

POLICY DIGEST, June 2015

This digest presents a summary of the latest policy developments at a national and regional level of strategic relevance to Northumberland and highlights Government announcements of relevance to local government. This issue covers period from Monday 1 June to Friday 26 June. Previous and subsequent editions are available at www.northumberland.gov.uk/policy.

Policy Development	Action	Lead
PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY		
<p>Devolution: a road map</p> <p>Despite recent progress, Britain still remains one of the most centralised countries in the western world. Perhaps the starkest indication is that only two per cent of taxation in the UK is raised locally, compared with at least double that in countries such as France, Germany, the United States or Canada. This <i>Road Map</i> from LGiU outlines proposals to invert the current relationship between central and local government by creating a locally led process of devolution in England, which would strengthen local economies and improve public services. It sets out the practical ways in which devolution can happen at scale and at speed to avoid a bureaucratic log jam in Whitehall.</p> <p>http://www.lgiu.org.uk/report/devolution-a-road-map/</p>	For information	
PLACE SHAPING		
<p>Transport Secretary confirms government is forging ahead on transport for the Northern Powerhouse (1 June 2015)</p> <p>Helping to end the decades old economic gap between north and south through billions of pounds of transport investment is a top priority for the government, Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin has pledged to northern and midland leaders. In a keynote speech in Leeds, he said that boosting growth in the north, rebalancing the economy and creating a Northern Powerhouse were a vital part of the long-term economic plan. He confirmed that £13 billion government funding would be invested to transform transport infrastructure in the north over the next five years and he pledged that the north will be empowered to shape its own future - by devolving power away from Whitehall. He said that by the autumn, Transport for the North (TfN) - the body established by the government to work with it on delivering a Northern Transport Strategy - will have a new independent chair to speak on behalf of the north with one voice on delivering improved train and bus services, rolling out smart ticketing, looking after passengers, reducing road congestion and speeding up links to ports and airports.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/transport-secretary-confirms-government-is-forging-ahead-on-high-speed-rail-and-a-northern-powerhouse</p>	For information	Geoff Paul Director of Planning, Economy and Housing

<p>Under Construction: Are councils ready to get the nation building?</p> <p>In many areas of policy the role of local authorities is changing rapidly. Increasingly they are expected to play a more facilitative curating role, which ties together many strands of social and economic life including public health, the local economy, education, and the public realm, into something more coherent and joined-up. In housing too the recent review by House and Elphicke argued that councils should become housing delivery enablers rather than pursue the traditional role of directly funding and building houses. The new report from Mears and Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) looks at whether councils are ready to take on this role. Recent estimates suggest that we need to build between 243,000 and 280,000 houses a year just to meet current demand. This is a huge challenge that will require innovation, new partnerships and investment. Councils will have a big part to play in helping to plug the gap, and they are keen to start building again. There is political will for them to do so and the public feels that government should improve access to housing. But they will need to approach their role in a more creative way. This research suggests there are pockets of innovation and some impressive examples of councils showing leadership, confidence and vision, but it is not widespread across the sector. The report therefore makes a number of recommendations for councils, to help ensure that they are able to deliver enough houses for their communities in the future.</p> <p>http://www.lgiu.org.uk/report/under-construction/</p>	For information	Karen Ledger, Head of Planning and Development Services
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ECONOMIC PROSPERITY		
<p>Government kick-starts plans to reach 3 million apprenticeships (14 June 2015)</p> <p>The term ‘apprenticeship’ will be protected in law, the government has announced. This will strengthen their reputation, help working people and ensure apprenticeships are recognised as a career path equal to higher education. With over 2.2 million apprenticeships created since 2010 to help establish the UK as the fastest growing economy in the G7, the government will also enshrine in law its commitment to create 3 million apprenticeships by 2020. The Skills Minister will legally protect the term ‘apprenticeship’ through the Enterprise Bill. This will give government the power to take action when the term is misused to promote low quality courses. To ensure that more young people can benefit the minister has also announced that public bodies will now be set targets to take on more apprentices. Schools, hospitals, prisons and police forces will all be creating opportunities for young people to get on.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-kick-starts-plans-to-reach-3-million-apprenticeships</p>	For information	
<p>Environment Secretary unveils vision for open data to transform food and farming (25 June 2015)</p> <p>Vast data reserves from Defra are set to transform the world of food and farming in the single biggest government data giveaway the UK has ever seen, Environment Secretary Elizabeth Truss has announced. Outlining her vision for the future of British food, farming and the natural environment, the Environment Secretary will say that over the next year, virtually all the data Defra holds—at least 8,000 sets—will be made freely available to the public, putting Britain at the forefront of the data revolution. Harnessing this open data will help food and farming achieve its full potential and enable the UK to become a one-nation economy, where the productivity of the countryside will be brought up to the level of our towns and cities.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/environment-secretary-unveils-vision-for-open-data-to-transform-food-and-farming</p>	For information	

HEALTH & WELLBEING		
<p>Making the most of Universal Credit (UC)</p> <p>This review undertaken by the Resolution Foundation concludes that the improvements necessary to enable UC to, at a minimum, make work pay and smooth the transition into work must be made before millions of families are moved onto the new system. This report reviews the potential impact of UC and set out plans for its near- and medium-term development. The proposals span two phases. The first phase – covering the period when UC is fully rolled out, largely over this parliament – seeks to focus incentives to work on the groups most likely to respond, in order to maximise its potential impact. The recommendations in this phase are cost-neutral, recognising a backdrop of ongoing fiscal constraint. The second phase – in the next parliament, following UC’s full roll-out – incorporates ambitious proposals designed to ensure UC is fit for purpose over the next decade and maximises its impact on employment. The recommendations in this phase are no longer bound by the short-term cost-neutral constraint but continue to fit within official projections of the expected long-term level of spending on working-age benefits.</p> <p>http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/making-it-work-final-report-of-the-resolution-foundation-review-of-universal-credit/</p>	For information	
<p>Ageing – The Silver Lining</p> <p>This report by the LGA sets out the increasing contribution to society and the economy older people can make through empowered local government and challenges the commonly-held belief that an ageing population is a burden. It explores the challenges and opportunities that an ageing population presents for local government and communities. To illustrate this, the report sets out a ‘Graph of Hope’, showing the increasing economic contribution from an increasingly older population. In particular, older people can be net contributors to the economy if local government has the financial sustainability, freedoms and flexibilities to support them and harness this demographic change for economic benefit. However, not addressing ageing now will store up problems for future years and place further strain on social care funding and provision.</p> <p>http://www.local.gov.uk/adult-social-care/-/journal_content/56/10180/7342516/ARTICLE</p>	For information	Jane Bowie, Head of Adult Safeguarding and Commissioning
STRONGER COMMUNITIES		
<p>Charitable organisations given £20 million boost by government (25 June 2015)</p> <p>The Cabinet Office has launched an initiative that will provide grants to increase the sustainability of around 250 organisations working in the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector. The fund, which will be delivered by the Big Lottery Fund, will provide grants that will enable recipients to implement organisational changes and access professional advice that might currently be out of their reach. It will give VCSEs access to a wider range of skills and support, with all grant recipients establishing a strong volunteering relationship with a local business. These cross sector relationships will help grant recipients to strengthen their resilience and long term sustainability. The Local Sustainability Fund will be £20 million of government funding delivered over 2 years, and will be available to medium-sized VCSE organisations that deliver vital support to vulnerable and disadvantaged people. Alongside working with local businesses, recipients will also work with skilled advisors so that the fund generates maximum impact.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/charitable-organisations-given-20-million-boost-by-government</p>	For information	Geoff Paul Director of Planning, Economy and Housing

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE		
<p>PM announces new taskforce to transform child protection (24 June 2015)</p> <p>Prime Minister David Cameron has announced a new Child Protection Taskforce to drive forward fundamental reforms to protect the most vulnerable children in our society and give them the opportunity to succeed. Chaired by Education Secretary Nicky Morgan, the taskforce will be responsible for leading improvements across police, social services and other agencies – focusing on transforming social work and children’s services and improving inspection. It will complement the Home Secretary’s existing work on tackling child sexual exploitation. It will join 10 other implementation taskforces already established across government to monitor and drive delivery of the government’s cross-cutting priorities. The taskforce’s work will build on the government’s wide-ranging reforms to create a care system that puts children’s needs first. This includes the appointment of a Chief Social Worker to champion reform in the profession, a £400 million investment in social work training, and cuts to bureaucracy to free up social workers to do what they do best.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-new-taskforce-to-transform-child-protection</p>	For information	Rachel Farnham, Head of Children’s Social Care
<p>£4.5 million to end delays for children awaiting adoption (20 June 2015)</p> <p>Trailblazing councils leading the way in matching children awaiting adoption with their ‘forever family’ are to benefit from new government funding worth £4.5 million. The injection of cash will mean the first regional adoption agencies - groups of councils coming together to match children quickly with adoptive parents - will be up and running months earlier than planned. By encouraging councils to work together, the potential matches for a child would increase significantly, giving children a far better chance of quickly finding a permanent family.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/45-million-to-end-delays-for-children-awaiting-adoption</p>	For information	Rachel Farnham, Head of Children’s Social Care



***Policy Digest* is produced on 4 to 6 weekly cycle by the Council’s Economic and Inclusion Policy Team within the Planning, Economy and Housing Directorate**
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