

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

### Levelling Up

1. The [LGA's Levelling Up Locally Inquiry report](#) was published in March 2023, broadening the conversation around levelling up through five roundtable discussions, commissioned research and analysis of demographic trends. The inquiry explored how the Government's levelling up agenda might better strengthen local areas by looking beyond the Levelling Up White Paper to explore the role local leadership can play in shaping a recovery that reduced inequality for all.
2. I launched the report at a hybrid event with over 100 attendees, and speakers included Sarah Longlands from CLES, Professor Francesca Gains from Policy at Manchester and Professor Michael Kenny from the Bennett Institute. The inquiry's findings will be used to inform the Board's future public affairs work and influence manifestos in the 2023/24 cycle, with a planned Devolution APPG session exploring its recommendations.
3. The Board approved the creation and co-sponsorship of a health devolution working group with the NHS Confederation. This working group has held its first meeting in April and provides an opportunity to ensure that learning can be shared between local government, the NHS and Integrated Care Systems (ICSs). The three boards with an interest in health devolution (the City Regions Board, the People and Places Board, and the Community Wellbeing Board) all have a nominated representative on the working group. Sarah Pickup, Deputy Chief Executive of the LGA is also a member of the working group.
4. National Farmers Union (NFU) president Minette Batters and Tim Goodship from the Environment Strategy Directorate at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) attended the March Board and discussed rural proofing policy and how rural interests will be integrated across Government's approach to levelling up, including future plans. The Board will use the discussion to develop policy lines in the 23/24 cycle relating to levelling up rural areas to ensure future policy creation is rural proofed.

### Digital infrastructure and inclusion

5. The Board commissioned DMS Research and Consulting to produce a report on councils' role in tackling digital exclusion. This was [published](#) in May and a letter has been written to the Minister highlighting recommendations for Government

and inviting a meeting to discuss the findings with the LGA's Digital Champion, Cllr Mark Hawthorne. The Chief Executive of Good Things Foundation, Helen Milner, has written a [think piece](#) in support of the report's recommendations. A press release for the report has received local, trade and [national press coverage](#).

6. The Board has continued to support councils with the digital switchover. Following publication of the [digital switch readiness survey](#) to understand councils' position on awareness, planning and implementation, the [digital switchover hub](#) has been updated in collaboration with key partners and a [communications toolkit](#) launched in April for councils to raise awareness of the switchover locally. To date it has received over 14,000 impressions on social media with the toolkit receiving around 400 unique views.
7. Continuing to highlight the importance of improved digital connectivity has remained at the forefront of the Board's work programme. The Board's longstanding call for Government to recognise the importance of local authority digital champions was recognised in Government's recently published [UK Wireless Infrastructure Strategy](#). The Board will now work to see how it can influence the practical outcomes of the Wireless Infrastructure Strategy.

## Growth and productivity

8. Following the announcement of the allocation of the second round of the Levelling Up Fund, the People and Places and City Regions Boards sent a letter to the Secretary of State outlining experiences and asking for an open review of the process ahead of any future rounds of funding. Dehenna Davison MP has agreed to meet with the People and Places and City Regions Board Chairs ahead of the third round of the Levelling Up Fund to discuss how the fund could be implemented in a way which would both be cost effective and empower local areas to level up their communities. The People and Places and City Regions Boards also issued a [press release](#) at the time of the announcement and led the sector response, receiving widespread media coverage.
9. The People and Places and City Regions Boards commissioned Shared Intelligence to provide support for councils and combined authorities undertaking Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) integration and to share good practice and learning, initially in response to the Ministerial letter in March 2022 setting out pathways of integration into combined authorities or institutions with devolved powers. The project saw a series of interviews and workshops carried out. The report was finalised earlier this month and draws on learning from research between November 2022 and March 2023 and DLUHC officials attended the sessions. It will now be used to inform the Board's response to the Government's

information gathering exercise following the Chancellor's announcement in the 2023 budget that he was 'minded to' end funding to LEPs from April 2024.

10. The Board, working with City Regions Board, also commissioned Shared Intelligence to capture learning for policymakers in central and local government from eight place-based programmes that have been delivered over the last 20 years. The final report identifies eight key lessons for policymakers to consider. The report has recently been [published](#) on the LGA's website and is being used to inform further work related to the simplification of growth funding.
11. Following a discussion at the Board of the impact of short term lets and second homes on rural communities, the Board is supporting Localis's research into the role of community land trusts as one option to mitigate the effects.

## UK Shared Prosperity Fund

12. With the City Regions Board we commissioned Shared Intelligence to deliver action learning sets for officers in lead authorities across February and March. A number of tools and learning are being developed to support the sector introduce and deliver the fund. The LGA are working with lead authorities to encourage networking and share learning.
13. Following the announcement that lead authorities could use year 2 allocations of UKSPF for the People & Skills priority, Cllr Kevin Bentley welcomed the [additional flexibility](#), something the LGA has consistently called for. We also highlighted the lateness of the announcement, making it difficult for lead authorities to utilise the new flexibility, while also calling for longer term funding beyond March 2025.

## Employment and skills

14. We continue to promote the role of local government in employment and skills and our Work Local objectives through select committees. For instance, in May 2023, the Boards responded to the APPG for Youth Employment Committee inquiry into [Place-based approaches to youth employment](#).
15. In April, I represented the People and Places Board alongside Cllr Hinchcliffe from the City Regions Board at a meeting with the Skills Minister, the Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP. Through it, we are seeking to create stronger ties at both political and officer level between local authorities and DfE.
16. Joint Board work across People and Places, City Regions and Community Wellbeing is being undertaken to explore and define the role of local government

in addressing economic inactivity. LGA officers expect to finalise work during the summer.

## Green jobs and skills

17. The Government's Green Jobs Delivery Group agreed for the formation of a time limited Local Capacity and Capability sub-group that held four evidence sessions between March and May, which the LGA took the opportunity to promote the Work Local model as a solution to some of the local capacity and capability challenges to create green jobs and skills. The group are developing recommendations for national government to consider over the summer.
18. Local Government is represented by Solace, ADEPT, Mayoral Combined Authorities as well as the LGA, with Cllr Emily O'Brien for the People & Places Board. There is also representation from business, energy companies, and education and training providers. The LGA are engaging with the partners to support the sub-committee as well as inform our wider policy development work.

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