

People and Places Board - End of Year Report

Background and Context

1. The People and Places Board was created by the LGA General Assembly in early 2014 to provide a clear voice and resource for non-metropolitan authorities within the LGA. The board's membership and terms of reference were reviewed by the Combined Authorities Working Group this year. The LGA Executive has asked for reports on the work of all boards over the past year, and so this paper sets out the board's achievements during the 2015/2016 board cycle and offers reflections on its work.
2. Members are asked to consider the achievements against the use of allocated resources and reflect on whether the board is continuing to meet its original purpose within the context of the changing geography and governance of non-metropolitan areas.

Priorities and Achievements

Devolution

3. In the past year, board members have continued to shape and influence the devolution agenda, advocating for greater devolution to non-metropolitan areas and offering support for areas as further devolution deals have been agreed. In late 2015, members steered LGA lobbying on the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill as it passed through the House of Lords and successfully pressed for amendments that would help to bring more transparency to the deals process.
4. With support from board members, the LGA has refreshed the online 'DevoNext hub' to provide a resource for councils with technical information, guidance, updates on the most recent activity at local and national government level, and key documents from devolution frontrunners. It is highly regarded and receives more than 6,000 unique visits a month.
5. Steered by the Board, the LGA continues to support councils across the country in negotiating and implementing devolution deals. This has included a focus on governance, political leadership and communication. Building on initial ideas from the Board to draft a prospectus spelling out the opportunities presented by devolution, officers are now working on a Devolution Green Paper, which will be presented at the LGA Annual Conference in July.

Devolving Skills and Employment

6. Securing further devolution of skills and employment support has been a key focus of the Board this year. With the City Regions and the Community and Wellbeing Boards, the Board commissioned the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion to develop the detail of a devolved employment model for the most disadvantaged jobseekers / ESA claimants. The proposal was submitted to ministers at the beginning of November 2015 by the board leads with the aim of influencing Spending Review decisions.
7. In January, a new specialist Work and Health Programme (WHP) was announced in the Spending Review for claimants with health conditions, disabilities or those unemployed for over two years to replace the Work Programme and Work Choice contracts in 2017.

LGA officers have been in discussions with DWP to ensure local government has as much involvement as possible in this area. Ten devolution deal areas are now working bilaterally with DWP on the design and commissioning of the WHP in their local area.

Broadband

8. The board continues to recognise the importance of achieving fast and reliable rural broadband and mobile coverage. Members oversaw the LGA submission to the Culture Media and Sport Select Committee Inquiry into establishing world-class connectivity throughout the UK, with the Board's chair meeting CMS Committee Chair, Jesse Norman MP, and securing a council evidence session. The Board commissioned officers to organise a joint event with Government in March for councils to find out about alternative solutions to extend broadband in hard to reach areas.
9. LGA's officers launched the Board-commissioned Up to Speed Campaign in May 2016. Officers have also explored the role the LGA and local government can play in mobile connectivity agenda going forward.

Leading Places Project

10. In partnership with Universities UK and the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the LGA is working to deliver a programme of leadership development for both the higher education and local government sectors in support of devolution, public service reform and economic growth. Following the programme's launch in May, six pilot areas are currently developing local partnership and project arrangements, aiming to conclude in February 2017.

Programme of work and priorities 2016/17

11. The board will continue to work on devolution and support non-metropolitan areas progressing with deals. The board will respond to feedback from the sector on the Devolution Green Paper and officers will take forward work as directed by Board members in the autumn. The board will also continue to feed into the LGA's work on business rates reform.
12. Officers will undertake a programme of work on the future role of public employment services and skills devolution. They will also continue discussions with DWP on the Work and Health Programme (WHP) and ensure local government is involved in this area.
13. The board will continue to build its work to date, including the Up to Speed campaign. It will also explore the role the councils can play to improve rural mobile connectivity. The direction of this work will be discussed at the next board.
14. The board will monitor the work of the Leading Places Project in each pilot area. Conclusions and learning will be drawn from the priority challenge themes chosen and the methods in which local authorities and local institutions successfully work together.

Financial Implications

15. All work programmes are met from existing budgets and resources.