

## **Planning and infrastructure for growth, including broadband**

### **Purpose**

For discussion and direction.

### **Summary**

This paper sets out recent LGA activity in relation to the agreed work programme on these areas and sets out proposed next steps.

### **Recommendation**

That the Board notes the report and comments on the proposals at paragraphs 5, 8, and 21.

### **Action**

As directed by the Board.

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## Planning and infrastructure for growth, including broadband

### Part A – Strategic planning

1. Due to officer resources being directed to supporting the Non-Metropolitan Commission and evolving devolution agenda, this piece of work has not been progressed as envisaged in the October Board paper.
2. However, the objectives included in that paper have been progressed in three ways:
  - 2.1 Through the work of the Non-Metropolitan Commission.
  - 2.2 As part of the LGA's work on devolution.
  - 2.3 In councils' own developing plans in this area.
3. The interim report of the Non-Metropolitan Commission draws on evidence from councils, businesses, LEPs and other organisations to illustrate the challenges faced by areas outside our major cities that hinder them planning effectively for growth. Issues raised in the evidence include: complicated governance arrangements, particularly in two-tier areas; the need to better reflect functional economic areas in public service delivery; maintaining and developing effective transport networks; the vital importance of digital communications to non-metropolitan areas; the need to provide housing supported by appropriate infrastructure; and the difficulty of making joined-up decisions about housing, transport, and other infrastructure, particularly across administrative boundaries.
4. The Commission made a number of suggestions in regards to strategic planning and infrastructure. Many of these reflect members' steer at previous Board meetings. The recommendations include:
  - 4.1 A formal mechanism **for joining up councils' strategies for new homes, roads, and other infrastructure across economic areas**, and for ensuring that they are taken in partnership with business through LEPs.
  - 4.2 Giving these groupings the power to **pool public land and assets** and make decisions about its disposal or use.
  - 4.3 Planning to be carried out at a **similar scale to decisions taken on transport and infrastructure** and integrated with those decisions, including by bringing utility providers more closely into the process.
  - 4.4 A forward look in partnership between industry and government at the likely developments in communications technology of the next 25 years leading to the development of a **long-term national plan**.
  - 4.5 A role for councils and LEPs in ensuring **digital infrastructure provision**, with an element of competition, in their areas.
  - 4.6 The development of a **pan-public service vision for the digital provision of public services**, with an eye both to reducing costs and improving access in rural areas
  - 4.7 Recognition in planning rules that **digital infrastructure needs to be treated as a basic utility** for all new homes and funded as part of basic development costs.
5. Members are reminded that the Commission has asked for comments on its proposals to inform its final report. As well as this morning's discussion, submissions from individual councils are encouraged via [nonmet\\_commission@local.gov.uk](mailto:nonmet_commission@local.gov.uk) by the end of January.

6. At the December meeting of the LGA Executive members agreed a programme of work on devolution including a 'toolkit' for councils looking to negotiate greater freedoms for their areas. This will include any 'breakthrough' agreements so far and help councils shape their own offer to government. This paper, being developed by a cross-team group of officers, will include a section on planning and infrastructure. It is due to be discussed at the Executive's January meeting.
  
7. Since the Board's October meeting the national context has developed significantly. A number of councils have published their intention to work more strategically on planning and infrastructure issues. This demonstrates the sector's readiness to take a more joined-up approach to planning issues. Examples include:
  - 7.1 The new **Greater Exeter, Greater Devon Partnership**, which "paves the way for joined-up decision making on planning, housing, resources and infrastructure."<sup>1</sup>
  - 7.2 A proposed **Derby and Derbyshire** combined authority which includes homes and infrastructure as two of its key priorities.<sup>2</sup>
  - 7.3 A new partnership between **Cambridge, Oxford and Norwich** which will allow a shared approach to issues including housing and transport infrastructure.<sup>3</sup>
  - 7.4 A proposed combined authority in the **Tees Valley** which would "make decision making simpler for strategic transport and infrastructure, employment and skills, economic development, business investment and low carbon."<sup>4</sup>
  - 7.5 A proposed combined authority in **Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire**, which would "take a strategic overview on the key issues of spatial planning, transport, skills, and business support to deliver an arc of economic growth."<sup>5</sup>
  
8. It is proposed that officers ensure that the programme of work on devolution and the response to the Non Metropolitan commission fully reflects the issues on planning and infrastructure for growth that have been raised by the People and Places Board. Following the discussion of this work programme by LGA Executive and the production final report of the Non-Metropolitan Commission, officers will develop proposals for how the project on planning and infrastructure should be taken forward and for discussion by lead members of the Board.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://apps.exeter.gov.uk/dnRSS/ShowMediaReleases.aspx?ID=1744>

<sup>2</sup> [http://derbyshire.gov.uk/council/partnerships/combined-authority/background/in\\_brief/default.asp](http://derbyshire.gov.uk/council/partnerships/combined-authority/background/in_brief/default.asp)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/Cambridge-forges-landmark-partnership-Place/story-24115444-detail/story.html>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.teesvalleyunlimited.gov.uk/media/262420/2014\\_11\\_13\\_combined\\_authority\\_faqs.pdf](https://www.teesvalleyunlimited.gov.uk/media/262420/2014_11_13_combined_authority_faqs.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/news/CreativeCountiesDocument.pdf>

## **Part B – Superfast Broadband**

### Introduction

9. Councils strongly support the extension of access to superfast broadband through the commercial rollout, and are also leading the rural and urban publicly funded programmes.
10. Fast and reliable broadband is vital infrastructure for supporting growth in non-metropolitan areas, given the employment and business patterns in those geographies, and the importance of the visitor economy. It also makes communication between citizens, businesses and public agencies easier in more sparsely populated areas.
11. Councils are joining-up the broadband rollout with efforts to encourage people and businesses to get online, and wider public service transformation including online applications for Universal Credit and health and social care integration.
12. Since the start of this project, the following actions have been completed to raise councils' concerns and support them:
  - 12.1 Provided opportunities for councils to come together to exchange good practice, help to identify solutions to challenges and develop shared advocacy messages. For example, 25 senior officers met at LGA in June, and we have maintained a virtual network of advisers to help shape our work.
  - 12.2 Set out a compelling vision for the potential of digital technology to drive growth and service transformation in the LGA's response to the DCMS and HMT consultation on Future Digital Communications Infrastructure Needs.
  - 12.3 Strengthened our ability to influence Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) by forging a productive relationship with the Chief Executive, Chris Townsend. Mr. Townsend has been visiting councils around the country to get a better understanding of their concerns and his recent article for the LGA's First Magazine is attached at **Annex A**.
  - 12.4 Planning Advisory Service developed and launched a guide for councils on BDUK's Mobile Infrastructure Project, covering information in on planning applications for mobile phone masts, and balancing economic and social benefits with the environmental impact.  
<http://www.pas.gov.uk/documents/332612/6594211/PAS+telecomms+note.pdf/c56467a1-d427-4015-b9c5-8845f7a2b4af>

### Progress Monitoring

13. Phase One (90% coverage by 2016) of the superfast broadband rollout is continuing at pace with 1.5 million premises and the government's target of 2 million should be reached by 2016. In response to considerable lobbying by councils, BT has agreed to provide 'take-up' data at electoral ward level. This information will allow local bodies to better target local marketing and drive take-up and help to ensure value for money. Attached at **Annex B** is an article for First magazine from Councillor Neil Poole, Cabinet Member for Policy Resources at North Lincolnshire Council, updating on the North Lincolnshire Broadband Programme.

14. All 47 projects in Phase Two (95% coverage by end of 2017) of the rollout have started procurement. BDUK estimates that seven contracts will be signed by the end of this year and all projects aim to complete procurement by the end of June 2015. Ministers are putting pressure on BT to speed up the procurement process.
15. State aid consultation for Phase Three (beyond 95%) has now finished. Pilot testing on options for alternative technologies is underway, with a report expected in March 2015 about the best way to reach the final 5%. We continue to press for this to be taken forward as quickly as possible.
16. The Government announced on 18 December that EE, O2, Three and Vodafone have agreed a voluntary agreement that will result in them investing £5 billion to ensure that 90% of the UK landmass will have basic text and voice coverage by 2017. Under the agreement all four of the mobile networks have collectively agreed to:
  - 16.1 A guaranteed £5billion investment programme to improve mobile infrastructure by 2017;
  - 16.2 Guaranteed voice and text coverage from each operator across 90 per cent of the UK geographic area by 2017, halving the areas currently blighted by patchy coverage as a result of partial 'not-spots';
  - 16.3 Full coverage (i.e. the ability to download data as well as send texts and make phone calls) from all four mobile operators will increase from 69 per cent to 85 per cent of geographic areas by 2017;
  - 16.4 Provide reliable signal strength for voice for each type of mobile service (whether 2G/3G/4G) – currently many consumers frequently lose signal or cannot get signal long enough to make a call; and
  - 16.5 Make the deal legally binding by accepting amended licence conditions to reflect the agreement, which will then be enforceable by Ofcom.
17. As part of the agreement, the Government:
  - 17.1 Will bring this agreement to the attention of Ofcom in the context of their work to revise Annual Licence Fees – this is the subscription fee mobile networks pay Government;
  - 17.2 Intends to reform the Electronic Communications Code to make it easier for the whole communications sector to rollout out new mobile and broadband services, and increase choice for consumers; and
  - 17.3 Is allowing many of the Government's freehold buildings to be used as sites for mobile infrastructure – potentially opening up hundreds of sites to boost mobile coverage, including areas where it has been previously difficult to rollout network coverage.
18. While these improvements are very welcome, they still leave 10% of the UK landmass where people will be unable to use a mobile phone and 15% of the UK will still not have full mobile internet coverage, which is particularly important for businesses and public

service access for people living in the most remote communities. The Government noted that during the recent consultation process, consumers made it very clear that they feel any solution should include better data coverage.

19. BDUK has launched an advertising campaign designed to promote the benefits of its work to bring fibre services to rural communities. This is part of a strategy to encourage businesses and consumers to take-up broadband once the infrastructure is in place. We have emphasised the need to link the national campaign to local work led by councils to stimulate demand.

#### LGA Actions and Next Steps

20. Since the last Board meeting, the following actions have been completed:

- 20.1 Welcomed the announcement in the Government's National Infrastructure Plan that the Superconnected Cities Scheme will be extended to other urban areas, but highlighted in the LGA's On the Day Briefing the need to ensure that the rural rollout is undertaken as quickly as possible.

- 20.2 Submitted written evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry into broadband in rural areas. This was an opportunity to further press the Board's position that the predominantly rural communities who are already lagging behind in the publicly funded broadband and Wi-Fi rollout, need to get access to fast and reliable digital connectivity - internet and mobile - as soon as possible.

- 20.3 Launched a new publication *Transforming Public Services using Technology and Digital Tools*, which highlights case studies from councils across the country. For example, in Suffolk County Council, customer insight tools were used to better understand the needs of troubled families, saving more than £450,000 over four years in cost avoidance. Staffordshire County Council has co-developed Patchwork, an online tool which allows front-line staff to quickly log in and see which other agencies are supporting their clients. The publication can be viewed on the LGA website:  
<http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11553/Transforming+public+services+using+technology+and+digital+approaches/ab9af2bd-9b68-4473-ac17-bbdf2adec05>

- 20.4 Published an analysis about how to improve the effectiveness of national public service transformation programmes through earlier and better engagement with councils. The rural broadband programme is one of the case studies and responds to Members' steer that we need to ensure that Government learns the lessons from the first phase of the rollout. This work was led by the Local Government Delivery Council, a Chief Executive advisory group on digital technology and service transformation.

<http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/5854661/National+programmes+of+service+transformation++Making+these+more+effective%2C%20efficient+and+economic/ab1a3f43-fde0-42bb-b5f8-0e54ae11ec6b>

21. We would welcome Members' steer on priority actions over the coming weeks:

- 21.1 **Continue to influence phase two and phase three of the rural rollout to maximise competition, promote value for money and ensure that 100% coverage is achieved** – in particular to ensure that the Government learns the lessons from phase one of the rollout. The Public Accounts Committee's most recent report reinforced its earlier conclusion that Government had not done enough to promote competition. All 44 contracts for phase one of the rural

programme have been awarded to BT. The PAC recommended that “Before the next round of funding is released, the Department should work with local authorities to identify opportunities to promote competition and value for money; including considering alternative solutions, joint working and fair capital contributions from suppliers.”<sup>6</sup>

**21.2 Engage Ministers in follow-up discussions on the £5billion mobile phone agreement** to emphasise the need for the mobile phone providers to work in close partnership with councils and to press for plans that will enable 100% coverage to be achieved.

**21.3 Ensure that councils have the access to timely data from BT that allows them to accurately monitor take-up of broadband and up to date information about about planned broadband coverage and speed.** This will enable councils to assess value for money from their investment and to help ensure more competition in the next phases of the rollout.

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<sup>6</sup> Public Accounts Committee Rural Broadband Programme, August 2014,  
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmpubacc/834/83403.htm>

**Annex A**

1. When I was at the LGA conference in July, representing Broadband Delivery UK, I was delighted to be surrounded by so many people who share my enthusiasm for superfast broadband and the benefits it brings to all our lives.
2. Since then, I have been able to visit many council projects around the country. I have been truly impressed by the pace at which these are progressing.
3. Together, we are reaching 40,000 new homes and businesses every week; and nearly 4,000 small and medium enterprises in our SuperConnected Cities have taken up a connection voucher.
4. We are on schedule to deliver superfast broadband to 90 per cent of the UK by 2016, and to 95 per cent by the end of 2017.
5. We are now looking at what more we can do to encourage consumers to take up superfast broadband once it is available.
6. We have a lot of excellent case studies which show that local marketing is really making a difference. Spaldwick village in Cambridgeshire now has take-up levels of over 50 per cent. In October, the Prime Minister presented a national volunteering award to broadband champion, Mark Heath, for supporting the Connecting Cambridgeshire project. He has enabled villagers to get online, helped with their broadband problems and developed the village website. BDUK is looking at what more we can do to support this kind of work.
7. Meanwhile, we are working hard with Arqiva to build the masts that will provide mobile voice connectivity for communities who will have no coverage at all.
8. BDUK has much appreciated the advice and support we have received from the LGA Planning Advisory Service to ensure that we approach the planning issues in a way that reflects the range of local opinion.

**Chris Townsend is Chief Executive of Broadband Delivery UK**



## **Annex B**

1. The Northern Lincolnshire broadband programme, cited as best practice nationally by the Government, is now helping other councils in the country provide similar schemes and help their business community reap the benefits.
2. Our programme is leading the way nationally by providing an intensive support package to local businesses. The service provides a range of support including one-to-one meetings, business reviews, direct IT support, and workshops and seminars covering a range of topics including social media for business, dealing with HMRC, IT security and cloud computing.
3. Authorities including Northumberland County Council and East Riding of Yorkshire Council have sought help from us in setting up similar schemes.

## Companies

4. So far, the Northern Lincolnshire programme has provided over 2,200 hours of direct support to businesses, with 110 completing the full package of support. Around 400 companies have engaged in the programme and a further 40 continue to receive support. By June 2015, well over 160 businesses will have completed the support programme.
5. Throughout the whole project, North Lincolnshire Council has managed to avoid using expensive consultants and, unlike many projects, has avoided the use of technical consultancy for the telecommunications, mapping, data and business advice requirements.
6. This has resulted in a considerable saving of almost £336,000, which has enabled the programme to allocate more resources to businesses, including awarding all participating businesses who complete the programme a free mobile device.
7. The project has passed the half-way mark with 17,500 homes and businesses with access to high-speed broadband. By the end of the project in June 2015, the multi-million pound initiative will have made fibre optic broadband available to 31,000 properties.
8. In total, the project will invest more than £7 million to extend fibre broadband to reach 92 per cent of North and North East Lincolnshire. BT has invested £2.5 billion to roll out fibre broadband to two-thirds of UK premises.
9. We have been extremely successful in the delivery of both parts of the project – to improve infrastructure through access to superfast broadband, and provide a package of support to businesses to help maximise the benefits of being online. We are delivering one of the fastest schemes nationally.
10. We are able to deliver this fantastic service with existing expertise within the council, so this makes our scheme even more special. Our IT specialists and business advisors create a bespoke package of support for each company, recognising the unique nature and needs to each enterprise.
11. We have built up an excellent relationship with our business community and so they know and expect us to provide the best service we can for them, which means they can reap the benefits for their company. This is shown in the feedback we've received, which has been overwhelming.

15 January 2015

12. I'm delighted that we are leading the way nationally. It's been a real challenge, but everyone involved has worked so hard in bringing about these fantastic results.

**Cllr Neil Poole is Cabinet Member for Policy and Resources at North Lincolnshire Council**