

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

Levelling Up

1. Following the announcement of a Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill in the Queen's Speech, the LGA on 10 May, the LGA issued a [response](#) emphasising that levelling up will only be achieved if councils have the powers and funding they need to address interregional and intraregional inequalities, tackle deprivation, and make communities attractive places to live, work and visit.
2. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill was then published on 11 May, and this Board, together with the City Regions Board will work with parliamentarians and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to shape and amend this legislation to ensure it helps councils to level up and delivers greater devolution so the UK ceases to be one of the most centralised countries in the democratic world.
3. We are halfway through the [Levelling Up Locally Inquiry](#), overseen by an independent steering group, which explores how the Government's levelling up agenda might better strengthen local communities.
 - 3.1. The first roundtable was held in March exploring the theme of funding and alignment with Professor Philip McCann (professor of urban and regional economics at the University of Sheffield) and Matt Whittaker (chief executive officer at Pro Bono Economics) presenting. The session explored practical questions about how levelling up in the broadest sense might be paid for and, at a more granular level, the opportunities to align policy and funding interventions at the local level to improve the quality of public service outcomes and address concentrations of deprivation.
 - 3.2. Following this, the second roundtable on the theme of leadership took place in May with speakers Joy Warmington (chief executive officer at Brap), Patricia Wharton (community advocate) and Nick Garnham (chief executive officer at Community Organisers). The roundtable investigated the role of local leadership in binding communities and anchor institutions together to strengthen resilience, align national priorities, and articulate policy interventions necessary to support balanced economic growth and tackle systemic inequality.

Employment and Skills

4. This Board, together with the City Regions launched the LGA's [Work Local: Unlocking talent to level up](#) in mid-May, our latest instalment to our longstanding campaign for employment and skills devolution. The proposals build on the Government's Levelling up White Paper and make recommendations to Whitehall on ways it can improve its approach to policy and provision for all places right now and develop a more coherent approach to devolution. This is critical to levelling up.

5. It includes new analysis showing that every place has a unique labour market, that the system is complicated and that a Work Local approach – giving democratically elected local leaders the power and funding to work with partners to join up provision – could each year result in a 15 per cent increase in the number of people improving their skills or finding work in a local area. We call on the Government to work with us to establish a ‘Work Local Board’ to co-design new and repurpose existing provision and implement changes to improve the system set out in our prospectus for change. Through our press work, Cllr Bentley was interviewed by BBC Look North.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

6. On 13 April 2022, the Government published the [prospectus and allocations for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#). This provided further details and the platform for lead authorities to develop and submit their investment plans to access the funding. The LGA published a briefing and a [UKSPF hub](#) to support lead authorities by signposting to relevant improvement work.
7. The LGA has worked with the wider sector to understand the implications for the prospectus and continue to raise issues with Government officials, including the short time frames and the longevity and quantum of funding. One of the key issues raised has been the funding gap between the end of the European Social Fund and the commencement of the UKSPF People and Skills Priority. The LGA published a [press release](#) on the sector’s concerns which was featured in the Financial Times.

Digital Connectivity

8. We have been working with the LGA public affairs team to highlight the importance of good digital connection, [responding to the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill](#) announced at the Queen’s Speech to call for Government funding for councils to put in place a local digital champion. We also [responded](#) to a change in planning laws for 5G rollout. Cllr Mark Hawthorne, the LGA’s digital champion has supported with Mobile UK’s [recent report](#) calling for fully-funded local authority digital champions.
9. The LGA has launched a [digital switchover hub](#) to support councils throughout the switchover. We have a Local Government Digital Switchover Working Group who met for the first time in April to discuss issues, opportunities and good practice relating to the analogue to digital switchover. Where issues are raised within the group, particularly around communications and messaging, we are picking up conversations and lobbying Government.

Contact officer: Rebecca Cox
Position: Principal Policy Adviser
Phone no: 0207 187 7384
Email: Rebecca.cox@local.gov.uk