

Britain's Leading Edge

Purpose of Report

For information.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

This report provides background for members about the work of Britain's Leading Edge ahead of Cllr Linda Taylor, Leader of Cornwall Council, attending the full board meeting to have a wider discussion about opportunities for collaboration with the People and Places board.

LGA Plan Theme: Supporting local people and places

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to note the background and current work of Britain's Leading Edge ahead of a wider discussion with Cllr Linda Taylor at the board meeting.

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Britain's Leading Edge

Background

1. Britain's Leading Edge is a collaboration of 12 upper tier local authorities on England's periphery without major cities, representing eight per cent of England's GVA (equivalent to English core cities) and 37 per cent of England's renewable energy.
2. Average per capita GVA in peripheral regions without major cities is growing more slowly than England's average, and average median earnings are around £2,600 less than the English average.
3. Britain's Leading Edge was launched in July 2019 amid the UK's exit from the European Union, to provide a platform for its members to contribute to a balanced debate about the future of the UK economy.
4. Over the past three years the group has:
 - 4.1 Co-sponsored with the University of Exeter a report on sustainable regional development in peripheral regions - 'Levelling Up the Periphery: Investing in Our Natural Assets for Prosperity and Growth'.
 - 4.2 Organised an academic conference on regional development in the UK, which aims to grow into an academic network, looking at the unique advantages and disadvantages of peripheral regions.
 - 4.3 Worked with the Treasury to reduce rural disadvantage in the Green Book. The group continues to be represented through Cornwall Council on the Green Book working group.
 - 4.4 Provided oral and written evidence to multiple parliamentary select committees.
 - 4.5 Organised a roundtable discussion with Britain's Leading Edge political leaders in the margins of the LGA Conference in Harrogate.

Opportunities for collaboration

5. Cllr Linda Taylor, Leader of Cornwall Council, a key member of Britain's Leading Edge, attended the November People and Places board meeting. Cllr Taylor reflected on the Levelling Up White Paper and how the levelling up agenda might support people living on the periphery and discussed 'where next for Britain's periphery?'. Members invited Cllr Taylor to attend another board meeting in the cycle

to update on Britain's Leading Edge's work programme and discuss opportunities for collaboration with the People and Places Board.

6. Since Cllr Taylor last attended the Board meeting [Britain's Leading Edge has published its 2023 manifesto](#). It commits to:
 - 6.1 Continuing to advocate for moving focus and investment beyond the policy corridor, which still affects so much of central Government policy.
 - 6.2 Press for all parts of the UK to be truly levelled up, so that rural areas perform as well as metropolitan areas do with reference to the 12 Levelling Up Missions.
 - 6.3 Helping Government deliver on its promise that the UK will be net carbon zero by 2050. Britain's Leading Edge regions contain the clean energy capacity which will power this commitment.
 - 6.4 Building UK energy and food resilience, particularly in the light of ongoing geo-political developments.
 - 6.5 Advocating for fairer Government investment in research, development and the vital connectivity infrastructure that peripheral areas need to unlock our potential for growth, particularly in food production, clean energy, sustainable transport and digital.
 - 6.6 Championing Government recognition for the extra costs involved in providing reliable, high-quality public services in peripheral areas, and pressing for fair funding to drive innovation in service delivery.
7. Members might wish to discuss the specific commitments in Britain's Leading Edge's manifesto with Cllr Linda Taylor and consider how the People and Places Board might work in collaboration with Britain's Leading Edge to ensure the rural proofing of future policy creation.
8. Having heard from Minette Batters, President of the National Farmers Union and Tim Goodship, Head of Rural Policy at the Department for the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs in March, the discussion with Cllr Taylor provides an opportunity for members to continue to engage with key rural stakeholders to inform the development of the Board's key asks of the rural sector.

The meeting implications for Wales

9. Many policy areas are devolved, however where the topic allows we will work with the Welsh Local Government Association and other bodies to ensure issues relating to Welsh councils are properly represented and we are aligning our lobbying work where appropriate.

Financial Implications

10. Any financial implications arising from this work will be met from the Boards' agreed programme budgets and the LGA's improvement grant.

Equalities implications

11. The cost-of-living crisis, rising inflation and struggle with low levels of labour productivity strongly impact specific rural communities. LGA research found [rural and coastal areas are disproportionately impacted by macroeconomic downturns](#) and can be slow to recover, worsening the social and economic challenges facing their communities. This workstream highlights these challenges and continues to advocate for Government moving focus and investment to strengthen all rural communities.

Next steps

12. Members are asked to note background and current work of Britain's Leading Edge to inform a wider discussion at the Board with Cllr Linda Taylor.
13. Following a steer from members, officers will follow up any opportunities for collaboration with Britain's Leading Edge to strengthen and inform the Board's work in the 2023/24 cycle.