

People & Places Board - Report from Cllr Kevin Bentley (Chairman)

Levelling Up White Paper

1. Following the publication of the Levelling Up White Paper on 2 February, we published an [LGA briefing](#). This sets out an overview of the White Paper, outlined the LGA's key messages, provided policy responses to each of the '12 missions' and set out the LGA's improvement support offer on devolution and levelling up. We also released a [press statement](#) in which we welcomed the extension of the offer of devolution to every part of England, reiterated local government's place based leadership role in levelling up communities, and set out our commitment to working with central government on the development of a new independent body relating to data transparency and the new Levelling Up Advisory Council.
2. In light of the announcements in the Levelling Up White Paper, we have refreshed content on the [Levelling Up Hub](#), including specific responses to announcements on culture, serious violence and crime, education investment areas, gigabit broadband rollout and healthy life expectancy.
3. We have launched a 'Levelling Up Locally Inquiry' looking into how the Government's levelling up agenda might better strengthen local communities. We have published an [inquiry webpage](#) on the LGA website which details the themes of the four roundtables as well as the members sitting on the steering group.
4. The independent steering group members and expert advisers for the inquiry have been finalised. They are: David Buck, Professor Francesca Gains, Professor Michael Kenny, Sarah Longlands, Raheel Mohammed, Osaro Otobo, Neale Coleman CBE, Mayor Marvin Rees, Councillor Kevin Bentley, Stephen Beechey and Rachel Skinner CBE. Steering group members attended a launch meeting in early February to agree the terms of reference.
6. Officers have begun research on the possible impacts of the pandemic on demographic changes. This research, drawn both from existing literature and from LG inform data sources aims to inform the work of the Levelling Up Local Inquiry. It considers the implications for ongoing and future demographic changes on council services and delivery of the levelling up agenda.

Skills Update

7. The LGA has continued efforts to [advocate](#) for councils to have a strong role in shaping their local further education offer, working with businesses and FE providers, through new Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). We worked to secure an amendment to the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill in the House of Lords, which would have given councils a named role in the Bill to work in partnership with employer representative bodies to develop LSIPs. However, the Government removed this provision when the Bill returned to the Commons and unfortunately the role of councils will now not be written into the final legislation. After having its Report Stage and Third Reading in the House of Commons, which was the final opportunity to make substantive changes to the Bill, the Bill will return to the House of Lords for consideration of the Commons

amendments. The LGA will now continue to push for councils to be named in the guidance which we understand will set out how LSIPs will be rolled out across England

8. The Government has announced a new adult numeracy programme called Multiply, funded from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. We are working to ensure that this is localised as far as possible with maximum alignment with other local activity.

Digital connectivity

9. We responded to the Levelling Up White Paper announcement of nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, alongside 5G coverage for the 'majority of the population' by 2030, in a press release picked up by [national outlets](#). We shared a [press response](#) to the Government's announcement of eight pilot areas to speed up 5G rollout and Cllr Mark Hawthorne, our digital connectivity champion gave an interview to the BBC about gigabit capable broadband.

Growth funding

10. We responded to a National Audit Office report on supporting local economic growth, arguing that the current fragmented and competitive funding model has created uncertainty and hindered councils' ability to plan strategically for their communities. We called for the Government to align new funding to enable councils to deliver and co-ordinate long term interventions at scale.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Community Renewal Fund

11. The pre-launch guidance for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) was published at the same time as the Levelling Up White Paper. The LGA welcomed the recognition of local government as place leaders and the move towards the allocation of funding to places, instead of competition – two key LGA lobbying positions. In advance of the publication of the investment plan guidance, the LGA will continue to lobby to ensure there is not a gap in the funding of employment and skills provision and that the UKSPF provides local government with the longevity and quantum of funding it is replacing.
12. Following the extension of the pilot scheme for the UKSPF, the Community Renewal Fund (CRF), the LGA has commissioned Shared Intelligence to capture learning from the CRF. They have commenced conducting interviews with 12 local authorities as both Lead Authorities and delivery partners. This will form part of our support for lead authorities with the introduction of the UKSPF.

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