

## **Work Programme 2021/22**

### **Purpose of report**

For direction.

### **Summary**

This report sets out a work programme for the People and Places Board for the 2021/22 political cycle for consideration and sign-off.

Is this report confidential? Yes ☐ No ☒

### **Recommendation/s**

Members are asked to consider and agree to the proposed work programme for the People and Places Board for the 2021/22 cycle, including the proposal for a standalone workshop to consider in depth the Board's views on current plans for devolution to non-metropolitan England in paragraph 7.

### **Action/s**

Officers will take forward the work programme over the next year, in line with comments from the People and Places Board and with sufficient flexibility to adapt to changes in national circumstance.

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## **Work Programme 2021/22**

### **Background**

1. As set out in the [terms of reference](#), the People and Places Board represents the interests of non-metropolitan councils within the LGA. It has a shared interest and regularly works with the City Regions Board on a number of issues, including: devolution, skills and employment, local economic growth and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The People and Places Board also leads the LGA's policy development on digital connectivity and has previously overseen work relating to town and parish councils and rural land management in England.
2. This paper sets out a work programme for 2021/22. Members are asked to consider the proposed shape, direction and priorities and formally agree the programme, noting that uncertainty arising from the pandemic is likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

### **Proposed Work Programme**

#### *Devolution*

3. Devolution has been one of the Board's core issues since its inception. Members have been clear that councils in non-metropolitan areas should be able access powers and resources through devolution comparable to that available to city regions. The LGA has consistently campaigned on this basis and the People and Places Board has led work to advance policy in this area, publishing [The future of non-metropolitan England: the freedom to lead local places](#) in July 2019. Recently, this has also included work to support the Devo APPG's inquiry into [Levelling-up Devo: the role of national government in making a success of devolution in England](#).
4. On 27 July 2021 the Local Government Minister indicated that these calls had been heard in Whitehall and that a new round of devolution, including county devolution deals would be brought forward. These county deals are expected to be at least on a par with existing combined authority deals, with the potential to forge new territory for English devolution. Importantly the minister stressed that there was no appetite in central government for further devolution to be predicated on local governance reform.
5. Over the summer the LGA published [Devolution deal to delivery](#) as a guide to support local areas looking to explore a devolution deal. It also published [Local service delivery and place-shaping: A framework to support parish and town councils](#). Both these publications drew on evidence and advice from the People and Places Board and are the latest in a long line of board commissioned research in this area.
6. Looking ahead to the autumn and the publication of the Levelling Up White Paper (see below) it is anticipated that the People and Places Board will want to continue to play a leading role in shaping the Government's emerging policy on devolution and supporting local areas to secure the best possible deal for their residents. Reflecting the success of previous work, the Board may also wish to further explore the opportunity for further devolution to town and parish councils.

7. To give members the opportunity for a full discussion of this topic, lead members have suggested a standalone devolution workshop in the autumn. This would allow members to hear from those who have been through the devolution process, discuss what they need from Government and others to make a success of a new round of devolution, and invite leading Government figures to hear their conclusions.

### *Levelling Up*

8. The concept of 'Levelling Up' first appeared in Boris Johnson's first speech as Prime Minister and later featured in the 2019 Conservative Party Manifesto. It has since been refined to cover a wide-ranging policy agenda, picking up aspects of public service reform, addressing regional economic disparity, and the role of culture in building civic pride and resilience.
9. In May 2021, the Government announced its plans to publish a Levelling Up White Paper later this year. Reports have suggested publication will be alongside the Spending Review in the autumn. MHCLG has since confirmed that this will supersede the anticipated Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper and will include further details regarding the next phase of devolution deals.
10. As detailed in a separate paper to Lead Members it has been agreed that over the next political cycle the People and Places and City Regions Boards will jointly oversee a programme of research and round tables to explore different aspects of levelling up locally, including:
  - 10.1 The opportunities to de-fragment policy and funding programmes at the local level to improve the quality of public service outcomes and address concentrations of deprivation
  - 10.2 The role that devolution to democratically elected local leaders can play in binding communities and anchor institutions together to strengthen resilience, align national and local priorities and articulate policy interventions necessary to support balanced economic growth
  - 10.3 The optimal relationship between local and national government, the private and public sector and physical and social infrastructure investment in addressing inter and intra-regional inequalities
  - 10.4 The potential of local cultural capital and other assets to strengthen inward investment, encourage entrepreneurialism and support demographic dynamism

### *Economic Growth and Recovery*

11. Following the commissioning and publication of [Rural recognition, recovery, resilience and revitalisation](#) it is proposed that the Board will want to ensure that the Levelling Up White Paper responds to the needs and priorities of rural and coastal areas. It is also suggested that the Board might wish to explore the implications of the National Food Strategy for rural areas, recognising the significant contribution the agricultural industry makes to rural economies and communities.

12. In line with the Board's previous interest and expertise it is proposed that work in relation to the review of Local Enterprise Partnerships, trade and investment and the wider development of local economic strategies is advanced in line with the priorities of national and local stakeholders.
13. The LGA has also secured a position on the [Business in the Community's Place Taskforce, chaired by Lord Steve Bassam](#). Recognising the diverse interests across councils we have put forward two representatives, a vice chair from each of the City Regions and People and Places Boards, who would attend on an alternating basis.
14. The LGA will provide briefing support for these representatives who will report back to their respective boards on progress and seek a steer on priorities. We will also submit evidence to the inquiry and will co-host one of the taskforce's roundtables.

#### *Digital Connectivity*

15. The Board has a well-established position of thought leadership in mobile and broadband connectivity. Over the coming political cycle it is proposed that members work with the ADEPT Digital Connectivity Working Group to: maintain pressure on the Government and broadband providers regarding the pace of the Gigabit rollout in more rural areas; ensure the Shared Rural Network delivers on its promise of improved mobile connectivity in remote communities; and, explore the opportunities for greater digital inclusion as part of the levelling up agenda.

#### *Employment and Skills*

16. A separate employment and skills paper is tabled at this meeting and covers our suggested work plan for this area. It includes a mix of policy and improvement activity and builds on discussions at the last Board meeting in June 2021. The main change to our suggested priorities is that we include a refresh of our well-established Work Local proposals. The aim of this is to support the sector on employability devolution now that the Government has confirmed that English devolution is back on the agenda, and different spatial footings would be considered

#### *UK Shared Prosperity Fund*

17. Members agreed a programme of work at the June 2021 Board meeting which included developing good practice case studies, peer networks and roundtables. This workstream will provide learning and evidence to support the sector and help government shape policy. At present, the Government have launched the pilot scheme – the Community Renewal Fund. Lead authorities (combined authorities, county and unitary authorities) have undertaken competitive bidding processes for the CRF and are waiting for the Government to announce the successful bids. In the meantime, we have commenced engagement with the sector to capture learning from the process so far. This work will be expanded once CRF programmes are announced and in place.

### **Implications for Wales**

18. Wales is on its own devolution journey. We continue to work with the WLGA on issues of shared importance, including the role of local government post-Brexit and the details of the UKSPF.

### **Financial Implications**

19. The Board's activities are supported by budgets for policy development and improvement. Resources will be allocated as directed by members in support of individual objectives.

### **Equalities Implications**

20. Issues of equality, diversity and inclusion will be a core component of each of work streams identified above.
21. In designing the levelling up inquiry, we will ensure a diverse range of participants, explicitly consider issues of economic and social deprivation and adopt an evidence led approach to demographic change and representation.
22. Our work on digital connectivity will include a fresh focus on the issue of digital exclusion and the differential impact on opportunities for home working and education.
23. Our employment and skills, and UKSPF work will take a closer look at how range of our work will also focus on EDI challenges and opportunities and how these can be better identified and addressed at a local level.
24. In advocating for and on behalf of rural and coastal areas the board will reflect the specific and diverse concerns of these communities and, by successfully pressing the case for devolution, we will put more power and resources in the hands of local leaders, who we believe are best able to take decisions for their areas.

### **Next steps**

25. Members are asked to consider and agree to the proposed work programme for the People and Places Board for the 2021/22 cycle.
26. Officers will take forward work as agreed, including preparations for a devolution workshop.