

People and Places Board – report from Cllr David Hodge (Chairman)

People and Places Board

1. The second meeting of the People and Places Board took place on 16 June 2014. Members heard from each of the Board's lead members on the work programme proposed as part of its focus for non-metropolitan areas. The key themes identified are: housing; planning and infrastructure for growth (including broadband); employment, skills and economic growth and public service transformation.
2. The Board received an update on the work of the Non-Metropolitan Commission, chaired by Sir John Peace, which 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. As part of its remit, the Commission launched a call for evidence from businesses and business organisations, the voluntary and faith sector, and public service providers on ways to stimulate economic growth regionally, create new jobs and help people live their lives better. The first phase of consultation closed on 27 June and submissions will form the basis of the Commission's recommendations when it reports back in the autumn. Alongside this the Commission has undertaken initial research into the economic makeup of and prospects for non-metropolitan areas in England which will inform an interim report in the summer.

The evidence base for devolving of employment, skills and welfare

3. Last month I sent a joint letter with Cllr Sir Richard Leese, Chairman of the City Regions Board to a number of authorities addressing the employment, skills and welfare challenge, seeking their participation in a piece of research with the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (CESI) to develop an evidence base for devolving responsibility to councils for employment, skills and welfare. This includes councils represented by the People and Places Board: Devon, Essex, Lincolnshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Surrey. I am pleased to announce that our letter has received an extremely positive response from the authorities contacted and the first report, mapping the growth ambitions and skills needs in these areas will be 'soft launched' at the LGA Annual Conference this month.

Prospect Magazine roundtable - "What and where should the UK build?"

4. As part of a Prospect Magazine roundtable hosted at the LGA on 1 July to discuss how regional areas can benefit from infrastructure investment, I spoke on growth in non-metropolitan areas. Drawing on early discussions with the People and Places Board and the remit of the Non-Metropolitan Commission, I emphasised the particular challenges affecting non-metropolitan areas regarding growth and the need for an integrated approach to developing infrastructure in these communities.

LGA Annual Conference

5. I will be chairing a plenary session at the LGA Conference on 10 July entitled "the Case for deeper devolution". The session will bring together perspectives from national, local and business leaders on the case for enhanced devolution in England that better recognises local complexity following the new council groupings emerging within local government. Contributors will include the Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Hilary Benn MP, Sir John Peace Chair of the Non-Metropolitan Commission and Sir Richard Leese, Chair of the City Regions Board. I also spoke at the Future High Streets Forum chaired by Brandon Lewis MP, Minister for Local Government, to set out the LGA's work on local economic growth and its 100 Days campaign.
6. Penelope, Viscountess Cobham, Chair of VisitEngland and one of the newly appointed commissioners on the Non-Metropolitan Commission will also be speaking as part of a parallel plenary session on 9 July at Conference on the implications of devolution for local identity. Discussions will consider how councils can play a role in strengthening local identity to bolster the diversity of England's offer to visitors, particularly outside its major cities and how recent trends towards area-based working and city-regions fit with voters' traditional ideas of place and belonging.

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