

Strengthening Rural and Coastal Recovery and Resilience

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

This paper provides a covering note for a presentation to be provided by Pragmatix Advisory on the work they have undertaken on the Strengthening Rural and Coastal Recovery and Resilience Project.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- **Note** the summary findings of the project to date (paragraph 4) which will be expanded on by Pragmatix Advisory at the Board.
- **Comment** on the findings of the report, their applicability to members' rural and coastal settings and how they might inform the Board's future programme of work.

Action

Officers to take on board comments and steer Pragmatix Advisory as appropriate.

Contact officer: Daniel Shamplin-Hall
Position: Adviser
Phone no: 0207 664 3314
Email: Daniel.Shamplin-Hall@local.gov.uk

Strengthening Rural and Coastal Recovery and Resilience

Background

1. There is evidence that the significance of deprivation and economic challenges in rural and coastal areas has been underestimated by national datasets and, as a result, subsequent Whitehall policy interventions have failed to provide adequate support.¹
2. Following discussions with the Board on how best to address these issues within the context of the Government's levelling-up agenda, Lead Members approved the commissioning of research to explore how to strengthen recovery and resilience in rural and coastal areas.

Progress to date

3. Pragmatix Advisory (PA) were commissioned to undertake the project and will present their interim findings at the upcoming Board. These will draw on a wide-ranging qualitative and quantitative research exercise including more than fifty rural and coastal stakeholders' interviews, detailed analysis of national datasets, and deep dives into eight case study areas drawing on locally derived insight and data to augment the project's overall findings
4. At the time of writing PA are bringing together their research and drawing up a series of recommendations for central and local government. With more work to be undertaken before the project's completion at the end of March, the Board will be asked to sense-check the emerging findings of the report and help steer its final recommendations. To date the work has uncovered the following themes:
 - 4.1. **Ongoing challenge of Covid-19** - uptake of the Job Retention Scheme suggests rural and coastal businesses are suffering as badly as their urban and suburban peers. The high proportion of 'micro' enterprises and smaller family owned businesses that make up rural and coastal areas are now vulnerable to failure.
 - 4.2. **Challenge of scale** - the challenge of limited scale is reflected in higher fixed and unit costs in the provision of services (public and private) and delivery of infrastructure and assets - transport, communications and energy networks are key constraints on rural and coastal growth.
 - 4.3. **Challenges of geography** - there are fundamental challenges of geography that rural and coastal communities face to varying extents, such as low average population density, sparsity, peripherality. Each of these geographical characteristics bring with them a unique set of economic challenges such as small market catchments and the development of smaller enterprises with thinner margins across fewer sectors.

¹ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327675106_The_development_of_an_index_of_rural_deprivation_A_case_study_of_Norfolk_England

- 4.4. **Challenge of the industry** Three broad sectors often represent a higher share of output and employment; farming, fishing and agri-food, tourism and manufacturing. These key sectors bring their own specific challenges –such as the need for seasonal labour, dependency on export markets (often in the European Union) and reliance on natural resources.
- 4.5. **Challenging social outcomes** - These issues combine to provide challenging social outcomes which need to be addressed. These are easily seen in the performance of many coastal communities in the Index of Multiple Deprivation. But even in places with a 'good IMD score' there are hidden disadvantages holding back rural locations.
5. To further augment their findings, PA will host a workshop on Wednesday 10 March with a selection of People and Places Board members and officers from rural and coastal areas to test their findings. This will include a series of proposed solutions and opportunities which will be drawn together at the presentation to the Board.
6. PA will also host three focus groups on w/c 8 March, one each for participants from rural areas, coastal areas and the sparsest areas from both. The focus groups will explore key rural and coastal stakeholders' views on the various structural and socio-economic issues identified, and the potential policy interventions to tackle them. Participants from the focus groups will reflect a balanced and diverse sample of the local community, focusing on senior local businesspeople, community representatives, opinion formers and NGO leaders.
7. The project is set to be completed by 31st March 2021.

Next steps

8. Members are asked to:
- 8.1 **Note** the summary findings of the project to date (paragraph 4) which will be expanded on by Pragmatix Advisory at the Board.
- 8.2 **Comment** on the findings of the report, their applicability to members' rural and coastal settings and how they might inform the Board's future programme of work.