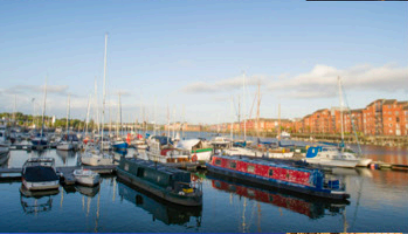
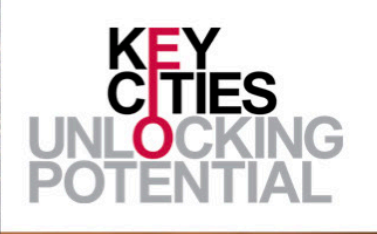
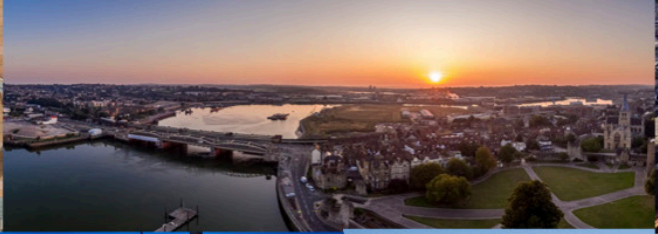




Cities driving recovery and growth



Cities driving recovery and growth



Report of a meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Key Cities on the obstacles and opportunities facing cities in driving recovery and growth as the country emerges from the pandemic.

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Published 10 May 2021

The network that speaks for urban UK

Key Cities is a diverse, national network that represents urban living in the UK and has the range, expertise and agility to deliver solutions for the challenges we face. The network's APPG, events and research initiatives help focus the national policy agenda on cities.

The 25 member cities of the network are significant urban entities with integrated municipal government in close touch with the lived experience of their populations.

As a network, Key Cities is well placed to offer nimble and scalable innovation to maximise the benefits of urban living in the UK. For Key Cities, platforming and connecting the diverse voices of urban UK is central to unlocking successful devolution and a productive, balanced economy for all parts of the country.

Voices from the engine room



*John Stevenson MP
Co-Chair of the Key Cities APPG*

Cities and towns will be at the heart of our recovery as the country transitions from the shadows of the pandemic over the coming years. We would be well served by empowering them to play their part as effectively as possible.

The recovery, like the public health emergency itself, is uncharted territory. How can we get to the successful and fairer country that is the universally shared goal? A good start is to look at the voices that are represented around the table as the Government sets our course.

Reports from universities, thinktanks and parliamentary groups have shed light on sectors, communities and regions worst affected, on underlying disparities and many other aspects of the pandemic.

Looking at cities overall, the Government's Urban Recovery Taskforce – co-chaired by communities secretary Robert Jenrick and Homes England chair Peter Freeman – is soon expected to offer valuable insights from major economic centres and industry stakeholders. Also this month, a report commissioned jointly by Key Cities and Core Cities on the future of urban centres will bring forward detailed recommendations based on evidence from economic and stakeholder analysis.

But if we want cities and towns all around the country to drive recovery and growth, then we must also listen directly to those who run and represent those places, close to the lived experience of their residents and acutely aware of the obstacles as well as the opportunities for progress.

The APPG on Key Cities – which, uniquely, has a remit to look at UK urban issues in the round – provides a forum for bringing Parliamentarians together with leaders and stakeholders from cities large and small from all over the country, and on 23 March the group came together to discuss cities driving recovery and growth.

Charlotte Alldritt and Ben Lucas helped frame the discussion in the context of the ongoing research that is so important to underpin effective policy. Peter Freeman, in highlighting the opportunities for Homes England and cities to work together to turn around struggling neighbourhoods, spoke directly to the daily concerns of city leaders and administrators. The discussion that ensued was thoughtful, nuanced and wide-ranging, and is captured in this report.

There are many ideas expressed in these pages that have not found their way into the recommendations. The discussion offers a snapshot of the diverse views of urban UK: local leaders of all parties reflecting the needs and experience of their areas, with often diverging views, but working to find common ground. The recommendations represent the common thread that weaved through the input from all sides. It is no more and no less than that: a short list of actionable ideas informed by the experience of those who run and represent our cities and towns.

This group of cities would welcome engagement with Government on taking these ideas forward to help deliver the positive outcomes we all seek.

John Stevenson MP

Recommendations



The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Key Cities calls on the Government to

1. Replace the current piecemeal arrangements with fewer and longer-term funding mechanisms for regenerating neighbourhoods and urban centres, taking account of disparities and linked to agreed housing targets.
2. Facilitate local authorities' ability to borrow against assets to invest in regeneration and growth, with match funding for areas with high deprivation or poor viability.
3. Work with Key Cities to design and distribute a new income support scheme aimed at stimulating business start-ups, community enterprise and sustainable urban centres.
4. Permit local authorities to enable construction of a new generation of social housing to meet local need.
5. Introduce fiscal incentives to support the high street, including VAT incentives for stores with meaningful high street presence, and reform of business rates.

Potential hotspots



Charlotte Alldritt

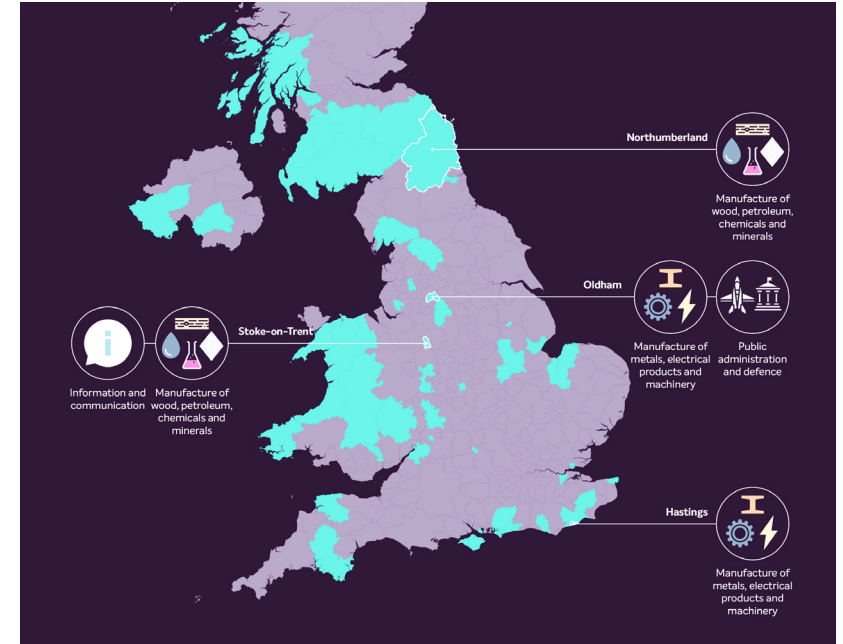
Right: Map of place-based productivity potential across the UK

Charlotte Alldritt, Director of the Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP), pointed to evidence that Key Cities could be slower than other areas to recover from the pandemic. CPP's May 2020 report 'Back from the Brink' cited Blackpool, Southend, Norwich, Doncaster, Wolverhampton, Bradford, Kirklees and Newport as vulnerable, and only Southampton, Gloucester and Preston as resilient, in terms of GVA indexed to pre-crisis trends, five years after lockdown.¹

In the wake of controversies about funding allocations, she showed that Key Cities members were more likely to receive investment from the Levelling Up and Towns Deal funds. 43% of Towns Fund money went to Key Cities as compared with 26% to non-Key Cities. In the Levelling Up fund allocations, 43% in Category 1 and 48% in Category 2 went to Key Cities compared with 29% and 33% respectively for non-Key Cities. But there are notable exceptions: Salford, Plymouth and Southampton are amongst the most deprived but are not covered by the Levelling Up, Towns or Community Renewal Funds.

In terms of recovery, Charlotte stressed the importance of identifying and nurturing potential productivity hotspots, pointing to Lincoln and Plymouth as places combining high deprivation with sectors that have high-productivity potential.²

1 Back From The Brink, CPP, May 2020
2 A Gear Change for Growth, CPP, Dec 2020



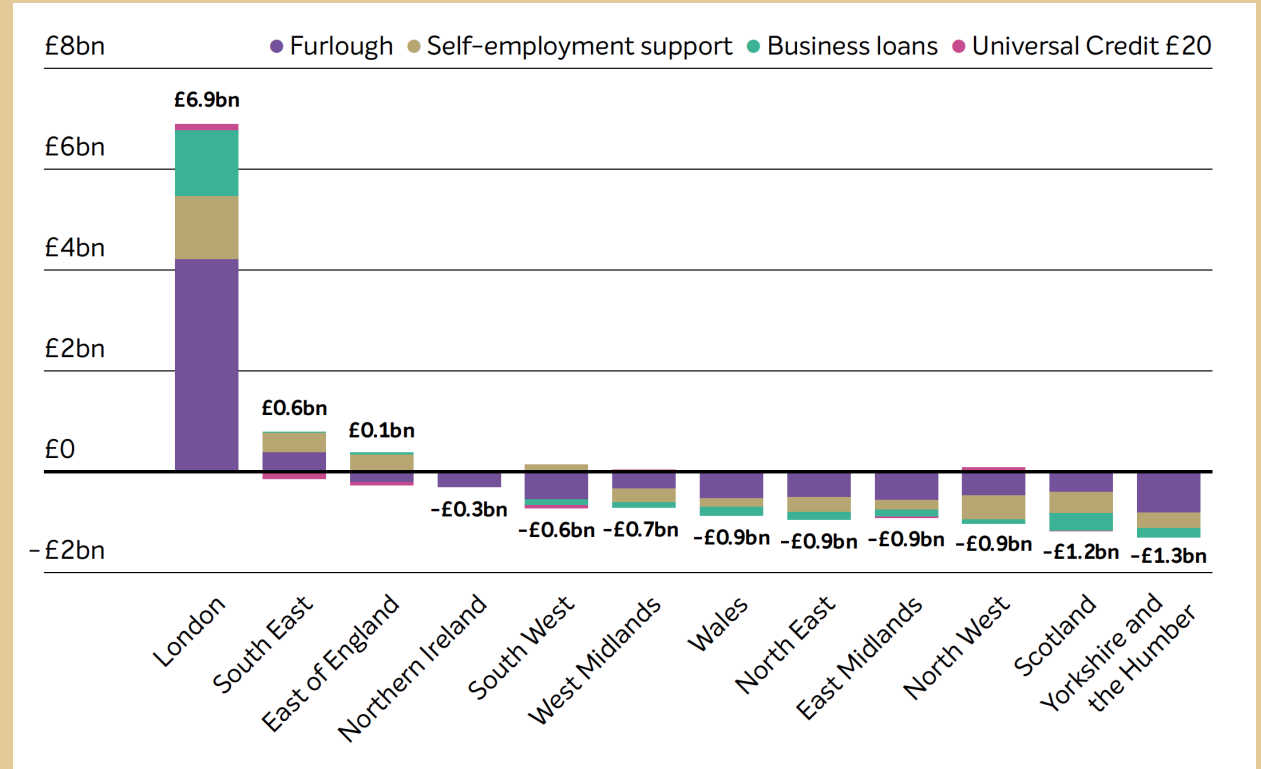
The key to recovery, Charlotte concluded, is place-based leadership. CPP quantified the value of delivering the levelling up agenda at £242bn, equal to an annual windfall of 13% of GB's GVA and a potential annual boost of £39bn for the former "Red Wall" which is double the annual spend on adult social care.³

3 Beyond Hard Hats: what it will take to level up the UK, CPP, Sept 2020

The Levelling Up Challenge

Two days after the APPG meeting, the CPP published a new analysis¹ of the Government's allocations from the Towns and Levelling Up Funds which concluded, inter alia, that the Government's major Covid-related economic policies have resulted in a regionally unbalanced distribution of support, and they are poorly targeted for levelling up, concluding:

“The sharp contrast between the huge amount of government spending thrown at the pandemic – which our analysis shows has been dispersed to London more than other regions – and the reversion to austerity by 2023, implies the government has turned its back on any serious effort to level up the country.”



¹ The Levelling Up Outlook #3, CPP, Mar 2021

Community and public enterprise



Cllr. Matthew Brown

As one of the originators of the community wealth building movement in the UK with the so-called “Preston Model”, Preston City Council Leader and Key Cities Co-Lead for Cities and Towns Matthew Brown has an enterprising vision for economic growth in urban centres. It’s a vision, however, that is shaped by acute awareness of the difficulties that face less well-off parts of the country, and a determination to redress the inequalities that have been laid bare by the pandemic.

There is growing support across all parties for community wealth building with mechanisms for local economic growth through partnership between local authorities, anchor institutions such as hospitals and universities, and other local stakeholders. An “anchor network” recently created in London, which brings together a £73 billion annual spend, focuses on where you purchase, where you recruit, and what you do with your assets – and similar initiatives are being explored in Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Scotland.

Preston has joined with Wirral and Liverpool Councils to establish a bank in the north west that can lend to local businesses and social enterprises. “If we can pool five or ten percent of public sector investments into the regional economies and city centres, and combine that with assets and investments from local authorities and anchor institutions as well,” Matthew said, “that would be exciting.”

There is much that can be done with local partnership, but Government support – both in terms of devolving powers and funding – is crucial in areas with high deprivation, where many of the workers who have helped the country through the pandemic are worst affected.

When it comes to housing, such places have often had to divest themselves of old housing stocks. The Preston City Deal was focused on infrastructure to encourage development without determining what type of development would result, and although the city now requires an affordable housing element, this is not sufficient for local need. Matthew Brown pointed out that there will always be less affordable housing available in areas where Councils can’t provide housing directly. There has been some movement in Government thinking on this in recent years and he believes it is important that Councils should now have the power to provide a new generation of social housing.

Matthew would like a more objective method for distributing funding for less well-off areas – such as the Barnett formula that adjusts funding for the devolved administrations – to recognise that they start with fewer assets, less economic activity, less investment and less transport and infrastructure to attract business. Funding for such areas is problematic because most of it is year-to-year, and with any longer-term funding the rules are prone to changing part-way through.

Some sort of longer-term mechanisms are important to make significant headway. Matthew is attracted to the idea that Councils should be able to borrow against assets, but again, the asset base in some areas will be less valuable, so how to do this equitably should be thought through.

Given the speed and extent in which high street retail has been decimated during the pandemic, Councils need powers to purchase assets in the city centre. A Debenhams will leave a gaping hole that could take years to get another business to take on. Councils should be able to buy and repurpose those premises, potentially as a charity or facility supporting small businesses and the community. Matthew Brown would like to take this further with council-owned holding companies being able to acquire businesses that are under stress and relaunch them with employee or community ownership models, if the Government would consider supporting such initiatives.

Other ideas advanced by Matthew include universal basic income (UBI) and flexible working hours. UBI – paying everyone a basic income regardless of their work status – has been explored in many countries including a trial currently running in Germany. The idea is to enable people to chart their own course without impediment – volunteer, start a new business, study. The Enterprise Allowance Scheme introduced by Lord Young in the 1980s (see p. 13) was also a form of income support focused

on individuals to create something more sustainable. That only went to small entrepreneurs. Could something similar today be drawn more widely than that?

Allowing people to work fewer hours without loss of pay could be an appropriate response to the accelerating impacts of automation and communication technologies that we have seen during Covid. What will be the future of work? To some extent that will determine the future of our urban centres. Could such a scheme, available to all who want it, be trialed in a Key City?

The aim of the APPG is to find policy approaches that can be supported by all cities in the network and lead to positive engagement with Government. Not all of Matthew's ideas may find that broad level of support, but this is the time for such ideas to be explored.

“Nobody would have thought we could have a scheme where people get 80% of their wages for many months because of a public health crisis. It's not dissimilar to the post-war settlement. The question is, what do we mean by building back better?”

Bringing cities back to life



Peter Freeman CBE

“I’m a developer, so I have to be an optimist.” The Chair of Homes England, Peter Freeman CBE, is best known for the redevelopment of Kings Cross, but he did not start in London and as this comment showed, he knows from experience that the path of making successful places is strewn with obstacles. Nevertheless, he was at pains to emphasise the opportunities that exist to turn around the fortunes of cities and towns up and down the land.

As an agency, Homes England has shown itself to be very effective. Its employees number fewer than 1 in 1,500 of people in the housing construction industry, yet it has a direct impact on the creation of one in four new homes. Homes England’s toolkit includes grants to Housing Associations and Local Authorities, loans to SME developers (which typically leverage seven times as much private investment), joint ventures as well as the Help to Buy scheme, which it delivers on behalf of Government.

The Urban Recovery Taskforce, which Peter co-chairs with Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick, will not report until after the local elections, but in its deliberations there has been unanimity in identifying the problem: more than half a century of growing car use matched by decline in rail transit, the expansion of out-of-town retail in the eighties and nineties, online shopping, and now Covid. But in Peter’s view, there are silver linings. Not only is Covid making the Government focus on levelling up

towns that have been left behind, but the technology that people have started using can help to bring some of those towns back to life, because more people who live there do not have to travel long distances to go to work.

A priority for cities and towns as we look to the future should be to strengthen their higher education offer as much as possible to retain bright young people and stop the brain drain away to larger cities. The focus should be on transforming neighbourhoods, with schools, shops and all the other services people need.

Peter believes that the issue Homes England was set up to address – the cost of housing – is not just addressable by building more houses, but also by making it more desirable to live in towns, which actually have a lot of historic housing stock.

There are opportunities for Homes England to help towns in their efforts to turn around neighbourhoods rather than just building new. With its Markets Partners & Places initiative, Homes England is creating regional and national centres of excellence which can help to look at viability and whether ideas will work.

Overall, Peter is clear he would prefer to see fewer and bigger long-term Government Funds, because transforming towns is a long-term business.

Goals for the post-Covid city



Ben Lucas

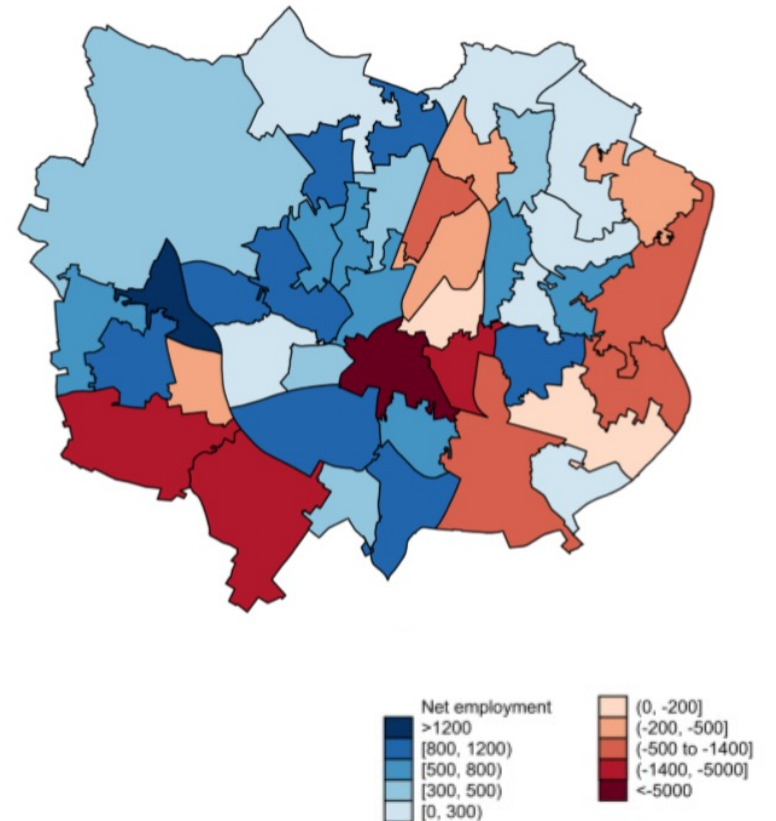
Ben Lucas leads the Metro-Dynamics team that is producing a new Key Cities and Core Cities research study looking at the future of urban centres after the pandemic. The study is due out in May, so this meeting was an opportunity to discuss initial findings in the context of the wider policy framework.

Cities, Ben showed, represent 62% of national output, 58% of jobs and 80% of the levelling up challenge in the UK. There is no doubt they have a central role to play in addressing the challenges of economic recovery and building back better, levelling up, governance models and the green industrial revolution.

Covid has created what Ben calls 'Zoomshock'. Many urban centres have been emptied of key workers who are now working from their homes in the more outlying areas. This shift is starkly illustrated in places like Coventry. If it became permanent, this would have profound implications for city centres and surrounding areas, and for city centre workers in food and hospitality.

Where are the new opportunities for growth? One key factor is the relocation of government functions, and the relocation of high-productivity workers and businesses to new areas. Trends include national and international investment in green industry and innovation, the impact of Covid and Brexit on production

The impact of Zoomshock on Coventry city centre



and supply chains, accelerating digital transformation and smart city innovation, developments in health, life sciences and the care sector through investment, innovation and prevention, and reorientation of the culture, creative, retail and hospitality sectors.

There's an opportunity to create a new framework of goals for the post-Covid city, to stimulate adaptation to climate change, innovate and pivot to a future green economy, provide better support for health and wellbeing resilience, and to build neighbourhoods around communities and data.

Building new, attractive homes in the city centre, with lower car demand for a restructured labour market, will create a greener city and improve the quality of city centre living. Repurposing physical assets and public space – community culture hubs for a wide range of activities, for example – will support more resilient communities. If local and business leaderships combine to partner in recovery plans and joint strategic investment, this will build stronger relationships between institutions and businesses and create longer-term local investment. If innovation is nurtured by boosting digital infrastructure and access for businesses, this will impact the repurposing of spaces and lead to better connected places.

Making the transition from managing Covid to inclusive recovery will require local, collaborative economic leadership focused on rebuilding economic value and restructuring labour markets, redesigning the use of spaces and improving and managing public health. This collaboration needs to bring together citizens,

anchor institutions, businesses, the public sector and investors.

The five priorities for achieving inclusive and sustainable urban centres are:

1. Good work and strong businesses
2. Innovation-led growth
3. Pivoting to net zero industry
4. Green, liveable, affordable cities
5. Resilient, empowered communities

So, how can all this be made to happen?

Ben identifies cities owning and shaping their city centre futures with citizens, businesses and partners as the first requirement. Next is creating new partnership-based governance, investment and delivery vehicles with the use of Innovation Districts and Freezones. To provide long-term certainty there should be multi-year funding agreements in the Spending Review aimed at investment in innovation, housing retrofit, green industry and jobs and also enabling outcome-based public service reform agreements to enable prevention and investment in social infrastructure.

Finally, new powers are needed to enable cities to catalyse future growth trends.

The no-money ask



Cllr. Philip Broadhead

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) is one of the southernmost members of the Key Cities network. A unitary authority with a population of around 400,000, it was created two years ago by the merger of the unitary authorities of Bournemouth and Poole with the non-metropolitan district of Christchurch.

BCP's Deputy Leader Philip Broadhead, the Key Cities

Co-Lead on Cities and Towns, believes that at least some of the financial keys to recovery are in cities' own hands. Giving cities and towns financial autonomy to invest in growth can be a win-win for central and local government, he said, so an important element of growth is a no-money ask.

Levelling up goes beyond language and party, in his view. There is a problem with disparity: how are we going to get ahead of it and fix it? On practical grounds he's cautious about the idea of asking for powers to raise more local taxes, because "all that happens is that Government stops worrying about it" – but finding effective mechanisms for long-term investment is key.

Local authorities have extensive assets, but they can't properly borrow against them to invest in growth. The approach Philip proposed would bandage the risk up with the solution. It would be a benefit for the Government that by giving people control of their destiny, they would also have control of their own risks and consequences.

Coming up with long-term solutions to local development can be difficult when Government wants to see outcomes more rapidly, but it can be done by pegging investment with a deliverable "quid pro quo", or by aligning it with the statutory Local Plan which local authorities have to produce and attaching some financial investment to that – or both. Why on earth, he asked, is a Local Plan for housing delivery in an area over 15 years separate from what Homes England or Regeneration departments are doing?

He cited the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal where the Government made a substantial investment in return for the local partners working with Homes England to deliver a significantly increased housing target.

"This is not the model of saying here's a pot of money you bid for, and if you meet the criteria you get it and we look over your shoulder. This is co-creation – and I think the stars could be aligning on this."

Distributing enterprise

Margaret Thatcher's Secretary of State for Employment, and later for Trade & Industry, does not believe that economic growth is about Government and local authorities doing things. In his book, Government sets the climate, and then people do things.

Politics aside – he came into Government as a technocrat and only thought of joining the governing party on the day of his first Cabinet meeting – Lord Young has twice pioneered schemes that successfully stimulated business startups in times of economic peril, and he believes this time cities could be instrumental in delivering something similar.

In the 1980s he started the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, where people who had been unemployed for three months and could find £1,000 investment from savings or elsewhere would receive unemployment benefit for a year without having to look for work. This led directly to the creation of 350,000 businesses.

Then after 2010, he persuaded the Treasury to bring in Startup Loans of up to £7,000 and over the two years this was actively promoted, it led to 77,000 startups.

David Young believes something like the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, tailored to today's needs, could help local growth. "But in the eighties, Government had regional and local offices everywhere. Now we don't have Jobcentres all over the country

to help us deliver that. But we do have local authorities."

He believes a scheme where the cities provide a delivery mechanism to help small firms set up would be a great asset, with the cities looking after planning and other aspects such as getting local business schools or colleges to give advice and getting businesspeople to act as mentors when needed.

There are examples of local authorities working with Local Enterprise Partnerships, Chambers of Commerce and other partners to encourage startups, but what Lord Young proposes is a funded Government scheme delivered by local government with local partners.

"That distribution mechanism is the only thing we really miss," he asserted. "And for the local authorities, they can see businesses growing up on their patch, which will produce rates and general prosperity."



Rt Hon Lord Young of Graffham

Understanding Place



Jane Meek

It is for elected politicians local and national to decide policy, and then it is for Jane Meek and her colleagues up and down the land to deliver the hoped-for outcomes in the places where we live.

Carlisle's Corporate Director of Economic Development knows that the needs and significance of cities is not just determined by their size.

One of Key Cities northernmost members, Carlisle may be relatively small, but it is the only city in Cumbria and the Borderlands region and so has a wide area of influence. The city recently signed the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal – the first rural and the first cross-border growth deal – with the UK and Scottish Governments. It also has a Towns Deal and investment from the Future High Streets Fund, St Cuthbert's Garden Village and the Capacity Fund.

But as Jane pointed out, Carlisle has not had this kind of investment for many years if ever, “and like a lot of smaller cities, we need the help. There has to be a recognition that we have

issues of viability and resources as small authorities away from the major conurbations, but with a very important role.”

Carlisle is intent on making a positive contribution to the Northern Powerhouse, looking at what its region can do to be resilient, support its economy and attract more people. Looking at the post-Covid city, there are challenges and opportunities.

Digital connectivity, particularly in the rural areas, is poor and this needs to be addressed to support working from home. The smaller towns from the west coast of Cumbria to Dumfries are losing their major retailers, so the city has a role as the only place with that level of shops and experience.

Locally, Carlisle is focusing on access into the city – including by rail, enhanced rural bus services and creative thinking about electric vehicles and future mobility – and making more of its significant leisure cultural offer. Carlisle has to grow and there is cross-party commitment to development.

Growth is the thing. In Jane's view, ten-year growth deals like the Borderlands one is what every place should be aiming for, because regeneration projects are not quick wins. But they are the most effective tool, because they work through the people who know what the local issues are, who could just do with a bit of long-term strategic support to succeed.

Level the playing field for high street shops



Cllr. Dawn Melvin

“If you cut me through the middle it says Thatcher, I’m that blue,” said Gloucester City Council’s Cabinet Member for Economic Recovery & Growth. Yet on the need for Cities to be activist players in the recovery, there is much that unites her with differently-hued colleagues across the network.

“We’ve bought our shopping centres and other retail back, because we wanted control again,” Dawn Melvin said, and the Council has also borrowed from the Government to fund a £107 million regeneration project as a joint venture with Reef.

National and local government incentives are central to Dawn’s thinking about recovery. “High street shops have had to bring their prices down to compete with online stores, but their costs are different,” she pointed out. Her solution? A differential VAT rate for online commerce as compared with businesses that have a high street presence: she suggests 25% against 7.5% respectively. “If you want to even things up, that will do it and that’s pretty immediate.” It also addresses what many see as tax avoidance by tech majors, a factor that aggravates the cost differential with legitimate high street stores.

Dawn Melvin would also use incentives to encourage British business in the high street. If a good company in Grimsby with hardware shops in five areas, or a farming cooperative selling beef and lamb in Herefordshire, wanted to expand, she would

want to look at using Council assets to give them immediate incentives to open shops in Gloucester or Tewkesbury, since the old model of shopping centres with high rents and service charges is just no longer viable to expand businesses.

With adult children who can see no prospect of raising a mortgage, Dawn is acutely aware of the lack of affordable housing and again looks to incentives. “If we want brownfield sites turned into housing – whether to buy or for social housing – why not give incentives to developers, say a reduced Council Tax for the first five years, for taking those units?” she asked.

She does feel developers need urgently to get up to speed and build houses that include a working-from-home environment, and Government should be proactive about making this happen.

With Government investment in housing, she would like to see a proportion of the annual allocation, say 10%, reserved for small housing providers to support small business and improve the mix.

When it comes to leveraging assets she is more cautious. “When we sell an asset, that money is invested directly in buying another. As administrations we are mere custodians. I do not believe we should be able to reduce the assets that belong to the people.”

We're here, no need to invent us



*Cllr. John Merry CBE
Deputy Mayor of Salford
Chair of Key Cities*

Key Cities come in all shapes, sizes and political colours. What brings us together is the conviction that we can do better for our own places by working with each other and with Government to tackle the challenges we face, and to create an environment in which cities can drive recovery and growth.

As city leaders, we are concerned with making things work and delivering better outcomes for our residents and stakeholders. This has never been more evident than during the pandemic, when it was cities working with local NHS and other agencies that dealt with the everyday realities: housing the homeless, implementing public health measures, supporting care homes, maintaining local services, gathering data and delivering many of the Government's emergency support schemes.

In the end, the existing structures of local government proved to be among the most effective and resilient instruments in our toolbox.

Now we confront the challenge of the recovery, and our cities and towns will again be central to achieving success in addressing underlying inequalities, improving productivity, reviving our urban centres and encouraging new activity.

What we say to Government in this report is this:

We're here.

We run our cities and local services.

We want a better future for our citizens.

We can develop innovative, scaleable solutions.

Give us the freedom and support we need to drive recovery and growth.

Cllr. John Merry

Participants

Chair

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APPG Co-Chair *

Parliamentary Members

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Stephen Morgan MP (Portsmouth
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Jo Gideon MP (Stoke-on-Trent
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Clive Lewis MP (Norwich South)

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Valley)

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Baroness Deborah Wilcox

Rt. Hon. Lord Young of Graffham
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Speakers

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Peter Freeman CBE, Chair of
Homes England and Co-Chair of
the Urban Recovery Taskforce

Ben Lucas, Managing Director,
Metro-Dynamics

Cllr. Matthew Brown, Leader of
Preston City Council and Key
Cities Co-Lead on Cities and
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Cllr. Philip Broadhead, Deputy
Leader of Bournemouth,
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Cllr. Richard Cook, Leader of
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Cllr. Gail Harris, Deputy Leader,
Norwich City Council

Cllr. Dawn Melvin, Cabinet
Member for Economic Recovery
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Cllr. Jane Mudd, Leader of
Newport City Council

Cllr. Shabir Pandor, Leader of
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Cllr. Dine Romero, Leader of Bath
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** Follow up consultations*

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Kasper de Graaf, CEO,
Images&Co and APPG
Programme Director

Pascale Delta, Executive
Support, Images&Co

Naomi Turner,
Parliamentary Adviser,
Images&Co

Participant breakdown

10	Parliamentarians
3	External Speakers
26	Cities Representatives
12	Stakeholders
3	APPG Secretariat

Cities present

Bath & North East
Somerset *

Blackpool *

Bournemouth, Christchurch
& Poole *

Bristol

Carlisle *

Doncaster *

Gloucester *

Hull *

Kirklees *

Lincoln *

Norwich *

Newport *

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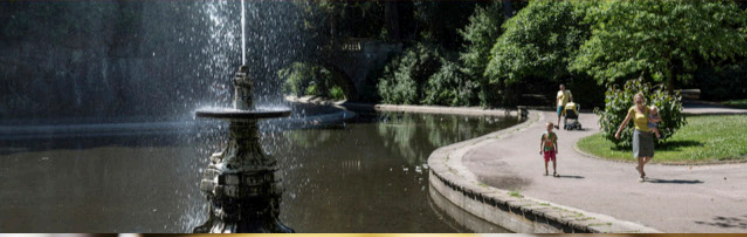
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Coventry, City of Culture 2021

