

23 May 2018

## **The future of town centres**

### **Purpose of report**

For information.

### **Summary**

Town centres around the country continue to undergo change in response to changing consumer habits, the growth of online shopping and global trends. Each town will also have its own set of unique issues, such as car parking and access, anti-social behaviour or clustering. This report highlights recent LGA work in this area and proposes further work to be led by this Board in support of councils' effort to revitalise their town centres.

### **Recommendations**

Members of the Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board are asked to:

1. Note the LGA's work and involvement on town centres support and policy.
2. Agree that the LGA should continue to support councils with good practice support and advice and engages in national policy development.
3. Identify and discuss any specific town centre issues where it feels councils could benefit from LGA advice and support.

### **Action**

Officers to progress as directed by the Board.

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### **Background**

1. Town centres around the country continue to undergo change in response to changing consumer habits, the growth of online shopping and global trends. Each town will also have its own set of unique issues, such as car parking and access, anti-social behaviour and clustering. The 2017/18 Memorandum of Understanding between the LGA and Ministry of Housing, Local Government and Communities (MHCLG), includes an agreement for the LGA to provide support to local authorities on their town centres. More recently the LGA has been invited to join the Minister's Future High Street Forum.
2. In all and to date, there have been seven elements to the LGA's work:
  - 2.1. A **seminar** in November 2017 with senior officers from member councils the LGA kick started its town centre work. The seminar helped to identify key common issues where councils would welcome good practice advice and what format that advice should take. Following the seminar, an expert consultant was commissioned to undertake further work for the LGA which included a good practice handbook for council leadership and a more detailed and extensive online resource for senior practitioners and councillors who would like more information on revitalising their town centres.
  - 2.2. The **handbook** was published on 14 May and is available [here](#). Based on feedback from councils, the handbook focuses advice on the following issues:
    - 2.2.1. Developing a forward framework
    - 2.2.2. Gathering evidence and deciding on objectives
    - 2.2.3. Parking, access and travel
    - 2.2.4. Property and planning
    - 2.2.5. Streetscape and public realm
    - 2.2.6. Place branding and marketing
    - 2.2.7. Digital technology and data
    - 2.2.8. Governance and influence
    - 2.2.9. Community engagement and coordination
    - 2.2.10. Roles and capacity
    - 2.2.11. Finances and investment
    - 2.2.12. Strategy and plans
  - 2.3. An accompanying **online LGA resource** will use the above framework but include more detail and links to other expert resources. This will be available in May.
  - 2.4. A **LGA national conference** "What next for our town centres?" took place on 14 May 2018. The event, which was chaired by Cllr Tett, was fully attended. Jake Berry,

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Minister for High Streets and Town Centres, gave a keynote speech and there was further input from experts from both the private sector and local authorities and in-depth discussion in workshops. The Minister endorsed the LGA's handbook and leadership on this agenda and underlined the importance of local authority leadership, which was a common thread throughout the day. Other key issues emerging from the day included: exploiting and embracing digital technology, the importance of a strong evidence base and working with all stakeholders; promoting a mixed purpose for your town centre, including employment; public/ private partnerships and smarter car parking strategies. The Association of Town and City Management also offered free membership for all LGA member authorities to join their online Basecamp knowledge forum for 6 months.

- 2.5. The Minister for Northern Powerhouse and local growth, Jake Berry MP, has reconvened **the Future High Street Forum** and has invited LGA officers to help shape its future direction. The Forum comprises of retail leaders and industry experts, and its aim is to work together to support and champion local high streets, share best practice and develop new solutions to the challenges faced at the local level across the country. Forum meetings have covered the following themes:

2.5.1. Leadership

2.5.2. Place & planning (High street experience)

2.5.3. Digital

- 2.6. Officers will use our membership of the Forum to ensure that Ministers and the Government recognise the leadership role of local government in supporting their town centres and local growth and that Government interventions should avoid the mistake of focusing on single issues and having a too narrow focus on the role of retail.

- 2.7. The **joint work with the British Property Federation (BPF)** on public/ private collaboration for growth continued in 2017/18 with a further joint study visit at the invitation of Derby City Council to provide independent reflection of their town centre regeneration plans.

- 2.8. The LGA also responded to the Government's draft revisions to the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** for consultation, published on 5 March 2018. The draft revisions included a chapter on 'ensuring the vitality of town centres'. The LGA submitted a response on 10 May.

### **Financial Implications**

3. None

### **Implications for Wales**

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4. There are no specific implications for Wales.

#### **Future LGA work and next steps**

5. It is clear, both from the attendance in the LGA conference and issues arising, that there is a great deal of interest and concern from councils on ensuring the future vitality of their high streets and town centres. Recent data and trends in retailing are evidence of continuing change in shopping habits. It is also a priority for the Minister, Jake Berry MP. In the Industrial Strategy White Paper, the Government said that they are working with a range of local partners to explore new approaches, including a pilot Town Deal with Grimsby.
6. There are also other influential organisations that are expected to set out new policy proposals for protecting and enhancing town centres later this year and we are also aware of emerging research from place management specialists and academic institutions.
7. It is therefore proposed that the LGA continues to offer support to member councils on their town centre revitalisation work over the coming year. The new online resource provides an excellent foundation for capturing new insights, advice and case studies of council leadership.
8. We will also consider new forms of support, such as masterclasses on issues such as leadership of place management and making the use of digital technology.
9. The LGA will continue to be involved in Future High Streets Forum – especially to ensure that future Government support complements councils efforts and does not create additional burdens or have unintended consequences.