

Debate on the future of seaside towns

House of Lords

1 July 2019



Key messages

- Councils play a central role in ensuring coastal areas are healthy, prosperous and sustainable places. The Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities Committee inquiry into our coastal communities is important and we were delighted that their final report supported the introduction of the Tourism Sector Deal. The Deal will help support the regeneration of seaside towns and communities, particularly in the context of improving skills provision.
- Coastal areas have a fundamental role in trade and commerce, and provide an important national resource in terms of food production, aggregates and offshore energy. They also play a significant role in the visitor economy, with day visits to seaside towns contributing to around 17 per cent of UK tourism in 2017.ⁱ
- Coastal towns have suffered from underfunding and underinvestment from central Government. They often have poor transport infrastructure, poor digital connectivity, poor healthcare facilities, an aging population and as a result, disproportionately high levels of deprivation. They are also one of the UK's most fragile and vulnerable environments, and local authorities work hard to ensure they are properly defended from flood risk and coastal erosion.
- In July 2018, the LGA published 'The Future of Non-Metropolitan England: moving on the conversation'ⁱⁱ which outlined the challenges facing coastal and rural communities and highlighted the key areas where councils can begin to address local issues. This included housing, skills, digital connectivity, health, transport, trade and local economic growth.
- Financial pressures on local government are limiting the ability of coastal local authorities to regenerate and support their towns. We are calling on the Government to provide long-term, sustainable funding for our seaside towns in the Spending Review.

Briefing

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FURTHER INFORMATION

This briefing outlines the key points from the LGA Coastal Special Interest Group's submission to the Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities Committee inquiry into the future of seaside townsⁱⁱⁱ. It also highlights areas of the Committee's report which the LGA welcomed upon its publication in April 2019.

Research

In July 2018, the LGA published an interim report which addresses many of the areas the Committee explored. 'The Future of Non-Metropolitan England: moving the conservation' outlined the challenges faced by rural and coastal communities in seven key areas which included housing, skills, connectivity, health, transport, trade and investment and local economic growth. We will be publishing the full report at this year's LGA annual conference.

There has not been enough Government analysis of the economic and social health of seaside towns. It is right that the Committee urged the Government to conduct further research into the challenges facing coastal communities, including the disproportionately high levels of deprivation these areas face.

Tourism

- **Tourism Sector Deal**

Government plans to publish a Tourism Sector Deal is a positive as new investment should help reverse the decline in seaside tourism. This will mean solving a range of issues related to the social challenges experienced in coastal towns, highlighted in this briefing, and the struggle in encouraging investment. It is pleasing the Committee recognised the importance of the Tourism Sector Deal and we are urging the Government to publish it as soon as possible.

- **Tourism skills report**

The Committee's acknowledgment that the economies of many seaside towns are suffering from skills shortages is welcome, as is their recommendation that the Government support local skills strategies. In 2017, the LGA launched its 'Work Local' approach^{iv} which demonstrated how local leaders can support the visitor economy through an integrated, effective and locally responsive employment and skills system that meets the labour market and skills challenges of the future.

To supplement this, the LGA have been working on a tourism skills report which will help councils identify a number of key areas where solutions can be developed to tackle the skills gap and high turnover of staff. This report will be launched at our annual conference in July 2019. We hope the solutions and case studies in the report will be considered by the Government, and be used alongside the delivery of the upcoming Tourism Sector Deal.

- **Moving away from the visitor economy**

The loss of previous industries such as fishing has left communities without viable alternatives beyond tourism and recreation, which are typically seasonal,

pay low wages and with low job security. While the majority of effort is focused on the visitor economy, other sectors such as renewable energy is a strong industry for coastal areas, and work is being done to develop the appropriate skills to support work locally. This echoes the Committee's suggestion that in some areas, promoting or invigorating tourism has been overstated as a solution to local economic challenges.

The LGA has published research into how 13 areas have undertaken a cultural approach to regeneration^v. While this type of approach underpins the visitor economy, the aim is to create thriving communities where people are proud to live and businesses are keen to invest. The Committee's recognition of the role that the creative and cultural industries can play in the regeneration of seaside communities is important; and we endorse their recommendation that grant funding for heritage and arts projects should take into account place-based approaches, particularly in the context of capital investment.

- **Housing**

Seaside towns have seen an increase in the number of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), which often offer low quality accommodation, with a high percentage of those occupied by people who are partly or fully dependent on housing benefit. It is pleasing the Committee recommended that the Government should determine whether local authorities require additional powers to address the problems arising in areas with an especially large numbers of HMOs.

- **Health and wellbeing**

Coastal towns are often home to an older demographic associated with a higher mortality rate. Residents in these areas also often have a lower quality of health. In Blackpool, for example, there is a life expectancy of thirteen years between and most and least deprived areas^{vi}. Challenges include attracting medical staff, the aging population adding pressure to overstretched health and social care services, the prevalence of poor mental health and geographical isolation.

We agree with the Committee that funding for coastal local authorities should reflect the financial impact of providing adequate services to support the needs of vulnerable people. We also urge the Government to invest in early intervention, which will reduce costs on public services.

- **Connectivity**

Coastal towns often suffer from poor mobile and broadband connectivity compared to urban areas. This means businesses suffer, new businesses are discouraged from starting up in coastal areas, and people do not feel the benefits of good connection, such as from working from home or video calling friends and family. In areas where there has not been a market solution, councils have been at the centre of delivering the Superfast Broadband Programme, having committed £740 million to extending connectivity to the hardest to reach areas^{vii}.

We were pleased the Committee highlighted these concerns and it is welcome they urged the Government to prioritise the roll-out of high-quality broadband and mobile connectivity in coastal areas. We recently submitted evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry on rural broadband and digital only services, which aligns with our concerns for coastal areas.

- **Transport**

Coastal towns typically sit at the 'end of the line', meaning visitors travel to them specifically and there is little passing trade. This applies to rail and roads, which often do not continue beyond or pass through seaside towns. This is harming the economic potential of these towns.

The Committee's recommendation that coastal transport improvements should be prioritised by the Government is welcome. It is also pleasing that the Committee has said that this should be informed by a detailed review of the coastal transport network, which should include an assessment of where the greatest socio-economic benefits can be felt through improvements to transport connectivity.

ⁱ Tourism Alliance, UK tourism statistics 2017

(http://www.tourismalliance.com/downloads/TA_395_420.pdf)

ⁱⁱ LGA, The future of non-metropolitan England: Moving the conversation on

(<https://www.local.gov.uk/moving-the-conversation-on/non-met-england>)

ⁱⁱⁱ LGA, Local Government Association Coastal Special Interest Group – written evidence

(<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/regenerating-seaside-towns-and-communities-committee/regenerating-seaside-towns/written/91413.html>)

^{iv} LGA, Work Local (<https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/employment-and-skills/work-local>)

^v LGA, Culture-led regeneration: Achieving inclusive and sustainable growth

(<https://local.gov.uk/culture-led-regeneration-achieving-inclusive-and-sustainable-growth>)

^{vi} LGA, Local Government Association Coastal Special Interest Group – written evidence

(<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/regenerating-seaside-towns-and-communities-committee/regenerating-seaside-towns/written/91413.html>)

^{vii} Parliament, Broadband: Written question

(<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2016-05-10/36984/>)