# People and Places Board – Report from Cllr Kevin Bentley (Chairman)

## Devolution

1. The Devolution APPG, which is supported by the Local Government Association, has agreed its work programme for the next year and will look at aspects of health devolution, constitutional reform and councils’ role in economic recovery. On 13 July Minister Stephen Greenhalgh attended a meeting to discuss the APPG’s recently published report *Levelling Up Devo* and gave a positive response on several issues including skills devolution, the devolution baseline and local governance reform. He reassured the Group that devolution would feature in the forthcoming levelling up white paper.
2. 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. The final report will be published imminently.

## Rural Issues

1. 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 a number of steps national and local government can take to tackle these issues and benefit from a successful post-pandemic recovery. It will be published before the end of July.

## Employment and skills

1. 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.

## EU Funding/UK Shared Prosperity Fund

1. 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

1. 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. We have called on Government to remain alive to the risk of economic displacement of UK domestic businesses as it progresses with winning areas. There were over 30 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.

## Programme of work and priorities

1. Future areas of work and priorities include:
   1. We 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.
   2. We will continue to work to ensure that the Government puts councils at the heart of its Levelling Up Agenda.
   3. We 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.
   4. We 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.

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