

## Note of last People & Places Board meeting

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**Title:** People & Places Board  
**Date:** Tuesday 10 November 2020  
**Venue:** Via Zoom

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### Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome, introductions and declarations of interest</b>  The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting.  Apologies were received from Cllr Eddie Reeves (sub Cllr Barry Wood) and Cllr Colin Davie.  There were no declarations of interest.	
<b>2</b>	<b>Covid-19 update</b>  The Chairman invited Sonika Sidhu, Principal Policy Adviser, to introduce the update.  Sonika informed members of the key lobbying points for the LGA as the country entered its second lockdown. These were broken down as follows:  Immediate priorities for councils: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Spending Review and filling funding gaps</li><li>• Seeking clarity around support for businesses</li><li>• Additional support for vulnerable residents</li><li>• Seeking greater local autonomy over decision making and service provision</li><li>• Addressing lack of capacity in the enforcement sector</li><li>• Seeking more local control over test and trace</li></ul> Medium term priorities for councils: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Effective transition out of lockdown</li><li>• Clarifying potential role for councils in mass testing</li><li>• Working with universities to facilitate students returning home and providing support for them where needed</li></ul> Longer term issues for councils:	

- Potential role in the vaccination programme
- Addressing impacts of EU exit
- Clarity around local government reorganisation
- Safely running elections in May 2021
- Providing support for vulnerable families

Following the update, members raised the following points:

- Concern was expressed about the future of school exams, with the devolved administrations having different policies to the UK Government. The 4 Governments should seek a consistent approach. Particular issue for councils on borders.
- The LGA's communication and information sharing with councils was praised.

The Chairman thanked members for their comments and requested that a Covid update be brought to all future Board meetings for the foreseeable future.

#### **Decision**

Members of the People & Places Board noted the update.

#### **Action**

Officers to bring a Covid update paper to the next Board meeting.

### **3 Business plan 2019-22 - 2020 review and update**

The Chairman introduced the revised Business Plan and highlighted the new priority that the LGA's Executive Advisory Board had resolved to add - "*Narrowing inequalities and protecting communities*" – since the original Plan was drafted in October 2019. The Plan was being taken to all the LGA boards for information.

Members then raised the following points:

- The Plan should focus more on outcomes and improving residents' lives.
- In relation to infrastructure funding, greater emphasis was sought on meeting the increased demand for energy that will result from the shift to electric vehicles.
- In relation to health and wellbeing, frustration was expressed that the Government had still not published its social care green paper. Could the LGA work with councils who had developed their own plans and present a possible solution to Government?
- Councils had played a crucial leadership role during the pandemic in relation to adult social care, particularly in mobilising and coordinating the community and voluntary sector.

#### **Decision**

Members of the People and Places Board noted the 2020/21 update of the 3-year business plan as the basis for work programmes over the coming months and requested that officers feedback their comments to the Executive Advisory Board.

### **Action**

Officers to feed back the Board's comments to the Executive Advisory Board.

## **4 Devolution Update**

The Chairman invited Philip Clifford, Senior Adviser, to introduce the update.

Philip said that the Local Economic Recovery and Devolution White Paper had been delayed and he wasn't expecting any further major developments on devolution and local government reorganisation until the new year. In the meantime, the LGA was exploring measures that could be introduced without legislation to boost recovery and renewal in the short to medium term and, also, the potential to align health devolution with devolution to local government. A joint Lead Member meeting with the People & Places, City Regions and Community Wellbeing Boards had been arranged for 26 November to discuss health devolution.

Philip sought feedback from members on the following issues:

- The list of detailed devolution proposals set out in Appendix 1
- The extent to which economic recovery and devolution should be linked.
- Potential powers that could be devolved to councils without setting up Combined Authorities.

Following the introduction, members raised the following points:

- The complexity of setting up Combined Authorities was raised and it was suggested that the timescales would be too long to be able to support economic recovery. Combined Authorities were also not considered to be so well suited to rural areas. Support was therefore expressed for a flexible approach, exploring powers that could be effectively devolved to individual councils.
- Members considered that there was a tension between the Government seeking greater clarity and simplicity in local government and the desire for more localised service delivery. Any changes to local government should be informed by outcomes and what works for residents rather than 'one size fits all' system change.
- Could more detail be provided on the items in the list at Appendix 1 so the sector can be clear about its asks. Police and Crime Commissioners taking over fire governance was cited as an example of taking away power from a local level. Philip said that there was a more detailed list behind the summary in Appendix 1 which would be circulated to members.
- The debate around local government reorganisation has become very polarised and a role was suggested for the LGA in taking a broader overview. It was considered vital to keep local communities engaged whatever new system was introduced.
- Concern was expressed about a loss of Spending Power resulting from the creation of unitary authorities such as Dorset. This would not help with economic recovery measures if further unitarisation were to take place.

- It was considered important that councils weren't seen by the public to be 'navel gazing' over devolution and reorganisation, when arguably more important issues needed to be addressed.
- Financing of local government was flagged up as a major concern. It was argued that councils needed to be able to raise more of their own money locally. Business rate retention would be a big unknown for councils into the future as businesses reorganise on the back of Covid-19.
- It was considered vital that adult social care services were retained under local authority control rather than being taken on nationally.

**Decisions:**

Members of the People and Places Board noted:

1. Ongoing work to review the range of existing devolution asks summarised **at Appendix 1** and agreed that the comments raised during the debate be incorporated as part of this research.
2. that a joint meeting between Lead Members of the City Regions, People and Places and Community Well-Being Boards has been arranged for 26 November.

## **5 People and Places Board Update**

The Chairman invited Sonika Sidhu, Principal Policy Adviser, to introduce the update.

Sonika briefly ran through the topics in the update paper – EU exit and transition, digital connectivity, Freeports, housing and planning reform, Heads of Place and City Regions Board update.

Members raised the following points:

- Concern was expressed at the lack of training being given to council's regulatory service teams in readiness for the end of the transition period when responsibility for ports would be transferred.
- More information was requested on the Heads of Place pilot. Sonika agreed to provide this.
- An update on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund was requested. The Chairman said that they were hoping for some detail as part of the Government Spending Review. He had pressed Government for more clarity on the various EU funded programmes and was making the case strongly for UKSPF money to be channelled through councils rather than LEPs.
- Concern was expressed that if the UK moved to WTO rules on 1 January, councils could be faced with significant extra costs in purchasing goods and services. The Chairman said that he was giving evidence to the Committee on the Future Relationship with the EU on this issue tomorrow. Paul Green, LGA Adviser, highlighted some resources on the LGA website that provided advice for councils on tariffs and other EU exit issues - <https://www.local.gov.uk/issues-local-government-resulting-end-transition-period> and <https://www.local.gov.uk/preparing-end-eu-transition-period>

**Decision:**

- Members of the People & Places Board noted the update.

**Action:**

- Officers to provide the Board with more detail on the Heads of Place pilot.

## **6 Strengthening Rural and Coastal Resilience**

The Chairman invited Philip Clifford, Senior Adviser, to introduce the report.

Philip outlined research showing how rural and coastal communities have suffered from poverty and deprivation over a number of years and explained that Government interventions to address it had been patchy. The current pandemic had served to highlight some of these issues but there was now an opportunity to consider how best to strengthen rural and coastal resilience within the context of national recovery and the UK's EU exit.

Philip therefore asked the Board to consider commissioning external research to help develop an evidence-based case for strengthening rural and coastal resilience.

Following the introduction, members raised the following points:

- Members felt that there was already a lot of information on rural and coastal deprivation in the public domain (for example in LEPs and the former Regional Development Agencies) and urged officers not to 'reinvent the wheel'. This existing information should be collated and updated before any new primary research was commissioned.
- Concern was expressed about the closure of welfare assistance schemes in rural areas and, also, that LEPs often failed to address rural economic interests. There was a request for the LGA to engage with SPARSE and others to see what was already being done to address these sorts of issues.
- Members felt that there was a need to differentiate between rural and coastal communities as they often faced different and distinct challenges.
- Any solutions should be outcome-focussed but the problems of rural and coastal areas were often more deep-seated than simply a lack of funding or employment opportunities.

**Decision**

- Members of the People & Places Board agreed that officers should bring a summary of existing research and information on rural and coastal issues to the next Lead Member meeting to inform a decision on commissioning further work.

## **7 Devolution and the Future Role of Town and Parish Councils**

The Chairman invited Daniel Shamplin-Hall, Adviser, to introduce the report.

Daniel set out some of the issues currently facing parish and town councils and spoke about the partnership working that the LGA had been undertaking with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), particularly around improvement. NALC were keen to build on the work of town and parish councils during the pandemic and, through their response to the Spending Review, were seeking a greater role in the recovery phase.

Daniel said he was keen to hear the Board's experiences of working with parish and town councils and views on their future role. He requested members agreement to commission external research to explore the subject further, within the context of the Local Economy Recovery and Devolution White Paper.

Daniel also sought members' views on the proposal for 'pop up parishes' contained in Danny Kruger MP's report - Levelling Up Our Communities. The LGA had concerns that they could lead to issues around governance, oversight, accountability and value for money at a local level.

There followed a discussion during which members raised the following points:

- Members felt that devolution across the board to parish and town councils would be difficult as they varied so much in number and size geographically and, also, in terms of expertise, resources and professionalism. Any proposal to devolve more powers would therefore need to be supported by effective training (of officers and members), regulation and democratic accountability. In particular, concern was expressed that many parish and town councillors were not elected. The fact that some areas of the country were not currently parished was also considered to be a barrier to further devolution.
- Members cited examples of where the public had previously rejected the establishment of new parish and town councils. This was thought to be due largely to the perceived imposition of another layer of 'bureaucracy' and an additional precept on the council tax.
- Members agreed that devolution of powers by district and borough councils to parishes and towns was often more about cost-shunting than genuinely empowering local communities. Could the LGA raise these issues with DCN?
- It was felt that town and parish councils could become marginalised with the formation of more unitary authorities as they lost their often close relationships with districts and boroughs. Relationships with principal authorities were often poor.
- There was agreement with NALC's position on Covid and members felt it was important not to lose the close working relationships that had built up over the last few months.
- Any devolution to town and parish councils would only be effective if accompanied by a relaxation of the current strict rules around spending.
- One of the strengths of town and parish councils was their apolitical nature and this could be put at risk if they were given greater powers and funding.
- Members suggested engaging with the Society of Local Council Clerks in addition to NALC, to get a broader view of the issues.

- The LGA's position on 'pop up parishes' was supported, particularly on the grounds of lack of democratic accountability and oversight. It was suggested that 'pop up parishes' should not be allowed in areas that had existing parish or town councils.
- Members agreed that officers should seek greater clarity on exactly what NALC was asking for in terms of greater devolution. This, and what the LGA's role ought to be, should be ascertained before commissioning further external research. Daniel agreed that this was a sensible way forward and said he would send a revised commission document to the Board as soon as possible.

### **Decision**

Members of the People & Places Board:

- 1) Approved the LGA response to the pop-up parishes recommendation highlighted in the recent Levelling up our Communities report published by Danny Kruger MP outlined in paragraph 14.
- 2) Requested further information on NALC's position and the LGA's potential role before committing to engaging external expertise.

### **Action**

Officers to produce a revised commission for the next Lead Member meeting and circulate to Board members.

## **8 Employment and skills recovery**

The Chairman invited Jasbir Jhas, Senior Adviser, to introduce the report.

Jasbir reminded members that in the summer, the Board had approved the LGA's jobs and skills recovery position. However, in the light of recent Government policy and funding developments, it had become necessary to update the LGA position. The revised position paper was presented at Annex A and members comments were sought.

Jasbir said that tackling long-term unemployment was going to be a huge issue and she reported that during confidential discussions with the DWP, it had become clear that they were going to introduce a national Work Programme type scheme, with a small number of contractors operating over large areas. This was likely to start in the middle of 2021 and there would be no devolution to local authorities.

Jasbir said that DWP had asked the LGA for its view on how this could be made to work at a local level and this submission, approved by Lead Members and submitted to DWP on 3 November, was attached at Annex B. Members views were sought on how best to convince the Government that a local approach would be a much more effective option.

Jasbir said that retraining was going to be key to tackling long-term unemployment and the Government's forthcoming Further Education White Paper was expected to address this, including by giving FE Colleges a more central role. Members' views were sought on local government's relationship with FE Colleges and possible LGA lobbying lines on the White Paper.

Finally, Jasbir reported that there was a significant risk of the Government's Community Learning Budget being cut and the LGA would be lobbying strongly against this. Last month, the LGA published a handbook containing top tips on how councillors could enhance their council-run adult and community learning services locally. Officers were currently exploring how this document could be taken forward most effectively.

Following the introduction, members raised the following points:

- Members agreed that the national centralised approach to tackling long-term unemployment would not be as effective as a localised approach. Local government had a vital role to play in bringing together local community organisations who were often best placed on the ground to deliver solutions.
- Concern was expressed about the accountability of FE Colleges locally.
- It was suggested that 'green economic recovery' needed to be higher up the list of priorities in Annex A.

In view of the late hour, the Chairman asked members to e-mail any further comments to Jasbir and requested that this item be brought back to Lead Members and the full Board at the next available opportunity. This was agreed.

#### **Decision**

Members of the People & Places Board:

- 1) Noted the report
- 2) Endorsed the LGA's position on (i) jobs and skills recovery; (ii) long-term unemployment; and (iii) skills.
- 3) Agreed that the issue should be revisited at the next available Lead Member and full Board meetings.

#### **Action**

Officers to bring the report back to the next available Lead Member and Board meetings.

## **9 Minutes of the last meeting**

Cllr Martin Tett expressed his concern that he had not been consulted about Building Digital UK's broadband project despite his authority being one of the areas covered by the programme. The presentation at the meeting was the first time he had heard about it. The Chairman agreed to write to Building Digital UK's Chair and ask for further information on their consultation process.

#### **Action**

Officers to draft a letter to the Chair of Building Digital UK on consultation with local government.

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

## Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Kevin Bentley	Essex County Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Morris Bright MBE	Hertsmere Borough Council
Vice-Chair	Cllr Simon Henig CBE	Durham County Council
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Heather Kidd	Shropshire Council
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Bob Jennings	Epping Forest District Council
Members	Cllr Rachel Bailey	Cheshire East Council
	Cllr Marc Bayliss	Worcester City Council
	Cllr Hilary Carrick	Cumbria County Council
	Cllr Neil Clarke MBE	Rushcliffe Borough Council
	Cllr Keith Glazier	East Sussex County Council
	Cllr Diane Marsh	Gravesham Borough Council
	Cllr Martin Tett	Buckinghamshire County Council
	Cllr Bradley Thomas	Wychavon District Council
	Cllr Rob Waltham MBE	North Lincolnshire Council
	Cllr Sue Woodward	Staffordshire County Council
	Cllr Leigh Redman	Somerset County Council
	Cllr Kyle Robinson	Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
	Cllr Doina Cornell	Stroud District Council
	Cllr Sarah Osborne	East Sussex County Council
	Cllr Stan Collins	Cumbria County Council
	Cllr Helen Grant	Richmondshire District Council
Apologies	Cllr Eddie Reeves	Oxfordshire County Council
	Cllr Colin Davie	Lincolnshire County Council
In Attendance	Cllr Barry Wood	Cherwell District Council
	Cllr Peter Moss	Preston City Council