

People and Places Board Annual Report

Background

1. The People and Places Board was created to provide a clear voice and resource for non-metropolitan authorities within the LGA. This year the Board had a particular focus on the importance of ‘rural proofing’ Government policies, particularly in relation to levelling up and access to services for rural and coastal communities. It developed its work on employment and skills to encompass the rising need for green skills, including on retrofitting, and continued to highlight the importance of digital connectivity and ensuring the resilience of rural infrastructure.
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

Levelling up and devolution

3. The Government’s long-awaited Levelling Up White Paper was published on 2 February 2022. The LGA published a [briefing note](#) and [full press release](#) in response to the Government’s ambition to pursue 12 national missions and proposals relating to a new devolution framework, a plan to streamline growth funding, a new independent data body and the establishment of a new levelling up advisory council.
4. Following the announcement of a Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill in the Queen’s Speech, 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. We will be working with parliamentarians and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to shape and amend this legislation to ensure it helps councils level up and delivers greater devolution.
5. The Board, with the City Regions Board launched an inquiry into how the Government’s levelling up agenda might better strengthen local communities. The [Levelling Up Locally Inquiry](#) looks beyond the Levelling Up White Paper to investigate the role of local leadership in shaping a recovery that works for all.
6. The Board agreed to an independent steering group helping to shape the inquiry’s development including its evidence gathering; making contributions drawing on their own experience and expertise; and formulating a set of recommendations based around each of the themes. The steering group is co-chaired by Cllr Bentley and Mayor Rees and

comprises members from business, academia, think tanks, community groups and government organisations.

7. As part of the inquiry, four roundtables are being held on: funding and alignment, leadership, productivity and prosperity, and place and identity. To date, two of the four roundtables have taken place. A final set of recommendations will be published in the Autumn.

Local growth

8. The Board, with the City Regions Board, has supported Business in the Community (BITC) Place Taskforce to launch a [new report](#) looking into the role of business and cross-sector partnerships in place-based regeneration. Cllr Simon Henig represented the People and Places Board on the Taskforce. The report provides practical recommendations to business, local government and national government on the role business can play in delivering the 'how' of the Levelling Up White Paper, as well as the foundations that are needed to transform communities.

Employment and skills

9. In May, we published [Work Local: Unlocking talent to level up](#), our employment and skills devolution proposals which build on the Levelling up White Paper and recommend ways Whitehall can improve its approach to employment and skills policy for all places right now and deliver a coherent devolution approach. Analysis reveals devolution could result in a 15 per cent increase in the number of people improving their skills or finding work in a local area each year.
10. Following the Government's Skills for Jobs White Paper, it launched two consultation and legislated to establish new Local Skills Improvement Plans. The LGA responded to the consultations on the [National Skills Fund](#) and the [FE Funding and Accountability System](#), and engaged parliamentarians to support the LGA position on the [Skills and Post 16 Education Bill](#) which has now been enacted.
11. We proactively brought together DfE and councils outside of devolution areas to ensure that the £270 million Multiply adult numeracy programme (funded through UKSPF) was routed via councils in non-devolution areas rather than contacted nationally through the Education and Skills Funding Agency.
12. We published a [report](#) to showcase the work of councils to support and develop education, employment and training pathways, including the wider wrap-around support for young people experiencing disadvantage.

Community Renewal Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund

13. In April 2022, the Government published the [UKSPF prospectus and allocations](#), which [allocated £2.6 billion over three years](#), as well as [the allocations for the Multiply adult numeracy Programme](#). We launched a [UKSPF Hub](#) to support local authorities to develop their investment plans.
14. The announcement confirmed that the fund would be driven by local authorities, funding to support capacity building and the removal of competitive bidding processes. These are some of the key asks that we have been consistently lobbying on since the EU referendum.
15. We have continually engaged with councils and combined authorities to understand the implications of the prospectus, and identified some of the key concerns, including the funding gap between the end of European Social Fund programmes and the commitment of the People & Skills priority in 2024/25, as well as the need for a longer-term funding solution. We have raised these issues through [the press](#) which was featured in the Financial Times. The Chairs of the People & Places and City Regions Boards wrote to the Secretary of State setting out the sector's concerns regarding the funding gap.
16. The LGA has worked with the sector to capture learning from the UK Community Renewal Fund. Following the delay in the announcement of the successful bids, we [lobbied successfully for an extension of the fund](#), with the Chairs of the People and Places and City Regions Boards writing to the Secretary of State, outlining the sector's concerns. We have commissioned Shared Intelligence to capture the learning from the fund to help inform our wider work on growth funding.

Digital connectivity

17. We have [responded](#) to a Westminster Hall Debate on digital inclusion, responded to the National Infrastructure Commission's baseline report call for evidence, submitted evidence and subsequently [responded](#) to a Public Accounts Committee report into Project Gigabit which had [wide coverage from news outlets including the BBC](#), briefed for a Westminster Hall debate on ultrafast broadband in Devon and Somerset, and Cllr Bentley met with the head of regional tech policy at DCMS.
18. We also [responded](#) to the Levelling Up White Paper target for the UK to have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage by 2030 and our response was 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 Hawthorne, the LGA's digital connectivity champion, gave an interview at the end of February to the BBC about the gigabit capable broadband rollout. We also issued a [press release](#) in response to the Government's announcement of a change in the planning laws to increase the use of permitted development rights in relation to the size of mobile masts.

19. The retirement of the public switched telephone network (PSTN) for new digital technologies continues to be cause for concern impacting on both council infrastructure as well as services for residents and we have launched a working group to share good practice and discuss challenges and a [digital switchover hub](#) on the LGA website to disseminate useful resources.

20. The Board has long called for further funding from Government for digital connectivity champions to help co-ordinate delivery locally. Mobile UK now echoes these calls having recently published research calling on Government to [fund local authority digital champions](#). In May Cllr Hawthorne met with digital policy leads at District Councils Network and County Councils Network to discuss the role of digital connectivity champions, how we can refine our call on Government and gather further support. Officers have been raising these conversations in monthly meetings with DCMS and the Barrier Busting Taskforce.

Programme of work and priorities

21. The Board will advocate for Work Local model to be a way of mechanism for enabling the sector deliver a local employment and skills offer to support the levelling up agenda.

22. The Board will also continue to work to ensure that the Government puts councils at the heart of its Levelling Up agenda.

23. 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.

24. The Board is now well established as an important voice on digital connectivity, but as the policy agenda is currently in a largely technical phase. The Board will now play a defining role in the increasingly high-profile area of digital exclusion following a session on 'digital levelling up' at the LGA's annual conference.

Next steps

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