

People and Places Board – End of Year Report

Background

1. The People and Places Board was created to provide a clear voice and resource for non-metropolitan authorities within the LGA.
2. Members are asked to consider the achievements of the board over the last year against the use of allocated resources and to reflect on whether the board is continuing to meet its original purpose in response to the emerging priorities of non-metropolitan areas.

Priorities and Achievements

Devolution

3. In the run-up to the Queen's Speech, we [published research](#) showing 58 per cent of MPs and 80 per cent of peers agree that councils should be given greater powers and funding to drive employment and training schemes in their areas.
4. The LGA [responded](#) to the House of Lords Public Services Committee report on Levelling Up, saying bringing greater resources and powers over key responsibilities, such as skills, transport and housing, closer to communities, is the best way to ensure we have a recovery that works for everyone.
5. We responded to the Treasury Select Committee's inquiry into jobs, growth and productivity after coronavirus, setting out the important convening role played by local government in the many aspects of the local economy.
6. Following confirmation that the Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper has been superseded by the Levelling Up White Paper, we are considering how to ensure that the sector's devolution priorities and the opportunities for rural and non-metropolitan areas can best be included within this new agenda.
7. Following the successful launch of its report in March, the Devolution APPG held its Annual General Meeting in May and agreed a new work programme.

Local growth

8. Following a shift in emphasis for national growth policy, the Board agreed in January to a reframed set of priorities for its work in support of the place-based growth agenda, including the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, exports and inward investment.

9. This Board, along with the City Regions Board, commissioned research into the lessons learned from the Local Industrial Strategy trailblazer areas and the implications for other areas developing local economic strategies. This is available on the LGA's [Local Industrial Strategies Hub](#).

Employment and skills

10. On 25 March, we brought together Whitehall leads with councils to engage on, and shape, Plan for Jobs related activity, and ran a workshop with the sector and the National Audit Office on its inquiry into the workings of DWP during Covid-19.
11. We responded to the [DfE's flexi-apprenticeship consultation](#), noting councils' important convening work during the pandemic, setting out the case for recovery interventions to be locally tailored, and pointing out councils' key role in ensuring interventions are coordinated nationally and locally.
12. We [briefed](#) for the 15 April Westminster Hall debate on the Education Committee's report on adult skills and lifelong learning; making the case for the role of local government.
13. We launched a new [Local employment and skills recovery learning hub](#) at a [webinar](#) on 20 May with 208 delegates. The hub contains *Top tips on five themes to boost a local jobs and skills* and thirteen case studies highlighting practical local government action to coordinate jobs and skills during the pandemic and a report capturing lessons for the future.
14. We also launched a [report](#) capturing action learning to support local authorities to identify barriers and challenges in fulfilling their statutory duties for young people and to identify solutions.
15. We continue to work with the sector to set out the implications of the Government's Adult Education Budget funding rule change on councils' adult and community learning provision.
16. We responded to the House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee's inquiry into measures taken to protect and create jobs for young people, reiterating our asks for young people in the recovery.

EU Funding/UK Shared Prosperity Fund

17. Through the Growth Programme Board and the Performance and Dispute Resolution National Sub Committee, the LGA has continued its work in shaping the Reserve Fund (the remaining ERDF and ESF programme) to support recovery. Having previously raised concerns about DWP not fully utilising the ESF programme before we leave the

ESIF programme, there is evidence of significant improvements in the ESF appraisal process which means it is more likely that the total of the fund will be spent when we leave the programme in 2023.

18. The Government has launched the prospectus for the [UK Community Renewal Fund](#), the pilot programme to inform the design of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Following the launch of the UK Community Renewal Fund prospectus, officers are speaking to a number of lead authorities to seek feedback on the CRF process and any learning that might be made available for the design of the forthcoming UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Freeports

19. East Midlands Airport, Felixstowe & Harwich, Humber, Liverpool City Region, Plymouth and South Devon, Solent, Teesside and Thames have been successful in the Freeports bidding process for England. It is vital that Freeports create new jobs and opportunities for local people and we have called on Government to remain alive to the risk of economic displacement of UK domestic businesses as it progresses with winning areas.
20. There were over thirty bids for Freeport status from across the country evidencing a high-level interest from local areas. We have asked Government to continue to consider how it can best work with the unsuccessful areas as part of its wider ambition to 'level up' the country and ensure no area is left behind.

Strengthening the recovery and resilience of rural and coastal areas

21. In November, the Board commissioned work to explore how to strengthen recovery and resilience in rural and coastal areas. The final report considers the impact of COVID-19 outside cities and outlines the underlying and structural challenges they face such as population sparsity, remoteness/connectivity and peripherality. The report also proposes steps national and local government can take to tackle these issues and benefit from a successful post-pandemic recovery.

The Future of Parish and Town Council Devolution

22. Following discussions at the Board, and an emerging narrative from Ministers supporting greater devolution to parish and town councils, the Board approved the commissioning of research to explore the implications of operationalising "double devolution." The project will provide a practical guide for councils and help ensure Board members are well placed to lead the policy debate on devolution and the future of town and parish councils at the most appropriate future point.

Digital connectivity

23. On behalf of the Board, officers worked in partnership with Cambridgeshire County Council and Shropshire Council to issue a press release calling on Government and Ofcom to improve the way it measures the mobile connectivity mobile network operators provide to local communities. The release received coverage in The Independent, The Sun, The Daily Telegraph, The Daily Mail, BBC Radio 4 and ITV.
24. The LGA also [responded](#) to the Government's consultation on proposed reforms to permitted development rights to support the deployment of 5G and extend mobile coverage. The response argued that limiting planning control and increasing permitted development rights takes away the ability of residents, businesses and councillors to contribute in a meaningful way to the deployment of new or upgraded masts, sites and infrastructure and circumvents local plans preventing the properly managed development of a place.
25. We promoted to councils a request by the Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan for their support to help students access education online by adding the 'eduroam' network to their existing public Wi-Fi network, at no extra charge.
26. The Board continues 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, who 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.

Programme of work and priorities

27. The Board will seek to ensure the Government's plans for economic recovery account for the interests and challenges of non-metropolitan places and lobby for them to have the powers and resources to lead a successful and sustainable recovery and drive improved outcomes in their communities.
28. The Board will also continue to work to ensure that the Government puts councils at the heart of its Levelling Up Agenda.
29. The Board will continue to take forward the LGA's lobbying work on skills, making the case for the Work Local model and continuing to engage with key stakeholders. The Board may want officers to focus on the role employment and skills will play in the Government's recovery plans.

30. The Board will continue to seek feedback on the UK Community Renewal Fund process to help the development of the design of the forthcoming UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and ensure that councils play a key role in managing growth funding through the Levelling Up Fund and UKSPF.

Next steps

31. Officers to take forward actions as appropriate to draft a work programme for the board.