

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

Devolution

1. On 17 October, the LGA hosted a major event which explored the benefits of enabling citizens to influence local decision making and service design in the context of devolution - [Shaping Devolution: the role of communities and citizens](#). This was well-attended by members across the sector. In addition, work commissioned from the [New Economics Foundation](#) (NEF) to develop materials that assist councils and combined authorities to engage citizens in devolution was formally launched on the LGA's [DevoHub](#) at the event.
2. In October, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to seek clarity on the Government's approach to devolution in rural areas. Whilst I welcomed assurances in the [Autumn Statement](#) that the Government remains committed to devolving powers to support local areas, board members have raised concerns that devolution to non-metropolitan areas is proceeding at a slower pace than desired.

Skills and Employment

3. Working jointly with City Regions Board, the board continues to make the case for the current employment and skills service to be more integrated and localised and for the sector to benefit from a devolution deal process which offers more freedoms and flexibilities.
4. It is the firm view of both Boards that national agencies such as Jobcentre Plus seldom coordinate their services and align even less with local services, making it difficult to integrate interventions. In 2018, JCP estate contracts are due to expire. The LGA believes this is an opportunity for reform, collaboration and integration to develop a locally relevant employment and skills system. Lead Members last discussed this in November. The project runs from December to July 2017. The Learning and Work Institute has been commissioned to develop it, bringing on board a range of councils.
5. In November, myself and Cllr Sir Richard Leese urged Penny Mordaunt MP to make changes to the [Work and Health Programme](#) national offer (WHP) to better fulfil the commitment to reduce the disability employment gap and reduce long term unemployment. We pointed to significant limitations with Whitehall's approach – large contract areas, limited local involvement (design, commissioning and performance management), employment support alone being wholly insufficient to support people with complex needs, with a markedly reduced funding envelope compared to its predecessor Work Programme – would mean difficult choices of too few people getting support, or too many receiving inadequate support. Given the range of concerns, the LGA was unable to endorse the national offer, and will continue to push for integrated and localised interventions for jobseekers furthest from the labour market.
6. On the 6 December, Cllr Philip Atkins spoke on local government's role in ensuring public sector apprenticeship delivery at Inside Government's Future of Public Sector Apprenticeships Forum. Cllr Atkins discussed the role of local government in building the local economy and growing the workforce of the future by supporting talent pathways.

Leading Places Project

7. With leadership 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 pilot programme that explores the opportunities for collaborative leadership between the higher education and local government sectors in support of devolution, public service reform and economic growth.
8. On 21 November, representatives from each of these areas attended a national event facilitated by the project consultants the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE).
9. On 31 January, I will be speaking at Inside Government's *Higher Education Community Engagement Event: Increasing Cooperation Between Higher Education and Local Economies* reflecting on the progress of the project.

Superfast Broadband and Mobile Connectivity

9. I welcomed the announcement in the Autumn Statement of plans for significant investment in 5G technology, which has the potential to make Britain a global leader in mobile digital connectivity. However, I cautioned Government must not lose sight of the needs of rural communities already struggling to receive a basic broadband services.
10. We continue to press these points as part of our lobbying on the [Digital Economy Bill](#) and in responding to DCMS's recent announcement of [further funding for the Superfast Broadband Programme](#) and [Ofcom's Connected Nations](#) report. We look forward to welcoming Sharon White, Chief Executive of Ofcom, to the January board meeting to discuss this issue.

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