

People & Places Board – report from Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE (Chair)

Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016

1. Since the last Councillors' Forum, the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill has received Royal Assent. Throughout the Bill's progress through Parliament, the People and Places Board and Cities Regions Board have worked in partnership to steer the LGA's lobbying activity. As a result, the LGA successfully secured, to the benefit of the sector, the requirement of the Secretary of State to make an annual report on devolution in England. The LGA also got on record assurances from the Government that the powers to determine the composition of local governance arrangements and remove functions from local authorities without local consent would only be used in exceptional circumstances and with safeguards to protect the viability of all affected authorities. The Boards also steered officers to consistently make the case for there to be greater flexibility in how councils could come together, and these changes are reflected in the Act.
2. Following discussion at the January People and Places Board, the Board Chair has written to the Secretary of State urging every effort to be made to support the signing of deals in non-metropolitan areas.

Devolution – the LGA Support offer

3. Take up of the LGA's devolution support offer, drawn up with direction from the People and Places and City Regions Board, remains excellent, and officers have received positive feedback from councils on the range of services that have been used. The Board have steered officers to continue to position the LGA as the key provider of devolution support to councils. Thanks to the Board's input, the offer has evolved and will offer the following additional support:
 - 3.1. A guide for councils will be commissioned which will combine details on the legislative provisions for combined authorities with practical suggestions and advice on setting up a CA.
 - 3.2. The LGA has partnered with New Economy, one of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's (GMCA's) research, policy and strategy arms to:
 - 3.2.1. produce the first comprehensive tax and spend data set for all council areas, including explainers and guides as to how to best use this to help make the case to Government for, and support the design and delivery of devolved services.
 - 3.2.2. capture local and national experiences of devolution thus far and share the lessons learned.
4. The Board has also commissioned officers to:
 - 4.1. work with Professor Robin Hambleton at the University of the West of England to explore models of executive governance, including international arrangements;
 - 4.2. work with the Centre for Public Scrutiny to support areas to develop their governance arrangements and capture the related learning;
 - 4.3. host specialist local devolution communications workshops.

5. The LGA hosted a roundtable on health and social care devolution with Greater Manchester combined authority and health partners, and the Public Service Transformation Network to share learning from Greater Manchester's experiences.

Devolving employment and skills

6. The LGA continues to build on our Realising Talent campaign to influence the Government's planned 2017 Work and Health Programme. This will include widening the suggested geographic scope, ensuring adequate funding is set aside, and that local government has a formal role in the programme.
7. Lead Members will be asked to consider a scoping power to expand our lobbying from April 2017, including:
 - 7.1. completing a stock take of employment and skills devolution as part of a wider analysis of devolution;
 - 7.2. influencing the debate on the future of public employment services leading up to the expiry of Job Centre Plus estate contracts in 2018, including international comparisons; and
 - 7.3. mapping councils' influence (existing and potential) over the skills spectrum including Area Based Reviews.

Superfast Broadband and Mobile Connectivity

8. As part of the Board's Superfast Broadband and Mobile Connectivity work programme, the Board received the results of the broadband and mobile connectivity survey it commissioned last year. As a result members commissioned a range of activity.
9. The LGA and Broadband Deliver UK (BDUK) will jointly host an event on 17 March for council officers, councillors and BDUK officials to discuss how best to procure solutions to reach the final five percent.
10. The Chair of the Board has also written to the Chief Executive of BDUK to push for reallocation of any underspend on the Mobile Infrastructure Project to future projects focused on improving mobile connectivity.
11. The Board has also commissioned a campaign to raise awareness of those residents, councillors and businesses still without adequate broadband speeds owing to a lack of suitable digital infrastructure. The campaign aims to help both councils and residents consider different approaches to improving broadband speeds and will focus on increasing members' understanding of the alternative network supplier market to help them make informed judgements on potential alternatives to current delivery partners.
12. The Board successfully lobbied the Culture, Media and Sports Committee to host a local government evidence session to feed into its inquiry into Establishing World Class Connectivity. A session with West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Westminster City Council and Connecting Devon and Somerset was held on 3 February, with the sector's viewpoint put forward.

13. Finally, the Chair of the Board will meet with Mobile Network Operators this month to discuss their commercial roll out plans in rural hot spot areas, and explore how both sectors can continue to develop helpful partnerships locally.

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