

People & Places Board – report from Cllr Mark Hawthorne (Chair)

Devolution

1. The LGA's devolution support offer, with direction from the People and Places Board, continues to go from strength to strength, with the LGA's Annual Conference providing a good showcase of recent activity, including:
 - 1.1 The launch of a key note discussion paper: [What next for devolution?](#) This draws on ideas from board members and councillors across the sector and has been written to provoke a wide-ranging debate about the future direction and scope of devolution. The paper highlights the importance of public service reform and the need for local leaders to play a greater role in shaping the next phase of devolution. Councillors, government and others are encouraged to respond with their views over the next few months via the LGA's Devonext 'microsite' – www.devonext.org
 - 1.2 The publication of a ['plain English' guide to combined authorities](#), developed in partnership with Shared Intelligence, combines an overview of the relevant legislative provisions, with practical suggestions and advice on setting up a combined authority.
 - 1.3 The launch of [Professor Robin Hambleton's report on Executive Models of Governance](#), which examines international models of sub-national governance and highlights lessons for those establishing devolved governance structures in England.
 - 1.4 The release of ['Don't Be left in the Dark'](#) - a guide which provides answers to key questions about devolution and what it means for councils and their communities.
2. Looking ahead, the summer will also see two further publications, aimed at responding to the specific concerns of members:
 - 2.1 In late July, the LGA plans to publish commissioned research by New Economy Manchester that charts the experience of officers and members in the development of devolution deals agreed so far.
 - 2.2 In conjunction with the New Economics Foundation, LGA officers will continue to explore the role of communities and the voluntary and community sector in devolution with a research report planned for publication via the DevoHub in September 2016.
3. The LGA has also recently organised well-attended events on devolution:
 - 3.1 On 1 June, the LGA jointly hosted an event with the National Association of Local Councils: [Devolving and Delivering: a new relationship for principal and local councils](#). This examined how all tiers of local government could benefit from devolving powers and functions, as well as how services can be improved through closer working.
 - 3.2 On 21 June the LGA hosted, [Devolution – a new type of leadership](#), which considered new and emerging forms of local leadership within the context of devolution.
 - 3.3 At the LGA Conference, board members spoke at key sessions on devolution. Cllr Alan Rhodes chaired the workshop 'What next for combined authorities?', which considered ambitions for delivering public services through combined authorities, identifying challenges ahead and setting out the keys to success. Cllr John Pollard

spoke at the 'Devolution deals: from design to delivery' workshop, discussing the devolution process and models of governance.

Employment and Skills

4. The board continues to work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on the new Work and Health Programme (WHP). The programme is designed to assist the long term unemployed and those with physical or mental health conditions into work with as much local government involvement as possible. Ten devolution deal areas continue to work bilaterally with DWP on the design and commissioning of the WHP in their local area. All other areas outside of a devolution deal area will eventually be subject to a WHP national offer.
5. The LGA established a working group of officers drawn from local areas across England without a devolution deal to help influence the design of the offer and put forward recommendations for the WHP. The group put forward recommendations which to help inform DWP's decision making process in June.
6. In addition, I will be making the LGA keynote speech at the Learning and Work Institute's annual [Into Work Convention](#) in Birmingham on the 12th July. As the employability sector changes and operates in an increasingly devolved context with new accountabilities going to city regions and combined authorities, the event is an opportunity to send out strong signals to employment providers, government and other relevant stakeholders on the local government regarding the WHP national offer.
7. Board Lead Member Cllr Gillian Brown chaired the panel session 'Mind the skills gap? Local government's role in skills and local growth' at the LGA Conference, in which key skills and employment issues were discussed including: current skills shortages, the Adult Education Budget and apprenticeship reform.

Leading Places Project

8. With input and steer from both the City Regions and People and Places Boards, the LGA is continuing to work with HEFCE and UUK to deliver the [Leading Places Project](#): a programme of leadership development for both the higher education and local government sectors in support of devolution, public service reform and economic growth. The six pilot areas have progressed with their work, and three are holding Senior Leadership Team Meetings in July.

Superfast Broadband and Mobile Connectivity

9. Since the last People and Places Board, the LGA has continued to support councils in their efforts to extend superfast broadband and mobile connectivity. The board-commissioned [Up to Speed Campaign](#) website has had over 3,000 page views with almost 500 people having taken the speed test. Tests have now been taken across over half the council areas in England, which exceeds the campaign's initial coverage target.
10. The Digital Economy Bill, which was announced in the [Queen's Speech](#), is expected to enshrine the Universal Service Obligation in primary legislation, cut the cost and simplify the building of mobile and superfast broadband infrastructure, and include measures to automatically compensate consumers if things go wrong with their broadband service. LGA officers will work closely with members to monitor the Bill's progress and take appropriate steps to ensure the concerns of councils are properly reflected.
11. I moderated a panel session on affordable connectivity at the [Connected Britain Conference](#) on 16th June, exploring how connectivity can impact on healthcare services

and how high speed connectivity can be one of the most powerful means to extend access to educational resources.

Rural Issues

12. On 12th July, Cllr Heather Kidd will be speaking at the Rural Housing Conference on the need for more affordable homes in rural areas to allow rural communities to continue to be sustainable and the potential for partnership work between housing associations, the Rural Housing Network and local government in this area.

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