

Work programme updates

Purpose of Report

For information.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

This paper provides members with an update of activity across the Board's work programme. Members might like to note the priorities agreed by lead members for the Board's work on strategic housing and transport.

LGA Plan Theme: Stronger local economies, thriving local democracy

Recommendation(s)

That the Board notes the updates.

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Work programme updates

Background

1. This paper outlines the work undertaken since the last Board meeting across the Board's work programme. It also shares with members the priorities agreed by lead members for the Board's work on strategic housing and transport.

Strategic housing

2. Lead members discussed the thoughtful and ambitious proposals put forward by members, which covered a wide range of topics. They agreed that the Board's first areas activity will be:
 - 2.1. A review of the role of housing in town centre regeneration in non-metropolitan areas. This will be a timely piece of work given the ongoing challenges for town centres in many areas. There might also be the opportunity to engage DLUHC ministers given their interest in this issue and the announcement of the ten pilot areas for the [High Streets Accelerator Programme](#).
 - 2.2. The role of Homes England and its relationship with councils in the context of devolution and levelling up. This is an opportunity to describe councils' ambitions and help those areas interested in devolution shape their proposals in this area.
3. Officers will develop project proposals and share these with lead members in the first instance.
4. In response to some other proposals raised by members, there are also a number of opportunities to take forward work alongside other LGA Boards:
 - 4.1. Concerns with housing affordability in rural and non-metropolitan areas:
 - 4.1.1. This Board and the City Regions Board will be invited to contribute to work led by the Economy and Resources and Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Boards on support for low income households, including temporary accommodation costs.
 - 4.1.2. The Countryside Charity (CPRE) last month published a [review of rural affordable housing](#). The Board might wish to invite CPRE to present to the Board on the next steps following its publication and the possibility of any joint working in future.

- 4.2. On homelessness, the EEHT Board in its previous Board cycle had signed up to be part of the [Rural Homelessness Counts Coalition](#) hosted by English Rural. We understand that English Rural will be launching some work in early 2024 on rough sleeping in rural areas which will be shared with the People and Places Board for comment.
- 4.3. On pressures from second homes and short term lets: we are waiting for Government's response to two consultations on use class changes and a registration scheme for short term lets. The LINZ and Culture, Tourism and Sport Boards have led the work to date with input from People and Places, and we expect this way of working to continue. At the January meeting of the CTS Board, the DCMS Secretary of State confirmed that the work is continuing and we should 'watch this space.'
- 4.4. On design codes, the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) has recently launched a [Design Code Practitioners' Network](#).
5. Officers have kept a record of all members' suggestions and will review them with lead members as the work programme progresses.

Strategic transport

6. On strategic transport, lead members agreed:
 - 6.1. A project looking at demand-responsive transport including good practice and how it might meet particular gaps in provision such as night-time transport. This should take into account the impact of the rural mobility fund, which is ending shortly.
 - 6.2. A review of strategic transport boards: their effectiveness, lessons learned, and good practice.
7. We are working with transport officers to develop project proposals which we will share with lead members in the first instance. Thank you to members who offered to share their experiences; we will follow this up.
8. In addition, members expressed interest in:
 - 8.1. (Lack of) rural bus services and their impact on public services and local economies. Issues with bus services are often raised at the Board. The EEHT Board and the Urban Transport Group (previously the Passenger Transport Executive Group, pteg) published a [report in September](#) looking at issues and options for local bus services, including rural areas. The CCN published a [report in the summer](#) on the pressure on county bus networks. This Board, with the City Regions Board and LINZ have commissioned work

on the impact of transport connectivity on skills and employment support; an update is included in at paragraphs 14-16.

- 8.2. An investigation into home to school transport in non-metropolitan areas examining current issues and good practice. ADEPT and ADCS have recently reviewed [home to school transport](#) and made a number of recommendations for reform. Members could invite representatives to the Board to reflect on the particular challenges for non-metropolitan areas and to hear on any progress from the work.

Local economic growth

9. **Growth funding:** The Board, alongside the City Regions Board, has jointly commissioned Athey Consulting to carry out a piece of technical analysis of previous and existing growth funds, identify the benefits and challenges of current methodologies used and lessons learned, and explore an alternative future model of growth funding which provides certainty and flexibility for councils which can be used to influence the next or successor government in their preparation for successor growth funds.
10. Officers have met with DLUHC officials to discuss their early thinking on the capacity and capability elements of the government's funding simplification plan.
11. Following comments from the Board and City Regions Board members, the report 'Devolution First: a five-point plan to support local growth and prosperity' has been signed off. Officers are now preparing for publication and a press launch.
12. The LGA also submitted [evidence on levelling up funding](#) in response to a short-notice request from the Public Accounts Committee.
13. **Local Enterprise Partnerships:** The Board, alongside the City Regions Board, has also commissioned Henham Strategy to develop a series of action learning sets to provide an opportunity for local areas to work through the challenges and opportunities of integration, with the findings published for other areas to benefit too. The findings from this research will be used to support the LGA's lobbying of central government to provide further support to councils and combined authorities with LEP integration.

Skills and employment

14. **Transport and skills:** To build on the People and Places and City Regions Boards' joint work to ensure economic inclusion, we have commissioned

Pragmatix Advisory to examine how the transport system impacts people and places by limiting or enabling access to skills, training, and the labour market.

15. The research aims to illustrate challenges in coastal, rural, and urban areas, as well as groups and communities experiencing disadvantage. The evidence will examine six case study local authorities to show the impact of transport challenges. Each case study area represents one of the six DEFRA rural/urban classifications: East Lindsey, Northumberland, South Staffordshire, Southend-on-Sea, Nottingham, and Lambeth. The common themes emerging from the research so far demonstrate that there are barriers to travel especially challenging for disadvantaged demographics; transport affordability is a problem for many people; reducing the cost of travel opens up choices in education and employment opportunities.
16. The final report will make a set of short- and long-term policy recommendations. Pragmatix Advisory will be invited to present the findings and recommendations to the board in March.
17. **Green Jobs:** The LGA has been supporting Kate Kennally, Chief Executive of Cornwall Council, who is the local government lead on the cross departmental ministerial Green Jobs Delivery Group and the local capacity and capability sub-group. We have been engaging the local government sector such as ADEPT, the Mayoral Combined Authorities network and UK100, as well as representatives of industry, business and training providers, developing recommendations for Government to consider as they draft a green jobs action plan expected after Spring 2024.
18. This has been an opportunity to work with partners and incorporate the principles of Work Local into the recommendations and develop the LGA's [Green Jobs Framework](#). We have engaged members and sought feedback from the City Regions, People & Places and the then EEHT Boards throughout this process during the 2022/23 Board cycle, with lead members of the three Boards providing additional feedback to the final draft of recommendations in December 2023.
19. We are also undertaking research into the role local government can play in supporting local food and drink supply chains. It will identify good practice in ensuring the local food and drink production, retail and tourism is central to delivering jobs and business growth. We are also seeking a supplier to provide additional research to support this work.
20. **Youth Employment UK Commission:** The LGA has been supporting the Youth Employment UK Commission on Level 2 and 3 Pathways for young people. The Commission aims to understand the impact of the Department for Education's decision to remove funding and support for some Level 2 Apprenticeships and for

some Level 2 and Level 3 vocational qualifications, and to propose solutions that will ‘allow all young people to flourish’.

21. Councillor Louise McKinlay along with Councillor Robert Alden from the City Regions Board continue to support the work of the Commission. A number of meetings have taken place between June 2023 and December 2023 and have involved young people, colleges, employers, and experts in youth employment and economics. The commission has also undertaken some ‘deep dives’ into local areas to demonstrate and evidence the impact of reforms on local areas.
22. The Commission is now moving into the final phase of developing short-term and long-term solutions. The LGA is continuing to engage with the Commission to ensure that the sector’s views are reflected in the recommendations.
23. The Commission has agreed that the recommendations should be based on the following principles: a) inclusion, aspiration, appropriate, holistic; b) sufficiency and efficiency; c) equality and quality; d) flexibility; e) integration and clarity; f) clear and stable signalling of the skills value of qualifications. The Commission is due to produce a final report in early 2024 with policy recommendations.
24. **House of Lords Public Services Committee inquiry into the transition from education to employment for young disabled people:** Last year the House of Lords Public Services Committee launched an [inquiry into the transition from education to employment for young disabled people](#).
25. The inquiry aims to examine young disabled people’s experiences of the transition from education to employment. This will include career and employment support and advice young disabled people receive throughout this transition; how far public services demonstrate best practice on employing young disabled people; support for employers; and enforcement of the rights of young disabled people in the workplace.
26. As part of this inquiry, the Committee is examining the role of local government during this transition, for example, the provision of employment support, training, and opportunities, and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP). The LGA has been invited to give [written and oral evidence to the Committee](#). We are currently working to source an LGA speaker for the oral session on 7th February 2024.

Devolution and levelling up

27. **Health devolution:** The NHS Confederation, through its Health Economic Partnerships work programme and ICS network, established a time-limited health

and devolution working group. The aim of the group was to understand the priorities, opportunities, and challenges for ICS leaders, how this intersects with English devolution to date and the emerging devolution deals. The Board co-sponsored the group alongside the City Regions and Community Wellbeing Boards. Four meetings took place in April, June, July and September and officers from the LGA and NHS Confederation are finalising the report encapsulating the findings from the working group so that it can be considered by members.

28. **UKSPF Webinar:** In December 2023, Cllr Martin Tett chaired a webinar to share learning from the UKSPF. The webinar received 196 viewers and included the learning from the [commissioned action learning sets](#) from Shared Intelligence, as well as the experiences of combined authorities, district and unitary councils. The webinar particularly focused on partnership working, social value and the delivery of both the People & Skills priority and the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

Digital connectivity

29. The Government's Rural Connectivity Champion, Simon Fell MP was due to attend the Board and provide an update to Members on his priorities. Unfortunately, due to a clash with his new responsibilities for tackling fraud he is no longer able to attend. Officers are working with his office to see if he can come to a future board meeting.
30. **Network switchovers:** We welcomed the recent [Charter](#), agreed by government and telecoms firms, to stop the forced roll out of the switchover in order to protect vulnerable people until adequate protective measures are in place. However, these commitments from Government and industry make no mention of local authorities and the key role they play in supporting and identifying vulnerable people. Our calls were highlighted in a recent [press article](#) featuring a quote from the LGA's Digital Champion, Mark Hawthorne.
31. We have similar concerns about the implications of the 2G/3G switch off in rural areas. There are some geographic areas of the UK that do not yet have 4G coverage, particularly in some rural areas and these communities may be reliant on 2G and 3G coverage for their mobile services. The extent of 2G and 3G coverage varies by mobile network operator. We understand that Vodafone and EE are beginning their switch off this quarter, region by region, and Three will be turning off its 3G estate this year mast by mast. We are concerned that following the 3G switch off, there will be areas experiencing disruption to their services whilst 4G coverage is rolled out, particularly in areas where coverage is already patchy. This is a particular concern for vulnerable residents reliant on 2G and 3G coverage.

32. A lack of communications from industry remains a key challenge, with public awareness levels low, and concerns remain around affordability of new devices. We ran a [survey](#) to understand how prepared the sector is for the 2G/3G switch off, levels of awareness, and support the sector would like from the LGA. It found that almost two-thirds of respondents (63 per cent) said their authority was still using devices and systems that were reliant on 2G and 3G networks to at least a small extent. We are currently in the process of developing an awareness raising campaign on this issue and have been approached by Ofcom who are keen to support our efforts.
33. **Digital exclusion:** The LGA published a report last year looking at the [role of councils tackling digital exclusion](#) which explored the link between various types of disadvantage and the availability and usage of digital infrastructure and the role of councils tackling digital exclusion. The report found there is still some way to go in ensuring every part of the country can have future-proofed, gigabit capable connections, with rural areas lagging in terms of gigabit coverage (47 per cent in rural areas compared with 79 per cent in urban areas).
34. The key recommendations for Government include the need to clarify ministerial and executive leadership on digital inclusion; creating and maintaining a new framework with national-level guidance and resources and tools that support local digital inclusion initiatives; and developing mechanisms for more effective cross-departmental coordination in tackling digital exclusion.
35. The recent [House of Lords Digital Committee report on digital exclusion](#) found the Government does not have a 'credible strategy' on tackling digital exclusion and reinforces our own findings that there is little strategic guidance to councils from Government on closing the digital divide. We welcome [Government's response](#) to the report, in particular the commitment to establish a cross-Whitehall ministerial group, and reference to the LGA's digital inclusion network. However, the response does not go far enough to address the Committee report recommendations and does little to include local government at the heart of tackling digital inclusion. We will continue to campaign on this issue.

Implications for Wales

36. Officers work with all UK Associations to share good practice and learning.

Financial Implications

37. All activity described can be met from the Board's policy budget.

Equalities implications

38. The Board's work programme includes consideration of equalities implications, both explicitly as part of individual projects and throughout all our policy work. We anticipate confirmation of the Board's Equalities Champion shortly.

Next steps

39. Officers will progress work as described above.