested that a working group could be set up with representatives from the People and Places Board to look at this.
- There was some concern about the management of transport authorities and whether control of these should rest with an elected mayor. This would need to be discussed with government.
- It was suggested it would be useful to look at governance models for local government in other parts of the world, to inform and challenge perceptions.

Decisions:

1. Members **noted** the report.
2. Members **agreed** that a Green Paper be prepared for the LGA's Annual Conference.

Actions:

1. LGA officers to consider a survey across LGA membership to get a sense of views on the elected mayor governance model.
2. LGA officers to look at a working group with representatives from the People and Places Board to look at a coherent framework for devolution deals.

7 Minutes of the Last Meeting

Decision:

1. Members **agreed** the minutes of the last board meeting.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE	Gloucestershire County Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Gillian Brown	Arun District Council
	Cllr Alan Rhodes	Nottinghamshire County Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Heather Kidd	Shropshire Council
	Cllr John Pollard	Cornwall Council
Members	Cllr Sarah Osborne	Lewes District Council
	Cllr Vince Maple	Medway Council
	Cllr Jennifer Mein	Lancashire County Council
	Cllr Andrew Bowles	Swale Borough Council
	Cllr Paul Carter CBE	Kent County Council
	Cllr Kenneth Meeson	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Stan Collins	South Lakeland District Council
	Cllr Derek Bastiman	Scarborough Borough Council
	Cllr Roger Blaney	Newark & Sherwood District Council
	Cllr Chris Hayward	Hertfordshire County Council
	Cllr John Osman	Somerset County Council
	Cllr Caitlin Bisknell	Derbyshire County Council
	Cllr Clive Woodbridge	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
	Cllr Chris Townsend	Mole Valley District Council
Apologies	Cllr Philip Atkins	Staffordshire County Council
	Cllr Paul Diviani	East Devon District Council
	Cllr Mike Jones	Cheshire West and Chester Council
	Cllr Amanda Martin	Council of the Isles of Scilly

