

Note of last People & Places Board meeting

Title:	People & Places Board
Date:	Thursday 18 June 2015
Venue:	The Terrace Lounge, 7th Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note.

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
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1 Welcome, introductions and declarations of interest

The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Paul Carter and Councillor John Pollard, who was substituted by Councillor Chris Townsend.

The Board **noted** that Lord (Jim) O'Neill, Commercial Secretary to the Treasury and the Northern Powerhouse Minister James Wharton MP were invited to address the meeting but were unable to attend.

The Chairman welcomed Andrew Campbell to the Board meeting. He is based at the Department of Communities and Local Government and will be seconded to the LGA from August 2015 in order to undertake work on the devolution agenda with the LGA and local authorities.

2 English Devolution and the new Government

It was noted that the Cities and Local Government Bill was proceeding through Parliament at the present time, currently in the House of Lords.

Board members raised the following points in the discussion that followed to inform the LGA's lobbying strategy:

- The Bill appeared to give the Secretary of State a great deal of discretion to approve or turn down proposals, without few mechanisms to hold the Secretary of State to account.
- It was important at every stage to ensure the needs of local authority residents were considered.
- There were concerns about balancing the speed at which the Bill is proceeding through Parliament with appropriate scrutiny.
- The importance of the Bill being flexible enough to allow a range of

future discussions on devolution within localities and governance arrangements.

- The need to maintain links with other LGA Boards to feed in a non-metropolitan viewpoint where necessary.

Decision

The Board **agreed to** focus their discussion on four areas:

- Amendments and lobbying on the Bill;
 - Keeping up the pressure to make progress on the ground;
 - Examining governance options; and
 - Securing local government's position through a constitutional settlement
- a) Devolution Deals for Non-Metropolitan Areas- confidential item for discussion

The Board were invited to consider what additional functions they would like to see devolved to non-metropolitan combined or other designated authorities and provide guidance to officers on whether they would like further work to enable a strong case for devolution to be presented to government.

In discussion, the Board had the following general comments:

- There needed to be a 'champion' for non-metropolitan areas.
- The Government had not yet realised the full benefits and potential of English devolution and authorities needed a reassurance on future funding if various functions were devolved.
- Devolution should be seen in terms of "what could work" and be delivered across the UK to benefit communities.
- There may not be capacity in the Civil Service to progress English Devolution at the required pace.
- The Government needed to "let go" of many of its powers and in devolving to localities, show that it can trust local government which had delivered substantial savings over the past five years: this had included public health which had been transferred from the NHS.
- There was a great opportunity to push the devolution agenda linked with public service transformation and reform which would deliver greater savings.

Members considered that the following additional functions could be explored for devolution deals in non-metropolitan areas:

- Emergency services
- Education, Skills and employment support -from primary

school through to further education and in the world of work.

- Devolution should include authorities being able set their own fees and charges.
- Integration of health and social care.

Decision

The Board **noted** the report and were keen for new areas to be considered for devolution in terms of their discussion.

b) Devolution in Non-Metropolitan Areas - Governance Options- confidential item for discussion

The Board were invited to address the questions posed and provide guidance to officers on the governance arrangements considered appropriate for groupings of councils or other arrangements established in non-metropolitan areas.

Members commented in their discussion as follows:

- The governance proposal arrangements needed to be clear and understandable to the general public.
- Overview and Scrutiny models varied across authorities and a useful model was that used in the joint body to hold the Police and Crime Commissioners to account in Kent. The Bill required a combined authority to arrange for the appointment of one or more overview and scrutiny committees which would be committee or subcommittee of a principal council.
- The need to further consider alignment with LEP boundaries and how democratically accountable LEPs could be.
- Government needed to trust local authorities as democratically elected bodies and give them the tools to do their jobs and devolve powers as far as practicable. They had delivered very large savings which proved their worth.
- The Government should be held to account in the promises it made on devolution and authorities needed to submit their own proposals for the way forward whilst the Bill is going through its stages in Parliament.

Decision

The Board **noted** the report and **agreed** that Group Leaders would advise on officers' proposals in the gap between Board cycles.

4 LGA Support Offer on Devolution

The report set out proposals how the LGA could help councils access support to make progress on devolution and in particular officers were seeking advice on whether there were other forms of support the LGA should consider.

Board members raised the following points in the discussion that followed:

- Andrew Campbell should be given as much support as possible in his seconded role at the LGA and in his role liaising with Government and local authorities.
- There were so many different models of governance across the country and there should not be a 'one-size fits all' approach, with identification of different stages of the devolution process.
- There needed to be a "knowledge exchange" across authorities, being able to work in a cross-cutting way and sharing information.
- Authorities needed to "see what worked" in each area for devolution purposes and for future devolution deals.
- The demands and pressures of non-metropolitan areas were different to that of City areas. The Government needed to listen and work with local authorities on the devolution agenda and also authorities could utilise the LGA resources available to it in the Devo Hub.
- It was clear that the Bill was going through various Parliamentary stages swiftly, therefore authorities needed to act quickly in this matter concerning the submission of their own devolution proposals to the Government, which needed to be clear, concise and well-thought out.

Decision

The Board **noted** the report.

5 Review of the Board

The report to the Board provided some issues for discussion to support members' review of the Board and set out a summary of the 2014/15 work programme.

The Board considered that it had met its original purpose and gave their views on how it can develop over the next year.

Board members raised the following points in the discussion that followed:

- The existing Board arrangements were working well, ensuring that non-metropolitan areas were able to have an important voice, particularly in relation to the devolution agenda.

- The City Regions and People & Places Boards had worked well together and there was a collective will to progress issues such as devolution at a strategic level. It was important however not to duplicate the work of other Boards.
- The Board should have the opportunity to review reports from other Boards where there was an effect on non-metropolitan areas, allowing the Board greater input from its own perspective and provide strategic overview.

The Board suggested other areas for its work programme in 2015/16:

- Broadband in rural areas, particularly its often very slow speed.

Decision

The Board **noted** the Annual Review which would be submitted to the LGA Leadership Board.

6 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2015 were **agreed**.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr David Hodge	Surrey County Council
Vice-Chair	Cllr Anne Western	Derbyshire County Council
Deputy Chair	Cllr Neil Clarke MBE	Rushcliffe Borough Council
Deputy Chair	Cllr Heather Kidd	Shropshire Council
Members	Cllr Vince Maple	Medway Council
	Cllr Jennifer Mein	Lancashire County Council
	Cllr Alan Rhodes	Nottinghamshire County Council
	Cllr Philip Atkins	Staffordshire County Council
	Cllr Roger Begy OBE	Rutland County Council
	Cllr Andrew Bowles	Swale Borough Council
	Cllr Gillian Brown	Arun District Council
	Cllr Paul Diviani	East Devon District Council
	Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE	Gloucestershire County Council
	Cllr Kenneth Meeson	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Cecilia Motley	Shropshire Council
	Cllr Stan Collins	South Lakeland District Council
	Cllr Simon Galton	Leicestershire County Council
	Cllr Chris Townsend	Mole Valley District Council
Apologies	Cllr Paul Carter CBE	Kent County Council
	Cllr John Pollard	Cornwall Council