

People and Places Draft Work Programme 2023-24

Purpose of Report

For direction.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

This paper sets out a brief overview of the Board's work and asks members to comment on the Board's priorities and its work with other representative bodies.

LGA Plan Theme: Stronger local economies, thriving local democracy

Recommendation(s)

That members comment on and agree the draft work programme and priorities.

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Background

1. The People and Places Board represents the non-metropolitan members of the LGA (rural, coastal, and town areas). It also works in partnership with the City Regions Board on a number of cross-cutting issues such as devolution, local economic growth and skills and employment support.
2. In discussing the run up to the next general election in the last Board cycle, members were keen to see progress on the Board's policy priorities and also to see a greater recognition at a national level of the needs and potential of non-metropolitan councils. This paper contains a brief update on work across the Board's core policy areas and asks for lead members' views on the draft policy priorities agreed at the end of the previous Board cycle. We would also be keen to hear members' early thoughts on the new inclusion of strategic housing and transport in its remit.
3. There are a number of LGA Special Interest Groups and other representative bodies relevant to the Board's work, including:
 - Britain's Leading Edge
 - Coastal SIG
 - County Councils Network
 - District Councils' Network
 - SPARSE/Rural Services Network.

The Board's relationships with these groups varies according to the work programme and tends to be driven by the priorities of the day. This might include, for example, presenting to the Board, working with officers on particular policy issues or nominating members for steering groups. A steer from members on how they would like to work together over the next year would be helpful.

Local Government White Paper

4. At the annual conference in July, the LGA launched its ['Make it Local'](#) report. The report sets out a range of clear offers from local government in the areas that pollsters are reporting as the biggest issues of concern for the public, and therefore are likely to be prominent in national parties' manifesto proposals. Alongside the LGA's ongoing work to influence party manifestos, we will be working with the sector to develop more detailed proposals for a new or returning government to implement. Proposals for the White Paper will be discussed at the Executive Advisory Board on 7 September.

Policy update

Rural and non-metropolitan policy

5. In the last Board cycle, members discussed the importance of non-metropolitan areas to levelling up, including strengthening the rural economy, developing rural infrastructure, delivering rural services and rural-proofing policy. They also met with a number of other organisations, including Defra, to consider opportunities for lobbying on behalf of non-

metropolitan areas in the run up to the next general election. Members suggested that this incoming Board consider this as part of their work programme for this Board cycle.

6. Following the publication of Government's positive [Unleashing rural opportunity](#) report we understand that Defra are working on a further report, and officers have spoken favourably about the possibility of the Board hosting an event focused on non-metropolitan areas, with a suggestion that the Secretary of State would also be interested.

Growth and prosperity

7. The role of local government in local economic growth and prosperity is increasingly seen as critical to supporting the national economy, but more can be done to support councils and devolved areas in their efforts. The People and Places and Cities Board commissioned WPI Economics to review councils' current roles and responsibilities and put forward recommendations for improvement. The final draft will be available for the September Board meeting and can be used to bolster our lobbying activity for party manifestos and the White Paper.
8. Earlier this month Government confirmed [its decision to withdraw funding to Local Enterprise Partnerships \(LEPs\) and move their functions to local government](#), supported by some revenue funding in 2024/25. Government also published its plan to [simplify grant funding](#) to local government. We also expect Round 3 of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) to be announced in the coming months. The Board might wish to undertake work in these areas to ensure positive outcomes for local government; we also have an outstanding offer to meet the Levelling Up Minister Dehenna Davison MP to discuss Government's plan for the third round of the LUF.

Skills and employment support

9. The LGA, councils and devolved authorities and partner local government representative bodies are united in their view that the status quo in designing, commissioning, and delivering employment and skills activity needs to change. The sector has a time-limited opportunity to influence all political parties that the LGA's Work Local approach can address the challenges and opportunities faced by people and places, and that it can be implemented across all places over time. A returning Government or new administration will want to adopt policies that it can move forward with at pace and with limited budgets. We need to both work through the operational level detail needed to turn our agreed policy lines into reality, as well as communicate our messages in a clear and simple way.
10. We have upcoming research on economic inactivity, one of the biggest labour market challenges, due to be published in the autumn. Officers continue to work with the Departments for Education, Work and Pensions, and Health and Social Care to promote a place-based approach. Following agreement by the previous Board, officers are scoping a piece of work to evidence how the fragmentation of the transport system impacts access to education, training and employment opportunities. Following a successful first meeting with the Skills Minister, the Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP earlier this year, we will look to secure a follow up meeting as agreed. Government's working groups on green jobs will put forward their recommendations in the autumn; there are

opportunities to undertake work on the workforce needs of delivering low carbon energy security and reducing the nature and land skills gap.

11. A separate paper on skills and employment support is included later in this meeting for a fuller discussion.

Devolution and Levelling Up

12. It is positive that all national parties have signalled a commitment to further devolution to local government. The LGA-sponsored [Devolution APPG](#) will continue to promote the opportunities for devolution with Parliamentarians, building on the People and Places and City Regions Boards' Levelling Up Locally Inquiry. The City Regions, Community Wellbeing and People and Places Boards are part of the time limited health and devolution working group established in April 2023 and co-sponsored by NHS Confederation and the LGA. It will meet for a final time in September to agree recommendations, which could feed into the LGA's White Paper work.
13. The LGA, through its improvement and support work, also works with combined authorities and existing and aspiring devolution areas to support them and share learning and best practice.

Digital connectivity

14. In the last Board cycle the Board expanded its remit to consider the role of councils in tackling digital exclusion and the need for a joined-up approach from Government to support this. It also playing a leading role in highlighting councils' concerns on the switch from analogue to digital phone lines and the impact on users of telecare services and others. This work is ongoing, alongside rising concern about similar issues relating to 2G and 3G switch off with mobile networks, and we have surveyed councils over the summer about this. Lead members also suggested the Board consider the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the role of councils and councillors.
15. The Government's recent [UK Wireless Infrastructure Strategy](#) had a number of positive features including recognition of the need for local authority digital champions, the creation of a Rural Connectivity Champion, investment in 5G 'innovation regions' and the need to improve the measurement and reporting of mobile coverage. Cllr Mark Hawthorne met Simon Fell MP, the new Rural Connectivity Champion, and was able to influence his upcoming a paper for the Defra and DSIT Secretaries of State. If members agree, influencing the actions arising from the strategy would be a useful focus for the Board's work.
16. A separate paper on digital connectivity is included later in this meeting for a fuller discussion.

Proposal

17. At the end of its 2022-23 Board cycle, members proposed the following draft priorities for the next Board:
 - 17.1. Making the case for investment in rural areas ahead of the upcoming general election.

- 17.2. Rural-proofing emerging government policy including on connectivity and transport.
 - 17.3. Influencing national policy on levelling up and devolution, including a focus on non-metropolitan areas and widening the scope of powers available.
 - 17.4. 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.
 - 17.5. Streamlining local growth funding and implementing the learning from existing funding programmes.
 - 17.6. Supporting councils with the transition of LEPs to local government and removing barriers to councils' abilities to support local inclusive growth.
 - 17.7. Aligning digital infrastructure and digital inclusion policy through joined-up national policy development and support for local leadership.
18. Members are asked to comment on whether:
- 18.1. These are the right priorities – is anything missing, or is anything there that can now be de-prioritised? For example, to support the inclusion of strategic housing and transport we might take a lighter-touch approach to devolution.
 - 18.2. Any priorities need to be updated to reflect current challenges and opportunities.

Implications for Wales

- 19. Many areas of the Board's policy are devolved, however we undertake to work with the WLGA to share learning as necessary.

Financial Implications

- 20. The work described can be undertaken from within the Board's budget.

Equalities implications

- 21. The Board has sought to reflect the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion throughout its work programme, including the particular needs of communities in non-metropolitan areas. An equalities champion is due to be centrally appointed to the Board in the autumn.

Next steps

- 22. Officers will take forward the work programme in line with members' direction.