

## Note of last People & Places Board meeting

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**Title:** People & Places Board  
**Date:** Wednesday 15 June 2016  
**Venue:** Bevin Hall, Ground Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

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### Attendance

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

| Item     | Decisions and actions   | Action |
|----------|---|--------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest</b><br><br>The Chair listed apologies and asked for any declarations of interests<br><br>Cllr Mike Jones advised the board that he was working as a consultant for a company with an interest in the broadband sector.<br><br>The Chair suggested that there should be a change in the order of agenda items. Item 4 (on skills and employment) would be moved before item 3 (end of year report), and item 8 (business rates oral update) would be moved before item 7 (devolution green paper).<br><br>The Chair congratulated Cllr Philip Atkins, who had been awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours' List.  |        |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Superfast Broadband Update</b><br><br>Philip Clifford, Senior Adviser, introduced the report in the absence of Daniel Shamplin-Hall (Adviser). He outlined the key issues in the paper; highlighting recent work to shape the government's Universal Service Obligation (USO) and asking members for a steer on proposals for future focus.<br><br>Hannah Berry, Campaigns and Marketing Manager, gave a presentation on Superfast Broadband and advised members that the Chair had written to the Culture Minister, Ed Vaizey MP, and a number of other MPs informing them of the campaign's objectives.<br><br>In the discussion which followed, members raised the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The online speed test only worked if there was an adequate signal, which was a problem in some areas.</li><li>• Although superfast broadband was increasingly available in rural areas, many residents were unaware of its availability. Members felt service providers could communicate service availability better.</li></ul> |        |

- There were concerns about individuals waiting several months to be connected, and about the increase in the cost of receiving superfast broadband, which meant some were denied access.
- Members emphasised that the USO should be rolled out promptly and there should be a minimum standard of broadband speed at peak times.
- There was concern on where the funds for the USO would come from. Members felt that local government might be expected to fund this and asked that these concerns be communicated to government.
- With reference to paragraph 4.3, members highlighted that there were examples of service providers offering to provide a particular speed when they had been unable to do so. This was misleading and should be stopped through tougher regulation.
- Members requested that minimum values were put in place for download speeds and that a timeframe was set for this.
- In reference to paragraph 13, members felt that Mobile Network Operators (MNO) should be encouraged to share their commercial roll out plans with councils to help address problems with inadequate broadband and signal provision..
- Opportunities for communities to work together on broadband provision were discussed, and it was emphasised that a local business plan could encourage service providers to progress with work.

**Decision:**

1. Members **noted** the update and **agreed** the future focus of the board's digital connectivity work as outlined in paragraph 17.

**Actions:**

1. Officers to talk to the website developers on the problem with taking the Up-to-Speed Campaign speed test if the signal in an area was inadequate.
2. Officers to take forward work as directed by members.

### **3 Leading Places Project Update**

Philip Clifford, Senior Adviser, introduced the paper. He outlined the Leading Places Project, advising members that it was being jointly managed by the LGA, Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and Universities UK (UUK).

He explained that the project's aim is to strengthen relationships between councils and universities and to encourage both to play a more collaborative role in the leadership and development of places. The project

will run over the summer, concluding in early 2017 and will initially work with six pilot areas across the country.

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

- Relating to the project, an initiative had started in Lancaster where Vice-Chancellors on the Local Enterprise Partnership Board had set up a separate Collaboration Board which local councils were keen to engage with.
- Gloucestershire was the only rural area in the list of six pilots – more rural universities and rural areas should be included.
- Exeter was mentioned as an area potentially interested in participating in a future phase of the project.

### **Decisions**

1. Members **noted** the report

### **Actions**

1. Officers to reflect on how best to accommodate the concerns raised regarding the lack of rural participation.
2. Officers to consider how best respond to expressions of interest from areas outside the initial six pilots.

Officers to continue with work as directed by members and report back on progress at the next appropriate board meeting.

## **4 End of Year Report**

Eleanor Reader-Moore, Member Services Officer, introduced the report and advised members that it gave a synopsis of the board's work over the past year and looked forward to key issues that would be considered during next year's meeting cycle. She asked members for feedback and suggestions on additions/improvements (within the limit of 2 A4 sides) before it was submitted to the LGA Executive in July.

### **Decisions:**

1. Members **noted** the achievements against the board's priorities in 2015/2016.
2. Members **noted** the board's priority areas for 2016/17.
3. Members **agreed** to forward any suggestions for additions/amendments to MSO.

### **Action:**

1. MSO to include any additions/amendments in the report.

## **5 Skills and Employment Update - Next steps**

Jasbir Jhas, Senior Adviser, introduced the paper and advised the board that it had been developed after a meeting on employment and skills between City Regions and People and Places Board Lead Members on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2016. Devolution of the Work and Health Programme and the Adult Education Budget was discussed, as was the relationship between local government and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Members were asked to consider ways to influence strategy and create an accord between DWP and local authorities. The review of Job Centre Plus was raised and the need to produce research to create a local government vision for the employment service. Members were asked for input on defining the vision, as this would be useful when engaging with Whitehall and politicians.

The Work and Health Programme (WHP) was discussed, as this would replace the Work Programme in 2017. This would be worth £130 million a year and would be available in all areas without a devolution deal. The programme would support those with health conditions, disabilities or those unemployed for over two years. The best possible outcome would need to be achieved for these groups. Members were advised that discussions with Job Centre Plus and contractual obligations to work with councils should be considered.

The board was also advised that work with Shared Intelligence on growth related areas had been recommissioned and that a report on this would be published soon.

In the discussion which followed members made the following points:

- There had been some difficulties engaging with DWP and the relationship needed to be improved. Members highlighted that local authorities were already working with Local Enterprise Partnerships, employers, further and higher education and the careers service to improve skills, employment and job and training opportunities in their areas. Local authorities should be allowed to take over some of the responsibilities of DWP in this area.
- Members expressed concern with the retention of Job Centre Plus. It was emphasised that other successful projects, such as the troubled families programme, needed further support from Job Centre Plus. The approach for helping the unemployed needed to address root cause of unemployment, as it was currently perpetuating a failing system.
- In reference to paragraph 6, there was concern about joint working and those residents in non-devolution deal areas who would not be involved in the co-design / co-commission of WHP.
- Local authorities and local businesses were aware of the skills sets needed in their local areas, but problems with lack of progress in some devolution deals were preventing them addressing skills shortages.

- Members felt that the vision for the skills agenda could be improved, and that the LGA was well placed to influence this.
- There had been instances where sixth form colleges offering vocational qualifications had closed as not enough students had enrolled to make them viable. It was important to address this issue and consider it more widely.
- Members asked officers to continue to develop the evidence base on why the approach on skills and employment should be changed so that it could be used in our lobbying work.

**Decision:**

1. Members **noted** the update.

**Actions:**

1. LGA officers to capture members' comments and reflect these in the next stage of work on skills and employment.
2. LGA officers to continue to strengthen the evidence base underpinning our skills and employment lobbying work.

## **6 Minutes of the Last Meeting**

The board **agreed** the minutes of the last meeting.

## **7 Business Rates Oral Update**

Aivaras Statkevičius, Senior Adviser, introduced the item. He provided a synopsis of the key issues in the debate, informing members that it was expected local government business rates retention reform would be implemented by 2020. In the run up to this, the Government will also review it needs assessment and resource distribution methodology. The LGA was currently working closely with DCLG, including co-chairing an officer-level steering group and a number of technical working groups, in order to provide a forum where all parts of the sector could make their views heard by the Government. Officers were also currently considering what the impact of business rate appeals and business rate reliefs would be on local government under the new system.

A formal consultation on business rate retention was expected to be published in July. Business rates retention 'pilots' announced in the 2016 Budget were planned to be April 2017, followed by a consultation on needs and redistribution in 2018. It was expected that the full system would be in place by April 2020.

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

- The working groups should consider both what 'day 1' and 'day 1000' would look like, to ensure that the reform is sustainable for

local government in the future.

- Members asked what amount business rate income would approximately be and requested a fact sheet on the issue.
- It would also be useful to have a list of how much funding was being held back through top-slices within the current 50 per cent retention system and for what purposes.
- Members felt they needed a better understanding of the current 50% retention system.
- Members emphasised that they would welcome a special session on all the points covered in the item, supported by finance officers. Lead members would meet in September and review the situation on business rates.
- Members felt that the transition to the new system once the revenue support grant was withdrawn, including potential devolution of services such as attendance allowance, should be carefully considered to protect individual councils from a 'shock to the system' and differential pressure to increase council tax to set budgets.
- Members discussed the implementation of business rates retention reform for two-tier authorities. It was felt that the quantum for a whole area could be considered first and then a decision made on dividing business rates up.

**Decisions:**

1. Members **noted** the presentation.

**Actions:**

1. Officers to produce a factsheet on business rate income and provide answers to other queries as set out above.
2. Officers to circulate the presentation slides.
3. Officers to arrange a meeting between lead members in September.

## **8 Devolution Green Paper**

Ian Hughes, Head of Policy, introduced the report, advising members that the paper sought to revise the debate on devolution and open a further discussion at the LGA Conference, where the paper would be launched. Issues considered included public service reform, fiscal devolution and public participation. Responses from members would contribute to a paper produced at the end of 2016.

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

- Issues resulting from proposals for mayoral governance models were discussed.
- Members asked what the deadline for comments on the paper was.
- There was concern that the paper did not discuss engaging with MPs on devolution enough, particularly when it was felt MPs still needed to be brought around to the idea of devolution. Government had to find a way of addressing this issue.
- The debate needed moving away from structures and to begin to emphasise that devolution could improve outcomes for residents. This could help convince MPs of devolution's benefits.
- There was no mention of double devolution in the paper and members asked if there was an opportunity to define this in the paper.
- Members commented that there had been delays receiving responses from DCLG after submitting documents on devolution deals. Local authorities needed a response within a reasonable time period to take deals forward - the paper could discuss this.

**Decisions:**

1. Members **noted** the report.

**Actions:**

1. Officers to take forward work as directed by members.

**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                    |
| Members         | Cllr Philip Atkins OBE  | Staffordshire County Council          |
|                 | Cllr Andrew Bowles      | Swale Borough Council                 |
|                 | Cllr Paul Carter CBE    | Kent County Council                   |
|                 | Cllr Paul Diviani       | East Devon District Council           |
|                 | Cllr Kenneth Meeson     | Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council |
|                 | Cllr Roger Blaney       | Newark & Sherwood District Council    |
|                 | Cllr Chris Hayward      | Hertfordshire County Council          |
|                 | Cllr Mike Jones         | Cheshire West and Chester Council     |
|                 | Cllr John Osman         | Somerset County Council               |
|                 | Cllr Jennifer Mein      | Lancashire County Council             |
|                 | Cllr Caitlin Bisknell   | Derbyshire County Council             |
|                 | Cllr Amanda Martin      | Council of the Isles of Scilly        |
|                 | Cllr Clive Woodbridge   | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council       |
|                 | Cllr Stan Collins       | South Lakeland District Council       |
|                 | Cllr Sarah Osborne      | Lewes District Council                |
| Apologies       | Cllr Derek Bastiman     | Scarborough Borough Council           |
|                 | Cllr Vince Maple        | Medway Council                        |
|                 | Cllr John Pollard       | Cornwall Council                      |
|                 | Cllr Chris Townsend     | Surrey County Council                 |