

CALL FOR EVIDENCE FROM THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PUBLIC SERVICES IN NON-METROPOLITAN ENGLAND

The Independent Commission, chaired by Sir John Peace, has been tasked by the Local Government Association to undertake a review of the future of economic growth and public services in non-metropolitan areas. The Commission's terms of reference are [available here](#) and its members are [available here](#).

The Commissioners are seeking evidence from businesses and business organisations, the voluntary and faith sector, and public service providers to help them identify and recommend ways to stimulate economic growth regionally, create new jobs and help people live their lives better.

Non-metropolitan areas (a note below explains what we mean by this term) account for roughly half of England's economy and population. This means that their economic contribution, and their growth potential, is as significant for the nation as that of the big cities. But their mix of businesses, and the challenges faced by areas of less dense population, of more diffuse transport networks, of market towns, green belts, and small cities, are different, and so is the pattern of governance. The current policy agenda does not recognise their economic importance, or reflect their diversity.

Evidence

The Commission is inviting submissions of written evidence on the following areas:

- **What is the economy of non-metropolitan England actually like?**
 - How does historic and prospective trend growth in non-metropolitan areas compare with the national average?
 - How does non-metropolitan productivity compare?
 - What is the composition of the non-metropolitan economy and what are its leading sectors with above average growth potential?
 - What are the social challenges faced in these areas?

- **What are non-metropolitan England's comparative economic advantages?**
 - Which are the key sectors that are likely to lead future growth, and why?
 - What natural and human resources will support growth?
 - What clusters and global centres of excellence are to be found in non-metropolitan areas?
 - Where do non-metropolitan areas have an edge in their cost base? Where do they have an edge in location, infrastructure and transport links?
 - Where in non-metropolitan areas can new opportunities and markets be opened?

- **Conversely, what's holding non-metropolitan England back that could be addressed by taking action?**
 - What are the barriers to growth for key sectors?
 - What regulatory or administrative barriers prevent these places making the most of their natural and human resources?
 - What needs to be done to support clusters and centres of excellence? What can be done to cut businesses' cost base in these areas?
 - What could be done to improve infrastructure and transport links?
 - Are there negative social consequences of growth that need to be alleviated, and if so how?

- **Who would need to take what action to address those issues?**

A large number of public and private agencies have the potential to make a difference, but the simple fact that so many bodies are involved means that non-metropolitan areas face issues of duplication, unintended mixed incentives, and lack of coherence.

- What are the key funding sources and decision-makers which might help to tackle the barriers to growth in non-metropolitan areas?
- Are there better models for raising and allocating funding locally, and creating stronger financial incentives for economic growth?
- Could the many different funding and planning mechanisms for skills and employment support be better aligned?
- Are there better ways of ensuring growth is supported by infrastructure and housing, and that new homes envisioned in local plans actually get built?
- How could Local Enterprise Partnerships be better enabled to play their part in bringing business and the public sector together?
- Are there better ways of engaging the wider public sector, from the NHS to schools and universities, in promoting growth?
- Could agencies work together better, and if so how?

The Commission invites responses to any or all of the above questions by **Friday 27 June 2014**. Responses and queries can be sent to:
nonmet_commission@local.gov.uk

Background: “non-metropolitan” England

“Non-metropolitan” is a deliberately imprecise term, embracing areas of deep rurality as well as the suburban hinterlands around great cities; whole historic shires and emerging alliances between places with economic links. While cities have important common features, what distinguishes the other half of the economy is its extraordinary variety. The Commission starts from an insight that diversity is itself a competitive advantage. But there are also particular challenges presented by the non-metropolitan mix of businesses, by areas of less dense population, of more diffuse transport networks, of market towns, green belts, and small cities, and of often-complex governance. The provision of housing and infrastructure – from fixed and wireless broadband to public transport – to facilitate growth can be expensive and difficult.

Those patterns of settlement, travel and land use also present particular challenges for the established model of funding and organising public services. Non-metropolitan areas, for example, are among those most at risk from the spiralling costs of care for an aging population. Dispersed service delivery points add to unit costs, but also make rural infrastructure particularly vulnerable to cuts in funding. Many non-metropolitan areas are taking radical approaches to reshaping the public sector to meet those challenges.

The Independent Commission has therefore been established by the Local Government Association in order to rebalance the policy debate and put the distinct advantages and needs of non-metropolitan areas firmly on the agenda. This is the right time to do that: a range of moves towards a more localised and devolved approach to promoting growth and delivering services have been undertaken since the last election, from city deals and growth deals, to the establishment of Local Enterprise Partnerships and the partial devolution of some tax revenues and government funding. As the next General Election and a subsequent Spending Review approach, and the future evolution of those policies is under consideration, now is the right moment to review the role non-metropolitan areas will play in future growth, and set out proposals for policy change where it is needed.