

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

### **Levelling Up**

1. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill has passed Second Reading in the House of Commons, and progressed to Committee Stage. This board, together with the City Regions Board, will continue to work with parliamentarians, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and external stakeholders, to look at potential amendments to the Bill to ensure it truly devolves power to the local leaders who are best placed to level up their communities.
2. The [Levelling Up Locally Inquiry](#) has now had its third roundtable, looking at the theme of productivity and prosperity. This roundtable explored the role of the private and public sector in addressing inter and intra-regional inequalities, and heard from Connor MacDonald, Head of Economics and Social Policy for Policy Exchange, and Sacha Romanovitch, Chief Executive of Fair4All Finance. The final roundtable, on the theme of place and identity, will take place on 20<sup>th</sup> July. Following the final roundtable, the steering group will meet again to identify themes from across all four roundtables, and the final recommendations will be published in the early autumn.
3. At LGA Annual Conference, this Board, along with the City Regions Board hosted a number of events, including a session on the Levelling Up Locally Inquiry. This session, heard first from the Rt Hon Simon Clarke MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who praised local government for the role it played during the pandemic, and then by Levelling Up Locally steering group members Stephen Beechey, Group Public Sector Director of Wates, and Professor Francesca Gains, Professor of Public Policy at the University of Manchester, who discussed the work of the inquiry, and then finally by Tom Walker, Executive Director of Economy, Investment and Public Health at Essex County Council.
4. This Board, together with the City Regions Board also held an event on Levelling Up: the vision from councils, which was chaired by Cllr Kevin Bentley, as Chair of the People and Places Board. It heard from Cllr Linda Taylor, Leader of Cornwall Council, Cllr Brigid Jones, Deputy Leader of Birmingham City Council and Cllr Jonathan Brook, Leader of South Lakeland District Council on their vision for their communities, what devolution meant to their areas and how they proposed to drive economic renewal, support inclusive growth and address the cost-of-living crisis.

### **Digital connectivity**

5. This Board held a well attended workshop session at annual conference which looked at the role digital plays in levelling up communities. This event heard from Cllr Mark Hawthorne, Leader of Gloucestershire County Council, Helen Milner, Chief Executive of Good Things Foundation, Selaine Saxby MP, Aruj Haider, Chief Digital and Innovation Officer at Westminster City Council, and Phil Swan, Director for Digital at Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

6. On 13 July, building on our strengthened relationship with the trade body for mobile operators Mobile UK, we hosted a joint webinar on the case for funded digital champions in all councils, and how it contributes to the levelling up agenda.

### **Employment and skills**

7. On 5 July Cllr Emily Smith, Vice-Chair of the Board took part in the *Mind the Gap! The Scale of the Skills Shortage and How We Can Tackle It* panel session at the Skills and Employment Summit 2022. Other members of the panel included Bethan Staton, Public Policy Reporter, The Financial Times, Sue Lovelock, Director - Professional and Technical Education, Department for Education, Rachel Hewitt, Chief Executive, MillionPlus, Matthew Percival, Programme Director - Skills & Inclusion CBI, and Lewis Cooper, Director, Independent Commission the College of the Future. Cllr Smith spoke about LGA's work on 'green' jobs, and the importance of councils and devolution of funding along with responsibilities in relation to skills development.
8. The Board along with City Regions Board 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.

### **UK Shared Prosperity Fund**

9. On 15 June, lead members of the City Regions and People & Places Board, along with nominated members representing Core Cities, the County Council Network, District Council Network, Key Cities and London Councils, attended a roundtable with Minister Neil O'Brien to discuss the progress of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
10. Members welcomed the recognition of councils as place leaders and the removal of bidding processes. They also raised councils' concerns relating to the short timeframes, the role of MPs, the potential funding gap for skills provision and the need for there to be longer term funding stability that meets the quantum and longevity of the European funding it is replacing. We will continue this channel of engagement to raise councils' concerns for the fund.

**Contact officer:**Rebecca Cox

**Position:**Principal Policy Adviser

**Phone no:**0207 187 7384

**Email:**[Rebecca.cox@local.gov.uk](mailto:Rebecca.cox@local.gov.uk)