

People & Places Board – report from Cllr Kevin Bentley (Chairman)

Devolution

1. Much of the focus during this period has been on refining policy lines in advance of the now delayed Local Economic Recovery and Devolution White Paper, drawing up a set up broad principles to frame future engagement. We have also continued to take forward work commissioned within the previous board cycle, including: the submission to Government of research by Metro Dynamics into Subnational Governance Structures; research by Shared Intelligence into the drivers of collaboration in two-tier areas; and, hosting a meeting of the Devolution All Party Parliamentary Group on fiscal devolution drawing on research undertaken by Europe Economics, Localis and WPI Economics.
2. Looking ahead, work is underway to provide members of the People and Places Board with an opportunity to engage directly with a Government representative and to use both the HCLG Committee Inquiry and the Devolution APPG Inquiry to further push the case for local devolution and a place based approach across Whitehall. Cllr Maurice Bright Vice Chair of the People and Places Board has been approached to sit on the APPG Inquiry Panel.

Employment and Skills

3. With rising youth unemployment, [latest ONS figures show the percentage of young people (aged 16-24) unemployed has risen to 13.4 per cent], we continue to engage our member authorities to shape our views and policy around the COVID-19 crisis and what is needed for young people. Officers continue to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Youth Employment Group, Impetus, Youth Futures Foundation and Youth Employment UK to progress our youth employment work.
4. During the summer I highlighted in a First magazine [feature](#) the plight of young people and the need for more employment and skills support to aid the economic recovery. It was an opportunity to set out our asks of Government, including greater Apprenticeship flexibilities and extension of the September Guarantee.
5. In September the LGA was been invited to a Ministerial roundtable with Gillian Keegan MP, Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, the Department for Education (DfE). It involved officials from DfE and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), external organisations (Chairs of the Youth Employment Group), plus young people ambassadors.

The roundtable discussion focused on 16-25-year olds, those not in education, employment or training (NEET) and those at risk of NEET. I took part in this session, along with a sector representative from Nottingham City Council and found listening directly to the young people a real eye-opening experience. As a follow-up to the event we are organising a meeting with DfE officials and council colleagues to have a more detailed discussion on the challenges facing young people and the sector in supporting them.

6. This month we published our [Re-thinking youth participation for the present and next generation: education to employment](#). The report culminates our engagement work with the sector and stakeholders on improving youth participation. It has been reviewed with a COVID-19 lens. The report sets out our recommendations to Government on improving the education, training and employment offer. It focuses on careers advice and guidance, vocational education and support for those not in education, employment or training (NEET) and disadvantaged groups to aid economic recovery.
7. We make a case to Government with a suite of recommendations to act immediately to save a lost generation. We are calling for a new Youth Minister to work across Whitehall to tackle youth unemployment and a localised investment to help support for those out of work. It also asks the government to work with councils and combined authorities to plan, co-ordinate and deliver the Kickstart Scheme and grant apprenticeship flexibilities to increase the number of young people who can benefit from schemes. The report has been shared widely with sector colleagues, stakeholders and DfE and DWP officials. The LGA has also written to all the relevant Ministers and Shadow Ministers, including Vice-Presidents. A range of [media activity](#) accompanied its publication and received good interest. As part of progressing our policy and lobbying work we are planning an APPG on Youth Employment this Autumn.
8. The LGA has responded to the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee inquiry into employment and Covid-19 which sought views on immediate and longer-term measures needed to protect and create jobs. Our response significantly focussed on the impact of the crisis on young people and what is needed to support them.
9. The £2 billion Kickstart scheme was launched on 2 September to support employers to offer six-month work placements to 16-24 year olds claiming Universal Credit or at risk of long-term unemployment. We have been working closely with DWP, sector colleagues and stakeholders to ensure the Scheme lands well locally. We have set out our [position](#) and how with the right level of resource, local government can add value to Kickstart. In addition, [Kickstart: what good looks like](#) paper has been developed by the T&F group

based on input from all member bodies. The aim of it is to support local and national discussions on the design, commissioning and delivery of Kickstart. It has been sent to the Employment Minister.

10. The LGA Chairman met with Mims Davies MP, Minister for Employment (8 September) to discuss the added value local government – councils and combined authorities – bring to DWP programmes and recovery through a co-design process including Kickstart and support for the long term unemployed. We have followed up to suggest further engagement opportunities with the LGA.

EU Funding/UKSPF

11. Through the Growth Programme Board and the Performance and Dispute Resolution National Sub Committee, the LGA continued the work in shaping how the COVID time limited flexibilities could be used to support local areas responses to the pandemic and economic recovery. This includes ensuring that the guidance for the Safer High Streets grants is accurate. In addition to this, DWP launched a bolt on option so current ESF funding programmes can purchase IT equipment and WiFi to help tackle the digital divide.
12. The LGA continues to raise concerns about DWP not fully utilising the ESF programme before we leave the ESIF programme. While there have been improvements in the number of projects stuck in the appraisal process, we are still waiting to see the impact of the increased staffing capacity will have on appraisal times, to ensure as much as possible is spent before we leave the programme in 2023.
13. The LGA continues to lobby for a replacement for EU funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This includes the EU Exit Taskforce members raising issue with Government Ministers and it is playing a key role in the LGA's submission for the Comprehensive Spending Review. The LGA has hosted a stakeholder event to discuss wider growth funding to inform any future work on the UKSPF.

Freeports

14. The Government has [confirmed that sea, air and rail ports in England will be invited to bid for Freeport status](#) before the end of the year, with aim of the first new sites being open in 2021. Following the Board's work on this issue, including the Chairman giving evidence to the International Trade Committee it is positive that Government has recognised our concerns about economic displacement, which will be considered as part of the bidding and selection process, and has made a commitment to maintain high environmental standards. However, the Government has yet to spell out where responsibility for upholding regulatory standards will lie. It will also continue to use

permitted development rights in establishing future freeports which risks further undermining councils' and communities' input into the planning process.

Broadband

15. The Board continue to engage Government on the design of the future broadband roll out programme which aims to deliver gigabit broadband to all premises by 2025. The Chief Executive Officer of Building Digital UK (the broadband delivery arm of Government) visited the People and Places Board to present the Government's plans and hear feedback from members. At the meeting members echoed the LGA's calls to provide funding for councils to put in place a local digital champion to help coordinate delivery locally and to recruit extra capacity within highways and planning teams. This will be essential to avoiding local bottlenecks and the slowing down of delivery.

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