

## People & Places

### Background

1. The country's non-metropolitan areas – towns, rural and coastal places – play a crucial role in the nation's economy and delivering our shared ambition to level up the country. Many of their residents benefit from a high quality of life, the characteristics of which cannot be obtained in the cities and suburbs. However, non-metropolitan areas also have their own often-distinct challenges with their own problematic social and economic consequences.
2. The People and Places Board provides a clear voice and resource for non-metropolitan authorities within the LGA. This year the Board had successes in its leadership of digital connectivity issues, making the case for an evidence-led approach to growth funding, and ensuring local government has a seat at the table on crucial plans for green skills and jobs.
3. It maintained a focus on the importance of 'rural proofing' Government policies to ensure the important contributions of towns, rural and coastal areas to levelling up the economy and social outcomes are maximised. Working with the City Regions Board, it developed its work on devolution and levelling up; the Work Local approach to employment and skills, and 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, such as nutrient neutrality and the growth in second homes in rural and coastal areas.

### Priorities and Achievements

#### Levelling up and devolution

4. The Board, with the City Regions 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, looking beyond the Levelling Up White Paper to explore how the Government's agenda might better strengthen local areas. 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 also approved 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. The Board has secured an important commitment from Government following the announcement of the allocation of the second round of the Levelling Up Fund. With the City Regions Board, we ensured [councils' concerns with the process](#) were aired across national media. 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. The People and Places and City Regions Board have long made the case for greater local democratic oversight of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Government is now pressing ahead with LEP reforms and the Boards are working to support the sector through these changes, commissioning 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. Recognising the renewed interest in place-based public services, 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. Councils and combined authorities are increasingly recognised for their role in creating the conditions within which local economies and communities can thrive. To contribute to the LGA's thought leadership in this space, 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](#) 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 noted the presence of tourist 'hot spots' in some non-metropolitan areas and the resulting pressure on local housing markets from second homes and short term lets. To explore options to address this alongside work undertaken by the EEHT and CTS Boards, the Board is supporting Localis in a project looking at Community Land Trusts.

## Employment and Skills

13. Support for the Board's employment and skills devolution proposals '[Work Local: Unlocking talent to level up](#)' continues to grow, and we have engaged

a wide range of parliamentarians and stakeholders on how it could improve services. Over the coming months, we will develop further methods to communicate our proposals to decision makers and stakeholders as well as looking at ways it can be implemented.

14. 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](#). Work is 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.
15. The Board has successfully built more strategic relationships with Government departments including the Departments for Work and Pensions and Education (DWP and DfE) in order 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, which last met in June. We have also had positive discussion with DfE to establish a similar grouping.
16. With LEP transition under a year away and an increasing focus on the role of councils in growth, 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.
17. Recognising the increasing prominence of the issue of economic inactivity, the Board, with the City Regions and Community Wellbeing Boards has commissioned work to explore 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.

18. 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 economic inclusion principles paper to share learning across councils to guide the advancement of economic inclusion in their communities.

## Green Jobs and Skills

19. Delivering on net zero ambitions depends on the right pipeline of training, skills and jobs being in place. The Board has played a leadership role in influencing government policy to enable local government to bring together skill providers, businesses and industry through the Ministerial Green Jobs Delivery Group, successfully securing a time limited Local Capacity and Capability sub group (LCCG). The LCCG comprises 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.
20. 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

21. Continuing to highlight the importance of improved digital connectivity and addressing the particular challenges experienced by non-metropolitan areas 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 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.

22. The Board has continued influence the national debate as it expands 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. Our popular [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.
23. Members raised their concerns about the impact on councils, residents and businesses of the 2G and 3G switch off. The LGA is developing a survey for councils exploring potential implications for the sector and the results will be used to inform the Board's lobbying position in the 23/24 board cycle.
24. The Board has taken a leadership role promoting councils' role in tackling digital exclusion and commissioned DMS Research and Consulting to produce a report. This has recently been [published](#) with local, trade and [national press coverage](#) 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.

### Draft priorities for 2023/24

25. 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:
  - 25.1. Making the case for investment in rural areas ahead of the upcoming general election.
  - 25.2. Rural-proofing emerging government policy including on connectivity and transport.
  - 25.3. Influencing national policy on levelling up and devolution, including a focus on non-metropolitan areas and widening the scope of powers available.
  - 25.4. Embedding our Work Local proposals into national policy, including specific policy proposals to support green jobs and net zero, including opportunities for roles in food, farming, forestry and nature restoration; and exploring attainment disparities in rural and non-metropolitan areas.
  - 25.5. Streamlining local growth funding and implementing the learning from existing funding programmes.

- 25.6. Supporting councils with the transitions of LEPs to local government and removing barriers to councils' abilities to support local inclusive growth.
- 25.7. Aligning digital infrastructure and digital inclusion policy through joined-up national policy development and support for local leadership.

### Next steps

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