

## **People & Places Board Annual Report**

### **Purpose of report**

For information.

### **Summary**

This report summarises the Board's activity over the past year. It sets out key achievements in relation to the priorities for the **People & Places Board** in 2022/23 and looks forward to next year's priorities.

Is this report confidential? Yes  No

### **Recommendation/s**

Members are invited to:

1. Note the achievements against the board's priorities for 2022/23; and
2. Note the board's proposed priority areas for 2023/24

### **Action/s**

Officers to take forward actions as appropriate.

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## Background

1. The People and Places Board provides 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 to ensure the important contributions of rural and coastal areas to levelling up the economy and social outcomes are maximised. The Board continued to highlight the importance of digital connectivity and ensuring the resilience of rural infrastructure.
2. Working with the City Regions Board, it developed its work on devolution and levelling up; the rising need for green skills, including on retrofitting, and continued its focus on better and more joined up policies and funding for local growth. It also worked with other LGA policy boards on cross-cutting issues of rural concern, like such as nutrient neutrality and the growth in second homes in rural and coastal areas.
3. 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 Bboard is continuing to meet its original purpose in response to the emerging priorities of non-metropolitan areas.

## Priorities and Achievements

### Levelling up and devolution

4. The Board continues to drive the national debate about the future of levelling up and devolution. The LGA's [Levelling Up Locally Inquiry report](#) was published in March 2023, broadening the conversation around levelling up to explore how the Government's levelling up agenda might better strengthen local areas by looking beyond the Levelling Up White Paper. The report was launched by Cllr Kevin Bentley 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.
5. The Board took forward new topics for devolution, approving the creation and co-sponsorship of a health devolution working group with the NHS Confederation and including representatives from People and Places, City Regions and Community Wellbeing as well as the LGA's deputy chief executive. This working group has held its first meeting and provides an opportunity to ensure that learning can be shared between local government,

the NHS and Integrated Care Systems (ICSs). Cllr Emily Smith represents the People and Places Board.

## Local growth

6. Following the announcement of the allocation of the second round of the Levelling Up Fund, the People and Places and City Regions Boards issued a [press release](#) raising concerns with the process. The LGA led the sector response, receiving widespread media coverage. The Board Chairs 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 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.
7. In response to the Ministerial letter in March 2022 setting out pathways of Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) integration into combined authorities or institutions with devolved powers the People and Places and City Regions Boards commissioned Shared Intelligence to provide support for councils and combined authorities undertaking integration and to share good practice and learning. The final report draws on learning from research between November 2022 and March 2023. 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.
8. 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.
9. The People and Places and City Regions Board have jointly commissioned WPI Economics to explore councils' future role in driving growth and prosperity. This is due for completion in June 2023 and will help inform the LGA's manifesto asks ahead of the next general election.
10. The Government has recognised the People and Places and City Regions Boards' proposals for the role of local government and local leaders in the design of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). In the announcement of the allocations of the fund in April, the Chair [welcomed](#) the fund, and said

government should also provide local areas with greater flexibilities and longer term funding that provides the same quantum and longevity that European funding provided. In November, Cllr Bentley [called](#) for the approval of local investment plans, and when they were subsequently approved in December, the LGA [made the case for](#) further flexibilities. DLUHC subsequently removed some restrictions on in-year spending in January, with a further announcement made in March on the introduction of the flexibility to spend UKSPF on the People & Skills Priority in 2023/24.

11. To support the sector with the opportunities provided by the introduction of a new fund, the Boards commissioned Shared Intelligence to undertake action learning sets to support local authorities with the introduction of UKSPF and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) in early 2023. As there has been significant interest in participating, the LGA has created a wider informal officer network to share learning. The LGA will publish the learning from the action learning sets by the beginning of June and will continue to support continual officer engagement with DLUHC and DEFRA for both UKSPF and REPF.
12. The Board is supporting Localis in a project exploring the possibilities for Community Land Trusts to address pressures on some rural housing markets as a result of second homes and short term lets.

## Employment and Skills

13. Since last summer's publication of our employment and skills devolution proposals '[Work Local: Unlocking talent to level up](#)', we have engaged a wide range of parliamentarians and stakeholders on how it could improve services. To build on the growing support for the Board's proposals, over the coming months, we plan to develop further methods to communicate our proposals to decision makers and stakeholders as well as to look at ways it can be implemented.
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 January, Cllr Toby Savage gave oral evidence on behalf of the LGA at the Work and Pensions Select Committee's inquiry on the DWP's Plan for Jobs and employment support. Our [written submission](#) was cited widely by committee members. Alongside this we [responded](#) to the [APPG for Youth Employment Committee](#) inquiry into how young peoples' mental health is affecting labour market outcomes. More recently in May 2023, the Boards responded to the APPG for Youth Employment Committee inquiry into [Place-based approaches to youth employment](#).

15. Work in ongoing to influence the outcomes of the [Commission on the Future of Employment Support](#) which is looking at ways in which employment support and services could be more effective.
16. Building more strategic relationships with Government departments including the Departments for Work and Pensions and Education (DWP and DfE) are important for both the LGA and councils to improve policy making at national level and create stronger ties locally. Devolution areas already have a relationship with these departments, so the LGA has proactively sought to develop links with councils not currently in a devolution area. In the last year, working with our local government partners, we have set up an LGA/DWP advisory group for councils to discuss issues related to labour market policy. The group last met in February and discussed youth hubs, contracted employment programmes and economic inactivity. It will next meet in June. We have also had positive discussion with DfE to establish a similar grouping.
17. With LEP transition under a year away and an increasing focus on the role of councils in growth, the councils' economic development (ED) functions will change. Working with councils, we have developed a guide to economic development teams – their role and skills needs. The report shows how ED services are delivered across England, shares learning across the sector with examples and top tips of what works and sets out the future skills and capacity challenges they face and where they can go for support. It will be published as an online guide on our website.
18. A joint piece of work developed by People and Places, City Regions and Community Wellbeing Boards has explored the role of local government in addressing economic inactivity and what factors could be driving this locally. We aim to publish the work in the summer.
19. The People and Places and City Regions Board jointly agreed to examine how the role of councils in supporting equality, diversity, and economic inclusion could be advanced to help unlock talent and level up local areas. The work will conclude in June with a compendium of case studies and the LGA 'Economic Inclusion Principles' paper to share learning across councils to guide the advancement of economic inclusion in their communities.

### **Green Jobs and Skills**

20. A key priority of the Board has been the need for green jobs and skills to deliver net zero ambitions. This includes influencing government policy to enable local government to bring together skill providers, businesses and industry. To do so, the People & Places and City Regions Boards have been supporting the local government representative on the Ministerial Green Jobs Delivery Group, successfully securing a time limited Local Capacity and

Capability sub group (LCCG). The LCCG comprises of representatives from skill providers, business, industry, national and local government, with the sector being represented by the LGA, Solace, ADEPT, Mayoral Combined Authority Network and UK100. It has explored a range of issues including a national definition of green jobs, the strategic mapping of key net zero infrastructure projects, the opportunities and barriers to developing the workforce needed to deliver net zero and local delivery mechanisms. This has been an opportunity to promote the Work Local model. The LCCG will be developing recommendations by July.

21. In tandem with the work of the LCCG, the City Regions and People & Places Boards are developing policy positions on the place-based approach to enable local places to develop the workforce and jobs needed to deliver net zero. This has included utilising the new partnerships the LGA has created through the LCCG. This work will be done to complement the net zero and climate change work of the EEHT Board.

## Digital Connectivity

22. 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](#). Councillor Mark Hawthorne the LGA's Digital Connectivity Champion has been invited to represent the LGA on the newly formed National Connectivity Alliance, an alliance of telecoms providers, infrastructure providers, landowners, professional advisers and wider stakeholders to discuss the importance of delivering world class connectivity for all. Cllr Hawthorne also sits on the Digital Connectivity Forum's Digital Infrastructure Working Group representing the LGA's People and Places Board.
23. The Board has continued to expand its work around digital connectivity and inclusion in the 22/23 cycle. It has supported councils with the digital switchover publishing a [digital switch readiness survey](#) to understand councils' position on awareness, planning and implementation to inform the LGA's support offer to councils and the Board's lobbying position. The [digital switchover hub](#) has been updated in collaboration with key partners and a [communications toolkit](#) has been developed for councils to raise awareness of the switchover locally. Officers continue to meet with DSIT officials on behalf of the Board to raise areas of concern.
24. Following a steer from Members a similar survey is in the process of being developed by the LGA's research team exploring potential implications for the

sector of the 2G and 3G switch off. The results will be used to inform the Board's lobbying position in the 23/24 board cycle.

25. The Board commissioned DMS Research and Consulting to produce a report on councils' role in tackling digital exclusion. This has recently been [published](#) 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](#).

### Draft priorities for 2023/24

26. The Board will look to build on its successes as it plans for the 2023/24 board cycle. Areas of focus are likely to include:
- a. Making the case for investment in rural areas ahead of the upcoming general election.
  - b. Influencing national policy on levelling up and devolution, including a focus on non-metropolitan areas and widening the scope of powers available.
  - c. Embedding our Work Local proposals into national policy, including specific policy proposals to support green jobs and net zero.
  - d. Streamlining local growth funding and implementing the learning from existing funding programmes.
  - e. Supporting councils with the transitions of LEPs to local government and removing barriers to councils' abilities to support local inclusive growth.
  - f. Aligning digital infrastructure and digital inclusion policy through joined-up national policy development and support for local leadership.

### Next steps

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