

Social Mobility in Counties

A Report by the County All Party Parliamentary Group,
supported by the County Councils Network and Localis



The County APPG would like to thank all county authorities who contributed towards the inquiry and for taking the time to submit written or oral evidence.

CountyAPPG

COUNTY ALL-PARTY
PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

The County APPG is a forum for parliamentarians to consider the critical issues and challenges faced by county areas and their communities. It promotes the current and future contributions of county areas, to the national economy, to public services and to social wellbeing.

CCN

COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

CCN is the national voice for England's county councils. It represents all 27 county councils and 9 county unitary authorities. Collectively, they represent 26 million people, or 47% of the country's population. It is a special interest group of the Local Government Association. For more information, visit www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk.



Localis is an independent think tank for putting place at the centre of politics and policy. Our work promotes neo-localist ideas through research, events and commentary, covering a range of local and national domestic policy issues.

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Foreword



The County APPG exists to provide parliamentarians with the chance to come together and raise issues that are impacting on those living in county areas. As champions and representatives of those areas we know that they are great places to live and work.

But too many residents in county areas miss out on opportunities that are taken for granted in larger towns and cities. They have fewer chances to find good jobs or access high quality training or apprenticeships. It is more difficult for people to access vital public services such as transport or high speed broadband.

Taken together, this means that county areas have lower levels of social mobility to those in larger urban areas. Social mobility is an issue that has rapidly risen up the political agenda in the past few years, but there needs to be an increased focus on what is happening in county areas.

Action is already being undertaken nationally to tackle problems that have become deep-rooted over decades, such as repeated attempts to improve coastal economies. But county authorities have also developed their own range of interventions designed to improve social mobility, tailored to the specific needs of their areas. Many of those initiatives have been highlighted here.

This report contains recommendations that builds on existing good practice which if taken forward will help residents in county areas to catch up with social mobility levels that exist in other parts of England.

The APPG hopes that the government will continue to engage with county councils on these issues, with a renewed focus on how they can best support social mobility.

Peter Aldous MP
Chair, County APPG





Executive summary

The issue of social mobility has had an increased profile over the past ten years. This is in part the result of the government's decision to set up a Social Mobility Commission, who recently found that London enjoys levels of social mobility that far outstrip the rest of the country, with 29 of the 32 London boroughs classed as being social mobility hotspots. By contrast areas within counties accounted for 52 of the 65 social mobility coldspots they identified.

The commission's overall findings were confirmed by the analysis Localis carried out for this inquiry. They identified poor levels of social mobility in coastal areas and found that city regions perform better than counties, particularly as distance from the capital increases.

The Foundations for Social Mobility

Much of the written evidence received highlighted initiatives that councils are already undertaking to improve social mobility.

However, it is clear that further support is needed to ensure that the right foundations are in place that enable councils to drive social mobility.

Local government funding

Since 2010, local government has witnessed large reductions in funding as a result of government efforts to reduce the national deficit. Since 2010, all government grants have been reduced by around 50%. But for county authorities, reductions in core funding between 2015 and 2020 have been more acute; for instance local government grants to counties will reduce by 42% during this period, double the rate of London boroughs and higher than all other types of councils.

As a result of funding pressures, local government funding is increasingly being focussed on a smaller area of council activity, making it harder for counties to support social mobility.

The government's development of a fair funding formula for local authorities must address this 'deep seated' unfairness that currently exists in funding for county authorities which is holding back social mobility in county areas.



Recommendation One

Counties' ambitions to deliver better social mobility are often hampered by the funding pressures they are under. As a result, the government should ensure that the Fair Funding Review delivers a more equitable share of funding for shire counties, in particular using new indicators to better recognise deprivation and rural delivery costs.

Other pots of funding are of course available to local authorities, some of which are designed to improve employment, skills, access to work, or other factors that may impact on social mobility.

Councils invest time and energy, committing staff resource and often additional resource in making schemes work, only to be faced with the difficult choice on whether they wish to continue providing funding and assistance when government assistance has run its course.

A further source of uncertainty for counties is over how to continue initiatives currently supported by the EU Regional Development Funding, for example skills funding. The government has already committed to replacing this funding with a new Shared Prosperity Fund. This fund has the potential to address some of the issues associated with social mobility and bring county economies closer to other areas that have historically received more investment and attention.



Recommendation Two

The government should consider extending the length of time that funding pots and initiatives designed to improve social mobility operate for.



Recommendation Three

The government should ensure that the post-Brexit Shared Prosperity Fund is properly open to county councils to support increased social mobility in the coming years.

Infrastructure

Fewer transport options for people in county areas is impacting on choices for work, training and education, particularly for young people, in turn impacting on social mobility in the longer term. A more sustainable, comprehensive solution needs to be put in place, such as Total Transport style schemes, which pools the transport budgets of different local commissioners. A special focus needs to be given on finding solutions that work for young people.

Improving broadband could also overcome some of the transport issues that have been identified, by enabling more people to work from home or in alternative ways. Slow broadband speeds can limit the attractiveness of county areas to businesses that they want to bring to the area.



Recommendation Four

The government should support counties to ensure that they have the powers and funding to improve connectivity for rural areas, both within counties and across local government boundaries. This could be through Total Transport schemes, and the government should ensure it builds on pilots and to determine what could be rolled out to other local authorities.



Recommendation Five

The government should consider how it can provide a Freedom Pass-style scheme for young people to help them access education, employment and training opportunities.



Recommendation Six

The government should consider how it can better support councils to deliver the roll-out of super-fast broadband.

Leadership

Dealing with the challenge of social mobility cuts across the work of a number of central government departments, but is led by the Department for Education (DfE). The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has responsibility for the rural economy and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has responsibility for coastal economies. Given the focus that the Social Mobility Commission placed on these areas, it is disappointing that neither DEFRA nor MHCLG have yet produced social mobility action plans for coastal and rural areas.

In the forthcoming Devolution Framework, it is therefore imperative that Government confirms a more flexible approach to devolution to support social mobility and as part of any discussion about repatriation of powers following withdrawal from the EU.



Recommendation Seven

The Social Mobility Commission highlighted the challenge of delivering social mobility in rural and coastal communities. In response, DEFRA and MHCLG should work on behalf of government and commission further work on what is holding back social mobility in rural and coastal areas and what would help to drive it forward.



Recommendation Eight

The Common Devolution Framework should recognise the potential of devolution in county areas to support regional growth and improve social mobility. It should include a flexible approach to Governance.

The social mobility life cycle

Over the past ten years there has been considerable focus on **early years** by improving access to nursery education. Councils have had to invest considerable resource in ensuring high take-up, but we also found that there are often difficulties for families in rural areas to access child care.

Devolution

Achieving greater social mobility is also dependent on councils and local partners and the strength and scale of leadership local councils provide on social mobility also came across strongly through the evidence that we received.

But county councils have missed out on the opportunities that have been given to other areas through devolution deals. There is a growing evidence base on what could be achieved if greater devolution was provided to counties.



Recommendation Nine

Many councils are investing resource to ensure that there is good take up of the 30 hours free childcare offer. The government should review the scheme as it goes forward to ensure that councils have the support that they need to make sure the scheme is operating properly.

The good work that is being carried out by councils with **schools** is hampered by a lack of funding, constraining the ability of county councils and their schools to improve social mobility.

The progression that people make from GCSE to 'A' Levels, college courses, university, training or employment is not as good as it should be in counties, as a result of a lack of post-16 choices in county areas.



Recommendation Ten

The Office of Students needs to ensure that universities work with schools in shire counties as well as cities to ensure that university options are as well understood as other work and training opportunities.

Counties face significantly greater challenges than that of urban areas, cities, and particularly London, in providing skilled **employment** to residents. This is despite the scale of county economies, which collectively account for 41% of the country's GVA, and have enjoyed growth faster than the English average in recent years.

Cities and large urban areas are endowed with a high skills base with which to attract businesses and other support workers. This means counties face a catch-22 where they are less likely to attract businesses that will provide high-value employment because of the size of the skills base; but highly skilled individuals are unlikely to move into or return to county areas without economic opportunities that are better than those offered by cities and urban areas.

Devolving responsibilities and budgets for skills to county councils will ensure that they are better placed to respond to the skills challenges in their areas and better guide and grow their local economies.



Recommendation Eleven

Responsibilities and budgets for skills have been devolved to metro mayors. The government should devolve the same responsibilities and budgets to county councils and unitary authorities.

Introduction

What is social mobility and why is it important?

The issue of social mobility has had an increased profile over the past ten years. This is in part the result of the government's decision to set up a Social Mobility Commission with a remit to promote social mobility in the UK and measure its progress. They define social mobility as:

“Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to build a good life for themselves regardless of their family background. In a socially mobile society, every individual has a fair chance of reaching their potential.”¹

Their work has given the issue of improving social mobility an added political and media profile, and made the government more accountable for improving social mobility.

Their measurement of progress on social mobility has been backed up by interpretations of the 2016 referendum result rooted within the context of how different communities experience social mobility. As Theresa May said in 2017, the referendum result was an instruction to the government to “change the way our country works – and the people for whom it works – forever”.²

Following the referendum, the County Councils Network (CCN) said in their *A New Deal for Counties* that the imperative for change was most keenly felt in county areas, who cover 47% of England's population and 86% of its landmass.³ This point was supported by Localis, whose report *The Making of an Industrial Strategy* said:

“The places that are still dealing with the fallout of the industrial trauma of the 1980s are the stuck... The areas we identify as the structurally weakest in England, the stuck, are small towns and rural places, cut adrift of big cities.”⁴

This is reinforced by the Social Mobility Commission's 2017 *State of the Nation* report, which found that London boroughs and cities enjoy high levels of social mobility, whilst many areas of low social mobility are located within counties.⁵





Terms of Reference

Bearing in mind social mobility issues in counties that the County APPG, in partnership with the County Councils Network (CCN) and Localis decided to undertake an inquiry into Social Mobility in Shire Counties, considering what opportunities are available to counties and their partners and explore how they can begin to solve some of the issues identified by the government's Social Mobility Commission.

In establishing this inquiry it was agreed to focus on the following areas, which are crucial to securing better social mobility in shire counties: provision and impact of early years; education; transport; and skills and jobs.⁶

As part of or inquiry a call for evidence was issued seeking evidence on the following points:

- **What are the barriers and challenges facing counties and local partners in securing greater levels of social mobility?**
- **How visible are opportunities in counties for opportunities that could improve social mobility, such as higher/further education, skills training and apprenticeships, or employment?**
- **How do county councils, unitary councils and partners currently support social mobility in rural areas?**

In response to this, 18 county authorities sent in wide-ranging and detailed evidence. This reflected the central role that counties have in securing better social mobility through their core role to provide early years, education, transport, and economic development.

In addition to the written responses, the County APPG held an evidence session in July 2018, which was attended by MPs and councillors and officers from the following local authorities: Durham, East Sussex, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Wiltshire.

The written and oral evidence was supported by an analysis of key social mobility indicators carried out for the inquiry by Localis. This has been used to complement research, evidence analysis and policy development undertaken by CCN, exploring trends in social mobility in shire counties and informing the conclusions and recommendations.

North Yorkshire: Identifying Opportunities for Social Mobility



North Yorkshire County Council has worked with world class universities and leading international experts to help develop understanding and identify opportunities for improving social mobility.

The county council has undertaken its own detailed analysis of national and local data-sets on social mobility and has built up a comprehensive picture of the scale and scope of social mobility. This has been used to inform strategic thinking around social mobility and convert the analysis into meaningful strategy across North Yorkshire.

The council has commissioned academic experts from the University of Manchester to support the development of an integrated strategy to tackle school readiness issues in targeted areas across the county, a key contributor to social mobility. This research supports an internal school readiness steering group, sponsored (and initiated) by the chief executive and chaired by the director of children's services, and the discussion papers presented by the University have informed the development of a local position statement and vision that will convert into a comprehensive county wide strategy called North-Yorks-Talks in 2018. In accordance with this research, North Yorkshire have chosen a targeted approach for improving school readiness which centres on the development of speech, language and communications skills as one of the main barriers to educational achievement and long-term social mobility.

The council used sponsorship funding from the Economic and Social Research

Council to form a research partnership with academic experts based at the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the University of York. One of the key work strands was a qualitative pilot study with young people in North Yorkshire who were growing up with material hardship, poverty and deprivation. The aim of the research was to improve the overall understanding of youth transitions to adulthood, and to weave this new insight into the strategic planning of the council. The work, which is on-going and is accompanied with a short film documentary, is centred on the lived experiences of young people, and will produce outputs to significantly improve awareness of some of the most pressing issues affecting young people today.

North Yorkshire are also undertaking further initiatives to drive improved social mobility, including a review of early year's provision, a revised economic strategy, and using the Armed Forces Covenant to understand the needs of children and young people from military families – a known major risk factor for poor social mobility. The council's Children and Families Service, which was recently rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, also provide additional support for Looked After Children and children leaving care, leading to improved educational attainment outcomes, increased progression to further and higher education, and improved labour market prospects.

Social Mobility in Counties

There is often a perception amongst the public and some policy-makers that shire counties are wealthy areas, with few social or economic problems. It was therefore important that the Social Mobility Commission explicitly acknowledged this is not the case in their State of the Nation 2017 report.

By their measure, London enjoys levels of social mobility that far outstrip the rest of the country, with 29 of the 32 London boroughs classed as being social mobility hotspots. By contrast areas within counties accounted for 52 of the 65 social mobility coldspots they identified.

The Commission also noted that “the new social mobility coldspots in our country are concentrated in remote rural or coastal areas and in former industrial areas”.⁷

This analysis was supported by councils’ written evidence, perhaps best typified by Norfolk who said that:

“Norfolk has several “cold spots” of concern in remote rural or coastal areas such as Great Yarmouth, with weak labour markets, a greater share of low-skilled, low paid employment and poor connectivity by transport.”

Localis Analysis

This Commission’s overall findings were confirmed by the analysis Localis carried out for this inquiry. They looked at a range of indicators at a ‘strategic authority’ (see opposite) level, looking at counties and unitary authorities, alongside city regions.

Their analysis is not intended to provide evaluations of public services. Instead they focussed on the relative ability of people to move through social strata and display the disparity in outcomes between people of disadvantaged backgrounds and other people.

For example, the Attainment 8 indicator that they used as an indicator does not evaluate the overall Key Stage 4 performance of London, but the outcome of a disadvantaged pupil compared to an average pupil.

The table in Appendix 1 sets out the measures that they used to underpin their analysis, and the overall scores are shown in the map below. The score for each individual life stage is taken from a strategic authority’s average rank across the indicators for that stage.

The final map was calculated by taking the average score across all three life stages. No strategic authority has an average rank lower than 36, due to the variance across life stages – Surrey, for example, ranks an average 43.0 at the Early Years stage but 6.5 for the Work stage.



What is a strategic authority?

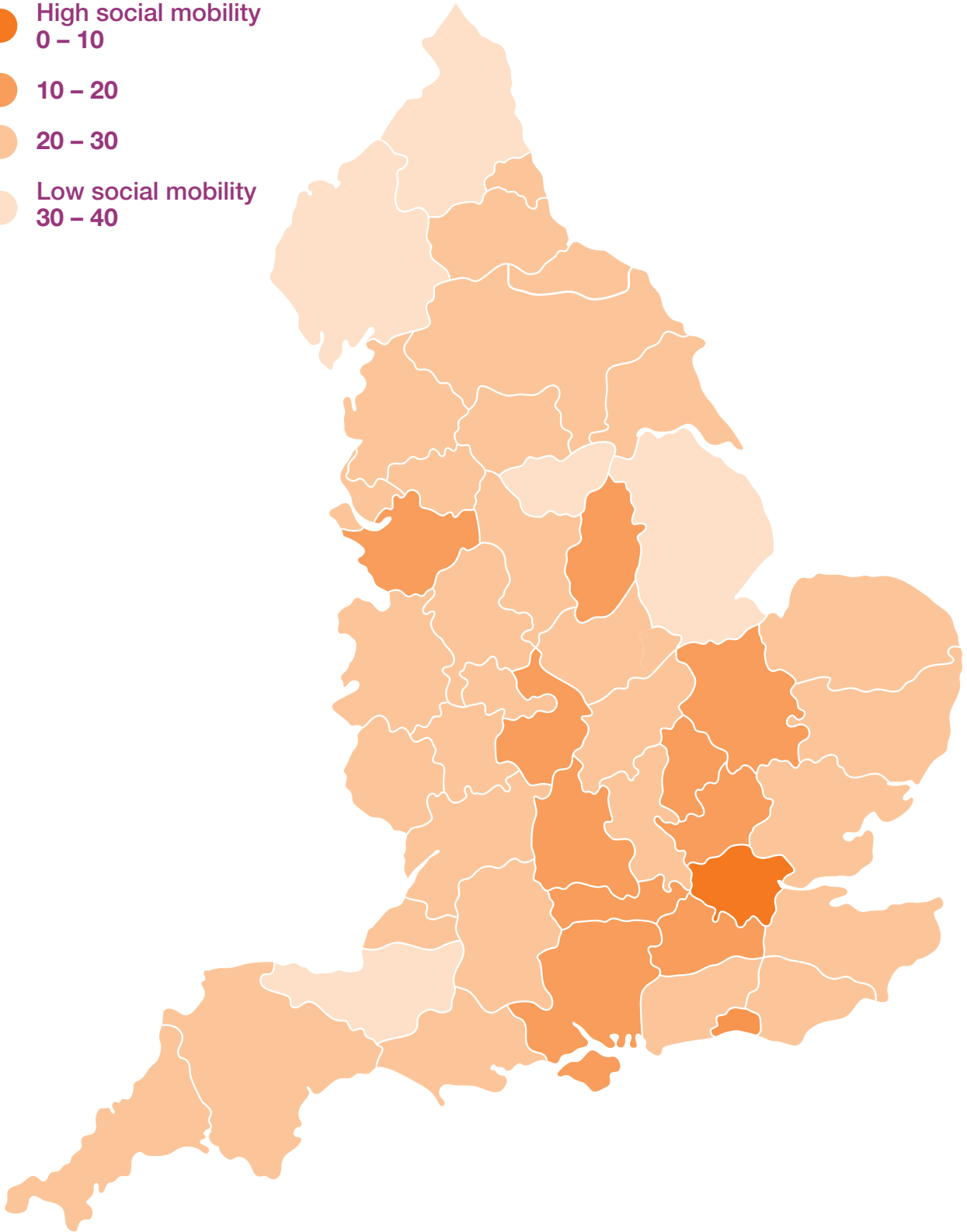
A strategic authority, as defined by Localis, is the recognised body which leads the industrial strategy in a local area. It would most commonly be a formal collaboration of local authorities across a geographic area. This would be different to a (non-mayoral) combined authority because of a) the requirement for an additional level of democratic mandate and b) the new suite of powers it would wield.





Social Mobility: Average rank across all three phases

- High social mobility
0 – 10
- 10 – 20
- 20 – 30
- Low social mobility
30 – 40



Analysis by Localis for the County Councils Network

There are some discernible patterns when examining the results of Localis data analysis, the most notable being the general appearance of social mobility seeming to increase with proximity to London on the west side.

The M4 corridor, in particular, shows the full range of social mobility in this country, with the west of England seeing relatively poor scores, which increase for each strategic authority up to London. Poor levels of social mobility in coastal areas are also clearly visible on the map. City regions on the whole perform better than counties, particularly as distance from London increases – with notable exceptions being Sheffield and Liverpool.

The Localis analysis also confirms three things highlighted by the Social Mobility Commission and the responses received to the call for evidence.

Firstly, London, and to a lesser extent other city regions enjoy high levels of social mobility. London is included the top rank of Localis' analysis, and the 'Golden Triangle' cities of Oxford and Cambridge are included in the top third.

It is possible to see a positive 'drag' effect, with London's economy acting as the centre of a 'southern powerhouse' focussed on the south east. Where the Social Mobility Commission found higher levels of social mobility on the north, south and north east of London (Surrey, Hertfordshire and Essex), Localis also found high levels of social mobility in Hertfordshire, but more broadly on the western side of London, in Hampshire and Buckinghamshire. London's status as a catalyst for social mobility is clear.

Secondly, as with the Commission's analysis, Localis confirms that coastal areas are struggling to match the levels of social mobility experienced in other parts of the country. County Durham, Devon and Cumbria are ranked in the bottom third, and other areas with significant coast lines including Dorset, Kent and Norfolk are also towards the bottom of their ranking.

Thirdly, both sets of analysis help disprove the assumption that counties are wealthy places with few socio-economic problems.

The Localis and Social Mobility Commission analyses both demonstrate that counties are large, diverse place spanning a wide range of types of community and economy. For example, the Social Mobility Commission found that North Yorkshire is home to one hotspot (Craven) and one coldspot (Scarborough).

The size of counties can often serve to mask deprivation and socio-economic challenges that can exist in large pockets of counties, whether it be towns, stretches of coastline or rural areas.

Moreover, the distances that often exist in counties can be the biggest factor hampering social mobility, as we will explore later on in this report.

The current model of social mobility

In responding to the call for evidence, councils highlighted many initiatives that they are undertaking specifically aimed at improving social mobility in shire counties.

However, counties do not always benefit from their hard work and investment in improving social mobility.

The current model of social mobility in shire counties could be crudely characterised as investing money in early years, education and careers advice, enabling young people to leave the place they grew up for larger towns and cities to attend university, where they then remain as a result of the greater economic opportunities that exist in those areas.

This model increasingly does not work for young people, who can find themselves living in expensive areas where the dream of home ownership gets ever further away.

But it also does not work for shire counties, as it holds back attempts to grow local economies, which are underpinned by highly skilled workers and good quality economic opportunities for residents.

Central Bedfordshire noted in their evidence the need to change this model this ensure that they can meet their full economic potential:

“The challenge of young people moving to urban areas is universal. However, Central Bedfordshire is designated as a growth area, and is in a strategic location within the Oxford – Cambridge Growth Corridor.

“It is intended that our interventions within that initiative will provide an increase in the higher skill, higher qualification jobs, ensuring that people achieving this level of education don’t need to migrate out or commute to London to find work.”

The current model of social mobility may have developed organically over the past fifty years, but it is clear that some sort of intervention is required to help counties develop a different model that continues to provide talented young people with satisfying opportunities and ensures that they can grow their economies for the benefit of all residents.





The Foundations for Social Mobility

Much of the written evidence received highlighted initiatives that councils are already undertaking to improve social mobility.

However, it is clear that further support is needed to ensure that the right foundations are in place that enable councils to drive social mobility and economic growth.

An analysis of the evidence shows that there are four foundations that are needed to enable councils to help families and individuals secure greater levels of social mobility in shire counties:

- **Strong economies**
- **Fair funding**
- **Infrastructure**
- **Leadership**

Building on the evidence to this report, this section analyses each of these foundations in turn, providing recommendations for the Government to consider.

Strong Economies

Key to ensuring high levels of social mobility is ensuring that counties have a strong economic foundation from which to work. Research from Oxford Economics found that county economies collectively account for 41% of the country's GVA and have enjoyed growth faster than the English average in the past couple of years.⁸

Their research also found that counties' occupational profile is skewed towards the skilled trades, reflecting the high proportion of manufacturing and construction jobs in county areas. However they also found that:

“Growth in recent years has been led by the service sectors, and this will continue going forward, with professional, scientific and technical sector employment becoming increasingly important.”

Employment patterns in counties are also impacted by the rise of the ‘gig economy’, a category into which employment in the tourism and agriculture sectors often fall. What counties therefore need to ensure is that their skills and employment base can expand accordingly, and that people in rural areas can access those opportunities.





Future economic challenges

County economies are also exposed to two sets of forces that the government needs to take into account when taking forward its local industrial strategies and reform of the network of Local Economic Partnerships that have been created over the past decade.

Firstly, county economies need to be able to withstand any pressure that may result from the withdrawal from the EU and be able to take advantage of any opportunities that are created in the future.

For example, Localis' In Place of Work research found that 22 of England's 47 strategic authority areas have an above average level of labour market risk to a post-withdrawal migration squeeze.⁹ Counties already have a population that is aging faster than the English average, with 28% of their population being aged over 65.¹⁰

Indeed, Cumbria's evidence said that they have a 'super-aging population'. Without appropriate support, their economies could suffer a loss of workforce that could impact on the skills base and employment ratio of counties.

Secondly, whilst technological change can offer growth opportunities, such as superfast broadband, county economies need to be able to withstand any pressure that it may pose, for example automation. In Place of Work also found that 28 of the 47 strategic authorities have an above average level of labour market risk to automation. Oxford Economic have forecast job losses of 144,000 in the county manufacturing sector between 2017 and 2027.¹¹

These forces make it vital that county economies are fully supported to grow and diversify, acting not only as bedrock of England's economy but also drive forward social mobility through increased and future economic opportunities.

Fair Funding

Since 2010, local government has witnessed large reductions in funding as a result of government efforts to reduce the national deficit. Over this period government grants have reduced by around 50%. But for county authorities, reductions in core funding between 2015 and 2020, have been more acute; for instance local government grants to counties will reduce by 42% during this period, double the rate of London boroughs and higher than all other types of councils.

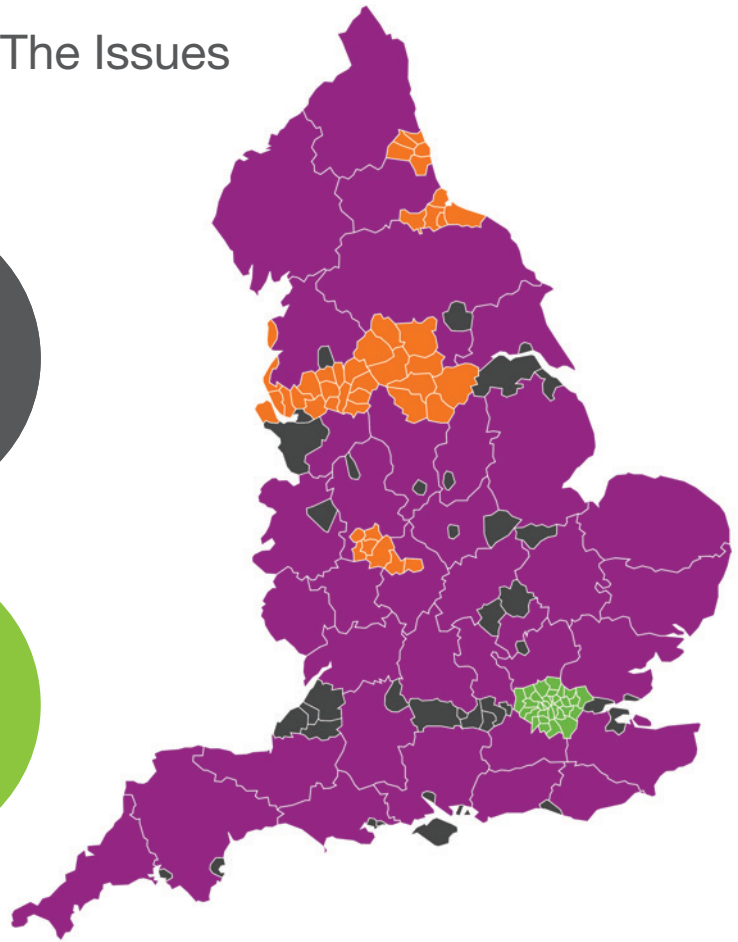
However, it is not just the overall level of funding for councils, but also how it is distributed. Shire counties receive £182 per head from core government grants for local services, while councils in London receive £481 per head. As a result of funding reductions, this will reduce further over the period.

A combination of funding reductions, unfair funding and rising demand for services mean that over this year and next, county authorities face funding pressures of £3.2bn. When exploring the £3.2bn funding pressures, 58% (1.861bn) is caused by demand-led pressures. This figure includes projected growth in usage of frontline services, such as adult social care services or children's social care services, (£1.2bn), and inflation (£661m).¹²

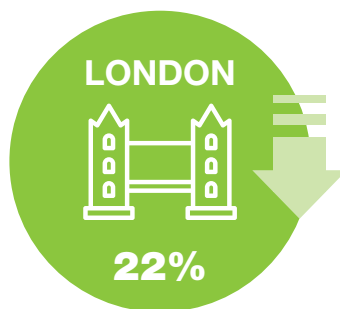
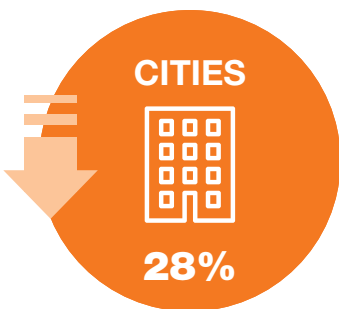
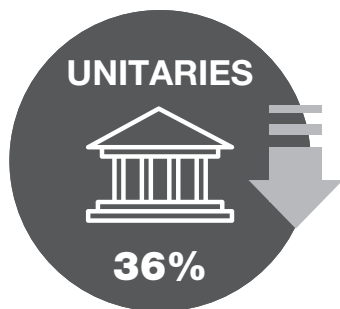
As a result of funding pressures, local government funding is increasingly being focussed on a smaller area of council activity. A recent report from the National Audit Office found that adults and children's social care now accounts for 65% of county authority budgets, up from 56% in 2013/14. This is only set to get more severe over the next few years as county authorities continue to grapple with rising demand in statutory services at a time when funding is being squeezed.

County Funding: Exploring The Issues

Per-Head Funding: By Council Type



Funding Drop – 2016 to 2020



Taken from councils' settlement funding assessment (Revenue Support Grant and retained business rates)

Funding Challenges: In Numbers



65%
of an average county's budget is spent on adult and children's social care

Source: National Audit Office



£3.2bn
the funding black hole facing counties by 2020, largely due to increased demand in care

Source: County Councils Network budget survey

Faced with these funding and demand-led pressures, counties are understandably keen to ensure that reforms to local government finance delivers a level of funding that fairly funds county authorities and supports their ambitions to provide local services that aid social mobility.

From 2020/21 councils will be able to retain 75% of local business rates. Reform is ongoing, and the evidence submitted, and therefore this report, has not considered the specific implications of these reforms in detail.

However, it is clear that to meet the unique funding pressures facing counties, a sufficient redistribution mechanism will be required. The impact on county councils is also dependent on how proceeds from business rate growth are split between county and district councils.

On the fair funding review, the evidence received highlighted a number of specific challenges county areas face in providing services to young people, but which are not currently being recognised in funding allocations.

Firstly, as shown by the analysis by Localis for this study – and highlighted throughout evidence – current measures of deprivation do not always capture small pockets of deprivation in counties; whether within small towns and cities, coastal communities or remote rural areas.

As Suffolk County Council told the inquiry:

“Like most counties [Suffolk] has a diversity of communities that is less likely to be prevalent in urban conurbations. There are urban communities with high deprivation as well as more hidden needs that are harder to identify in sparse rural communities.”

The neighbouring county Norfolk also said:

“Although generally considered a relatively well-off population.... this picture conceals significant pockets of deprivation, characterised by low incomes, job insecurity, poor educational attainment, ill-health and a lack of social mobility. Unfortunately, the false perception of Norfolk as a relatively rich area, has left it excluded from the levels of investment in public services that its people require and have a right to expect.”

Secondly, reforms to welfare and housing benefit introduced from 2010 have potentially changed the pattern of needs in London and counties.

In particular, some evidence submitted outlined the impact of families being rehoused outside of the capital, as a result of difficulties in providing housing for those families, particularly in the Home Counties. One council submitting evidence said:

“Migration can mask the impact of work to improve social mobility in an area. For example workers may move out of the area to be closer to higher value jobs that they secure. In addition London boroughs are placing homeless families in county areas. One in three temporary accommodation placements in London are now out of area placing a strain on local services. This can make it appear that an area is not achieving social mobility despite the efforts and successes of local services.”

County authorities have done much to support these families, but for those families the loss of support networks by virtue of their being moved can make them difficult to assist.

And lastly, the evidence showed that when considering social mobility and the fair funding review, it must take into consideration the additional costs of providing services in rural areas.

The services experienced by residents in rural areas often fall behind those in more urban areas – who often struggle to access services such as public transport, children’s centres and libraries, which are often taken for granted by residents in urban areas. Funding must be sufficient to ensure that residents in rural areas have the same opportunities to access these services. As Essex County Council told the inquiry

“There is no escaping the fact that reductions in funding are a challenge to maintaining services particularly in county areas where the rural geography can increase the costs of provision.”

This was supported by Hampshire County Council who said that:

“Hampshire is rural and sparsely populated, one of the challenges going forward will be how to retain equity of services irrespective of geography.... if forced to make more savings, there is a high risk that highly valued discretionary services which support social mobility, such as community transport or business support, will need to be further reduced.”

Looking ahead to the fair funding review, the County APPG has previously expressed a view that there should be a new funding formula for councils that is driven more by genuine cost drivers and, where possible, a distribution of funding that can respond to the growth in social care pressures in county authorities.

Moreover, as this evidence shows, the formula must also better recognise pockets of deprivation and the additional costs of delivering rural services.

Current deprivation measurements provide a greater weighting to urban authorities and as one council outlined, it is important that rural indicators of deprivation such as health inequalities, lack of social housing, car dependency, poor public transport and lack of access to health and social services to also be included within the formulae.

Shropshire Council said in relation to deprivation that they are:

“A relatively affluent location, albeit with pockets of deprivation, but in terms of access to services, it is amongst the most deprived localities in the country. Of Shropshire’s 193 Lower Level Super Output Areas, 65 are within the most 10% deprived areas of the country according to the geographical barriers to services sub-domain of the 2015 Indices of Multiple Deprivation”.

The government’s development of a fair funding formula for local authorities must address these ‘deep seated’ issues and the unfairness that currently exists with funding which is holding back social mobility in counties.



Recommendation One

Counties' ambitions to deliver better social mobility are often hampered by the funding pressures they are under. As a result, the government should ensure that the Fair Funding Review delivers a more equitable share of funding for shire counties, in particular using new indicators to better recognise deprivation and rural delivery costs.

Funding streams

Other pots of funding are of course available to local authorities, some of which are designed to improve employment, skills, access to work, or other factors that may impact on social mobility. Councils submitted evidence suggesting that they do not get a fair share of these funds either. Warwickshire said that:

“Attracting non-statutory funded provision into the county [for employment support] can be challenging as there is a tendency for such provision to head towards more urban areas with lower costs and greater concentrations of people seeking support.”

Governments also make funding pots time-limited, to help determine what works and what could be rolled out to other local authorities. But we heard at our evidence session that this approach can sometimes create problems.

Councils invest time and energy, committing staff resource and often additional resource in making schemes work, only to be faced with the difficult choice on whether they wish to continue providing funding and support when

the government assistance has run its course. This can limit the effectiveness of the initial investment and also provide a further draw on council resources.

However, the biggest source of uncertainty is over work that is currently supported by the EU Regional Development Funding. Much of the funding that has underpinned skills provision in England has come through the European Social Fund (ESF): between 2016 and 2018 over £400m was distributed by the fund for the delivery of education and training on behalf of the Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs).

The government has already committed to replacing this funding with a new Shared Prosperity Fund. However, the government has not yet set out in sufficient detail how it will work.

This fund has the potential to address some of the issues identified elsewhere in this report and bring the economies of the shire counties closer to other areas that have historically received more investment and attention. We would like to see the outcomes used as a way of delivering new funding streams that will explicitly focus on social mobility, and ensure that counties have fair access to these monies.

The County APPG therefore believe that the government must urgently engage with local government to ensure that the Shared Prosperity Fund appropriately supports local government. Given that the social mobility challenges are greatest in shire counties this funding must properly support them to improve social mobility.



Recommendation Two

The government should consider extending the length of time that funding pots and initiatives designed to improve social mobility operate for.



Recommendation Three

The government should ensure that the post-Brexit Shared Prosperity Fund is properly open to county councils to support increased social mobility in the coming years.

Infrastructure

The evidence submitted to this inquiry showed how critical infrastructure is to delivering social mobility. This has been supported by a recent report by the Prince's Countryside Foundation which found that found that:

“The top three barriers that exist right now for thousands of people across rural UK are poor broadband and mobile phone coverage, poor road and transport networks and a poor variety of employment opportunities with little or no scope for progression. Outmigration of young people is a “top five” issue across rural UK, being seen as a natural result of this mix of poor job prospects and weak digital connectivity.”¹³

Transport links are of course easier to navigate in urban areas, which enjoy higher levels of connectivity and shorter travelling distances. Shire counties, with their patchwork of towns, coastal areas, rural areas and ‘A’ roads and train lines have longer travel times to access opportunities. Department for Transport figures show that using public transport, the average travel time to key services was 15 minutes in urban areas but 29 minutes in rural areas.¹⁴

For those who rely on their cars, travel will be more expensive because of the longer distances that they are required to travel. Those who rely on public transport, and particularly bus services, have had to adapt to a series of reductions in service over the past decade. Campaign for Better Transport analysis of Department for Transport figures has found that over 3,000 bus routes have been reduced, altered or withdrawn between 2010 and 2018.¹⁵

This picture was reinforced by the written evidence we received. As Hertfordshire County Council said in their response:

“The nature of supported rural bus services mean they do not provide an efficient “value for money” measured in terms of cost per passenger, but are very important to freedom and social mobility for those individuals at relative disadvantage who cannot or choose not to drive.”

This limit on accessibility is impacting on choices for work, training and education, particularly for young people, in turn impacting on social mobility in the longer term.

For example young people choosing courses at their nearest college or sixth form rather than choosing an establishment that would offer more suitable course(s), better engaging them and help steer them towards a more suitable or rewarding career, or attending small sixth forms that have poorer educational outcomes.

This will in of itself limit future Higher Education and work opportunities. But transport can also have an immediate impact on those already in the labour market, limiting access to childcare, better employment or training opportunities.

This was an issue that we explored in depth at our evidence session. Many councils are seeking to offer an immediate, targeted solution. For example, a number of local authorities participate in the Wheels2Work scheme, which provides mopeds to young people and so improve their ability to access education, employment or training.¹⁶

However, we believe that a more sustainable comprehensive solution needs to be put in place. This is already happening in some parts of the country. For example, the Total Transport initiative in operation across Essex and West Sussex is:

“A cross-sector approach to the delivery of passenger transport services across health, school, and local authority transport and buses. Its aim is to integrate transport services which are currently commissioned by a variety of commissioners across these discrete areas. It does this by pooling resources, and using local expertise to deliver services that are better coordinated, integrated, and more efficient.”¹⁷

The Department for Transport has previously funded a series of pilots across England, which delivered a more integrated network, providing easier and better transport links, and giving passengers a better journey. As importantly for councils it could also deliver savings in transport budgets.

At the evidence session Essex and Suffolk councils provided an update about the impact of their joint Total Transport approach. This collaboration has been born from a desire to do more than provide the ‘bare minimum’ for transport, in part because of a desire to improve social mobility. By taking forward options such as using digital platforms and apps to make community transport work

better, they have been able to improve the access of young people. As important was the fact that this has been jointly commissioned across county boundaries.

Given this, we believe that the Department of Transport should work across all relevant government departments to ensure that this is rolled out more widely across counties, or that councils are given the practical support and financial means to do this. This could significantly improve transport options within the shire counties and across county boundaries.

At the evidence session participants reflected on the benefits the Freedom Pass has brought to older people – facilitating free travel for accessing appointments, shopping and helping to combat loneliness. But as has been described above, working adults and many young people often face many similar issues accessing transport impacting on their post-16 education, employment and training as well as their own ability to access services.

More must therefore be done to improve young people’s access to public transport. There are many different ways that this could be organised – either as a universal or a means-tested benefit. There are also differing ways that this could be paid for, but it is clear that this cost could not be borne by county finances at the moment. We would therefore recommend that government works with local government to see how a scheme could be properly financed and constructed that will support young people and the existing bus network and concessionary schemes.

Transport is not the only infrastructure required to improve social mobility in counties. Over the past decade the internet has become increasingly important to the workplace, and counties raised issues of slow broadband speeds in their submissions. This is supported by research published earlier this year showing that average download speeds (Mbit/s) are 27% slower on average in counties compared to London boroughs and 44% slower than mainly urban English unitary authority areas.¹⁸

Counties want to remain attractive places to live and work, but slow broadband speeds can limit their attractiveness to businesses that they want to attract to the area. Improving broadband could overcome some of the transport issues that have been identified above, by enabling more people to work from home or in alternative ways.

As Devon County Council pointed out:

“Reducing the requirement for physical transport, better digital connectivity can allow people to work and develop even from more remote areas. This is an area where lack of private investment means that the public sector needs to maintain a significant investment of energy and resources.”

The recent work that the government has done to secure broadband roll-out in rural areas, often in partnership with county councils, is to be welcomed.

In Wiltshire, for example, around 5% of all households currently receive a poor service with very slow broadband speeds and they are now investing £16m in improving access to digital services in areas which would otherwise miss out. This investment along with government grant and additional investment from the telecoms industry will generate over £30m of funds. It is intended this will go a long way towards eliminating the so called ‘digital divide’ across communities.¹⁹

However, it was made clear to us that more could be done to support the businesses and residents through better broadband speeds. As a result the APPG would like to see even more collaborative working between the government and local authorities to support faster broadband speeds.



Recommendation Four

The government should support counties to ensure that they have the powers and funding to improve connectivity for rural areas, both within counties and across local government boundaries. This could be through Total Transport schemes and the government should ensure it properly assesses the impact of the pilots and what can be rolled out to other local authorities.



Recommendation Five

The government should consider how it can provide a Freedom Pass-style scheme for young people to help them access education, employment and training opportunities.



Recommendation Six

The government should consider how it can better support councils to deliver the roll-out of super-fast broadband.



Leadership

The final foundation that the evidence submitted to the inquiry suggested was necessary for improving social mobility is the importance of national, and local, leadership.

The evidence we received suggested that there is a perceived lack co-ordination and ownership nationally within Whitehall.

Moreover, while county authorities are doing all they can to promote social mobility and overcome the barriers outlined above, their role is further hampered by a lack of devolution opportunities and focal points of leadership.

Whitehall

At a national level coordination for social mobility, which cuts across the work of a number of central government departments, is led by the Department for Education (DfE). Most recently they have announced a series of Social Mobility Area Action Plans, some of which cover county areas.²⁰

Education and employment opportunities are important in driving forward social mobility, but economic development in its widest sense impacts on social mobility, and vice versa. As the Education Secretary recently acknowledged social mobility is also ‘fundamental for a strong, highly skilled, productive economy, which successfully deploys and maximises its human resources’.²¹

In their evidence, some councils expressed frustrations about the lack of coordinated action across government.

In their evidence, Shropshire Council said that with regard to rural communities and services:

“The paucity of the information and the lack of recent data render it equally apparent to us that this is a policy area where national government and local government would be well served through the commissioning of a comprehensive piece of research. This could then help to shape and deliver effective policy, to achieve not only the national outcomes in the Government’s Industrial Strategy and associated Government policy, but also the local outcomes we have identified for our own communities and businesses in liaison with our LEP and other stakeholders.”

The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has responsibility for the rural economy and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has responsibility for coastal economies, both of which are widely acknowledged to be in need of greater attention.

Given this it is disappointing that neither DEFRA nor MHCLG have yet produced social mobility action plans for coastal and rural areas. This report recommends that DfE needs to work harder to ensure that the value of social mobility is much more explicitly recognised across government, and that appropriate action plans are put in place by individual departments where needed.



Recommendation Seven

The Social Mobility Commission highlighted the challenge of delivering social mobility in rural and coastal communities. In response, Defra and MHCLG should work on behalf of government and commission further work in what is holding back social mobility in rural and coastal areas and what would help to drive it forward.

Devolution

Achieving greater social mobility is also dependent on councils and local partners: and the strength and scale of leadership local councils provide on social mobility also came across strongly through the evidence that we received.

Since 2000 with the creation of the post of Mayor of London and the GLA, there has been a steady roll out of directly elected mayors across England, accompanied by devolution of responsibility for areas of public policy that has given cities and city regions greater control over their local economies.

But county authorities have missed out on these opportunities. As the Social Mobility Commission pointed out:

“The city regions with metro mayors cover only 17.5 per cent of the population of England. In the areas covered, the majority are not social mobility coldspots – only five out of 65 coldspots are part of these deals and the opportunities they bring. Some areas have Regional Growth Funds and City Deals, but it is the additional leverage of combined areas that is most likely to unlock social mobility across the country.”²²

In the lead up to the 2017 General Election, the Government was highly prescriptive about the structures that it wants to see in place before it will contemplate devolving responsibilities or funding to local government, requiring the establishment of the post of a directly elected mayor.

However, following the general election, and a manifesto commitment to drop the requirement for an elected mayor in rural counties the government set out that its forthcoming ‘common devolution framework’ would provide opportunities for areas to secure a deal without this additional tier of governance.²³

There is a growing evidence base on what could be achieved if greater devolution was provided to counties.

Modelling by Oxford Economics' suggested that if county areas were given full devolution of public spending plus tax retention and raising powers, they could attract jobs and growth to rural areas, generating:

“Over 1million new jobs over the next ten years under CCN projections an extra £26.3bn generated for the national economy over a five-year period public sector savings of £11.7bn per year over a five-year period.”²⁴

In the forthcoming devolution framework and as part of any discussion about repatriation of powers following withdrawal from the EU, it is imperative that government confirms a more flexible approach to devolution to support social mobility.

This should be focussed on evaluating and acting on what support county authorities could provide, or what powers counties could take on without creating new governance structures. This should include the proposed 'strategic authority' model proposed by Localis in their recent reports on the industrial strategy.²⁵



Recommendation Eight

The Common Devolution Framework should recognise the potential of devolution in county areas to support regional growth and improve social mobility. It should include a flexible approach to Governance.



Hampshire County Council: The Value of Infrastructure Investment



Hampshire County Council is using innovative transport solutions to protect services and provide access to opportunity over its large geography, in addition seeking more permissive powers around charging to secure community transport services well into the future.

Access to physical services such as education, training and employment opportunities are particularly important for residents in Hampshire, where fifteen per cent of households have no access to a car.

This presents a challenge for the county council in sustaining passenger transport services. Post 16 education and training has moved away from the standard school timetable, with post 16 students attending colleges on different days, and different timetables from schools. This has damaged the traditional college transport model, which brought together a volume of students and enabled providers to dovetail with commuting and shopping trips ensuring the model was economically viable.

This makes transport for young people living in more rural areas, such as parts of the New Forest or East Hampshire, more difficult which is why the County Council, through its Wheels2Work scheme, offers a moped loan scheme for people between 16 – 25, who need transport help to access training or work.

Hampshire County Council also works with district and voluntary partners to deliver 26,000 community transport trips a year, with voluntary car schemes

providing 98,000 journeys per year. The council works closely with commercial bus operators to invest in new facilities, such as contactless payment and on-board WiFi, to make bus travel more accessible, attractive and productive. This targeted investment has helped drive up usage and sustain commercially run services, with overall bus usage in Hampshire in now almost at a 20 year high, with 31.5million bus passenger journeys. The county also subsidises a proportion of bus services in rural areas to help support social mobility, although there are some small rural communities within the Hampshire that are unlikely to ever benefit from a commercial bus service.

Despite the financial pressures facing Hampshire County Council it has so far managed to protect its community transport budget and retain 75% of its bus subsidy budget for the immediate future. However, in order to maintain its community transport services over the longer term, it is calling on the government to allow a small charge to be applied on concessionary fare travel (a quarter fare). Income from this charge would be reinvested in subsidised bus services and community transport services, enabling them to be retained at their current level and potentially be further improved.

Durham County Council: DurhamWorks



Unemployment and economic inactivity play a significant role in increasing poverty, social isolation, and health problems (including mental health issues) ultimately reducing social mobility. Durham County Council is working to facilitate employment-intensive growth whilst enabling young people to achieve their potential and access opportunities.

DurhamWorks is a collaborative partnership project between Durham County Council and nine organisations working together to support young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training. The initiative is funded by the European Social Fund, and supported by the European Youth Employment Initiative and delivery partners, with the aim of supporting 10,000 young people into employment, training or education opportunities between 2016 and 2021.

DurhamWorks specifically targets vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, including young people with special educational needs and disabilities (including those with social, emotional and mental health issues), young parents, young people who offend/at risk of offending, those in care/leaving care, young carers and those with a history of homelessness.

The programme is based on the understanding that disadvantaged young people, seeking opportunities, often need sustained support to move towards their goals. Single interventions rarely produce long term impact. Mentoring and personal support, often from specialist staff, is key to the DurhamWorks offer.

Through the collaborative partnership arrangements in place, visibility of this initiative is high across the whole county. The partners bring their expertise and

experience to support young people on their paths into education, training or employment. Each provides a tailored service to the young people they work with.

The support provided by the programme includes the following:

- One to one support with a dedicated, and often specialist member of the team
- Helping the young person decide what/s/he wants to do
- Help to gain the skills and qualifications needed to meet their aims
- Finding relevant experience
- Support with benefits, housing and care arrangements
- Help to gain work, volunteering, further learning or training.

DurhamWorks provides long-term support for each of the young people engaged by the initiative – from initial engagement to accessing educational, training and employment opportunities. Young people can continue to work towards the right opportunities whilst gaining relevant work experience, confidence and self-belief.

Each young person has an advisor who remains with them throughout their search for employment/education/training in order to provide continuity of service.

The Social Mobility Life Cycle

There are three key points where county authorities impact on social mobility, which can be said to build into a social mobility life cycle: early years; education; and work. Each element of this journey is important as it provides the opportunity for county authorities to actively intervene and improve the social mobility of their residents.

Many examples of best practice were highlighted in the evidence submitted, but it also suggested areas where government can provide additional support. Recommendations have been made accordingly to ensure that counties are better supported to deliver in these areas.

Early Years

Many councils submitting evidence recognised the importance of early years education on social mobility. For example, North Yorkshire County Council said that:

“We know that children who do well at school will be more likely to invest in further and higher education and will be more likely to be successful when they eventually enter into the world of work. We also know that the long-term effects of education begin very early on, even before children start school, but the impact of the early years, for better or for worse, will have a marked effect on the long-term social trajectory of most children.”

Localis provided us with an analysis of a range of early years indicators, the results of which are shown in the map on page 37. This shows that counties perform much better compared to other strategic authorities, successfully supplying good quality early years provision and ensuring that residents are able to access services that they need to ensure that their children have a good quality start in life and are ‘school ready’.

This was particularly true of counties in the east and west midlands and across the south east. This suggests that the disparity between counties and the rest of the country, and the extreme disparity between London and the rest of the country, does not set in until later.

Early years covers a range of services that are offered to parents of pre-school children, which are designed to support their health and wellbeing, and also to engage their development to ensure that they are ready for school by the time that they enter primary school.

Early years is delivered in a range of settings – through nurseries and child minders, playgroups and sessions in libraries, in Sure Start and children’s centres, and of course delivered or supported within the home environment.

Over the past ten years much of the focus of early years has been on improving access to nursery education. The government has put in place initiatives such as 15 hours of free early education a week for the most disadvantaged two-year-olds, 15 hours free childcare for all three-and-four-year-olds, and 30 hours for working parents and the pupil premium.



Accessing this free childcare is often the best way to engage families in early years education. As a result councils have worked hard to support the take up of 30 hours free childcare, investing considerable sums in portals and promotion of the scheme because they recognise the value that it can bring.

However, they are also investing further in this area because residents in shire counties often face additional pressures in securing appropriate childcare.

Lincolnshire County Council said that:

“Some parents have found that the 30 hours childcare entitlement unrealistic. It is impossible in many rural settings to travel to employment in one town and still be able to leave and collect one’s child in one’s own village within the provider’s normal working day. The model appears to be based on an urban scenario in which home, provider and work are close-by.”

This was typical of a number of submissions we received that highlighted the difficulties in securing childcare provision in rural or semi-rural settings, when childcare will of course be more abundant in more urban settings.

Given the importance the government has rightly placed on early year’s education, they will of course want to ensure that the free childcare system is operating as intended, especially given the resources that local authorities are investing in childcare at a time when they are facing a constrained financial situation.

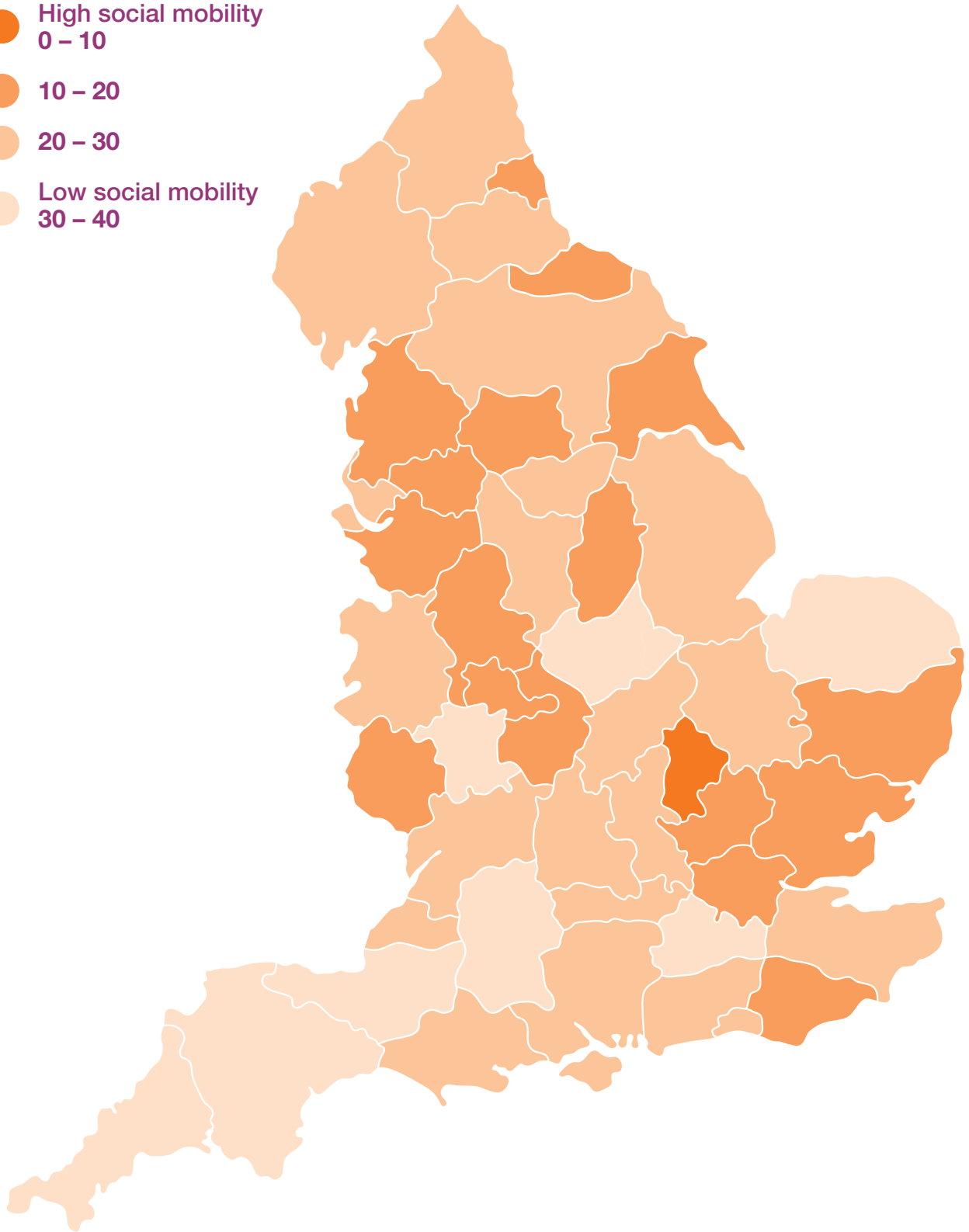


Recommendation Nine

Many councils are investing resource to ensure that there is good take up of the 30 hours free childcare offer. The government should review the scheme as it goes forward to ensure that councils have the support that they need to make sure the scheme is operating properly.

Early Years: Average rank

- High social mobility
0 – 10
- 10 – 20
- 20 – 30
- Low social mobility
30 – 40



Cheshire East Council's Parenting Journey: 'What parents and carers do is more important than who they are'



Recognising the importance of a child's home life to their wellbeing and social mobility. Cheshire East have developed the 'CE parenting journey', a universal wrap-around offer to all parents from pre-birth to their child starting school, delivered by children's centre staff, health visitors and the early years team.

The parenting journey involves ensuring early identification of children or families in need of support, alongside accessible provision of support services, provision of high quality early years settings and raising attainment in key skills such as communication and literacy.

Each 'stop' along this journey is an early help indicator, providing an opportunity for early identification of a child/family who may require additional support. Crucial to early identification is the council's integrated work with the health service, and the embedding of the healthy child programme into the journey. These combined efforts mean a child in Cheshire East can have eight assessments prior to the end of their reception year, and early targeted support can be provided. Secondment opportunities for health visitors to work within the early years team have had a huge impact on cohesive service delivery.

The support on offer for parents can include access to communication and language groups and evidence based parenting intervention programmes. To support inclusive delivery the council has a mobile vehicle to deliver these services in more rural areas.

The early years and childcare team are dedicated to supporting children to access their education in high quality early years provision. Being 'school – ready' through high quality early education is key to social mobility and attainment. Over 97% of early years settings have been judged as good or outstanding.

Cheshire East uses analysis of data and national research to focus on children's communication and language development, recognising the role communication plays in social mobility. The council uses the WellComm screening tool, its outstanding 'Every Child a Talker' model, and targeted packages of support and training for providers who are providing early education for eligible two year old children to provide the appropriate support as early as possible.

To improve outcomes for children in areas of disadvantage the council provides a targeted support package to all the settings and schools which these children attend. The raising attainment programme has increased the number of children achieving a good level of Development and narrowed the attainment gap for the most vulnerable children.

Education

It is education that often gets the greatest focus for social mobility. This manifests itself in a number of ways – from expression of concerns about children that are not ready for school, to a focus on the proportion of children on free school meals getting good GCSEs, to the destination of school leavers. It also represents the longest period of interaction with the state which offers many opportunities to improve ability and enthusiasm along the way.

However, the role of councils in delivering and supporting education has changed in recent years. This is in part as a result of academisation, which has seen councils, including shire counties, retain responsibility for school place planning but without the same central coordinating role they used to enjoy. This can make it more difficult for councils to support and take forward initiatives within schools that would improve social mobility.

It was at the education stage that the Localis analysis found the emergence of the pattern of coastal malaise, as shown in the map below. The economic decline of coastal areas has been long documented and it is a problem to which the attention of policy makers has repeatedly returned.

Most recently, the Social Mobility Commission highlighted it as an area of concern, saying that:

“Isolated rural and coastal towns and former industrial areas feature heavily as social mobility coldspots. Young people growing up in these areas have less chance of achieving good educational outcomes and often end up trapped by a lack of access to further education and employment opportunities.”²⁶

Councils have of course sought to overcome these barriers. For example, the Lincolnshire Learning Partnership has focussed on the disparity in performance of schools within five miles of the coast and schools elsewhere. Sector-led improvement strategies are starting to have impact and the progress made by pupils in Reading, Writing and Maths in Key Stage 2 in coastal schools is greater than in other schools in the county.

The Localis analysis also demonstrates that it is at the education stage that we can see London pulling away from the rest of the country.

Another pattern of note across the education indicators is the poor performance of some of the largest strategic authority areas. The strong performance of Cornwall and Cumbria compared to their average ranks across the work life-stage, illustrates the problem areas further away from London have with job and career-progression options.

The good work being carried out by individual authorities, like that being carried out in Lincolnshire, Cumbria and Cornwall, is hampered by the lack of funding both to councils and to schools in county areas. This constrains the ability of county councils and their schools to improve social mobility.

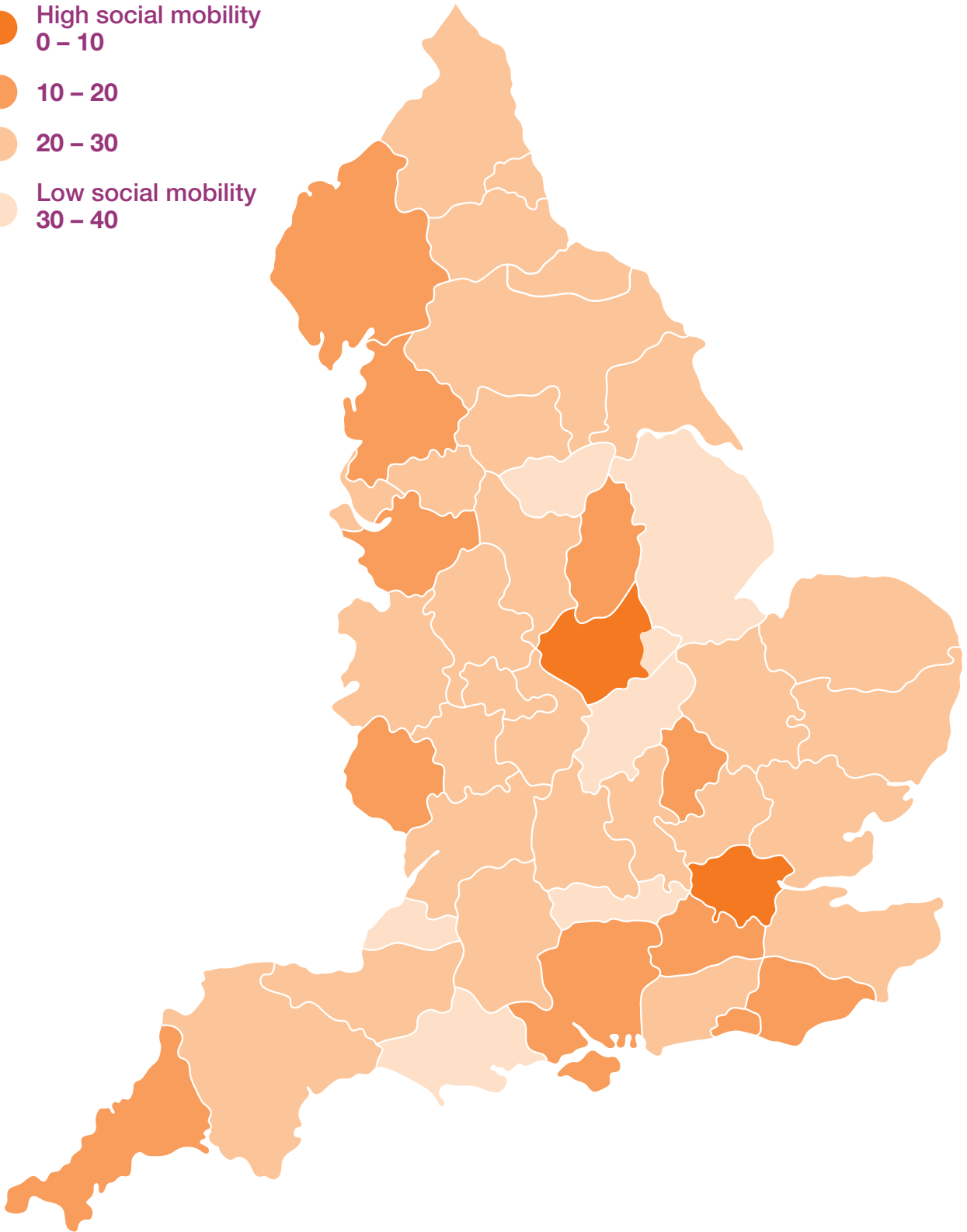
Post-16 Progression

Funding is not the only factor that acts as a brake on social mobility in counties. Also at issue is the progression that people make from GCSE to ‘A’ Levels, college courses, university, training or employment. Many counties submitted evidence suggested that a lack of post-16 choices in county areas can impact on social mobility.

In part this is driven by differing educational outcomes because of the educational landscape in counties. Many pupils will stay on at their school for ‘A’ levels, but smaller sixth forms do not deliver as good educational outcomes as larger sixth forms.

Education: Average rank

- High social mobility
0 – 10
- 10 – 20
- 20 – 30
- Low social mobility
30 – 40



Analysis by Localis for the County Councils Network

Norfolk County Council powerfully summed this up, saying that:

“Provision of post 16 places is determined by the market place so tends to be centred on urban areas. Achievement and curriculum offer is typically lower in most small sixth forms, which results in greater travel, higher transport costs and potentially more young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)”.

The presence of good further education opportunities can help to raise aspiration and also provide opportunities for young people who want to stay at home or those from lower income households who may need to stay at home and commute to university. It is worth noting that whilst there are many good universities located in county areas, provision within counties is not universal. For example, Swindon and Wiltshire LEP is the only LEP area in the country without a significant university presence, and some universities and colleges focus on specialist courses pertinent to the local economy.

Universities will always want to act as ‘good neighbours’ but they also have leadership responsibilities within their local area community. This often involves reaching out to children and adults in their local communities to encourage the take up on courses on a full or part time basis. In this way they make their own vital contribution to social mobility. But universities tend to be located in urban areas, meaning that this support work may not properly percolate through to young people in counties considering their FE options.

Having a university does have other positive knock on effects on a local community, which we explored at our evidence session. These include development of special facilities associated and connected to universities,

contributing to clusters of excellence that can facilitate future higher-paid employment, and providing leadership and capacity support within local business and civic communities. However, it was felt that the lure of London means that even where counties have a significant university presence that they will struggle to retain young people.

The Education Secretary recently acknowledged that when looking at university attendance ‘there is great variation across regions of England’. Part of his response to this has been to ask the Office of Students to launch a new initiative to ‘identify and share the best approaches for getting children from different backgrounds into university, including the most selective.’²⁷

As part of this work, we would like to ensure that the focus is not just carried out on a broad regional basis or by looking at outcomes for broad socio-economic groups. We would urge the government and the Office of Students as part of this that proper work is done with the areas that the Social Mobility Commission have already identified as social mobility coldspots, especially rural and coastal areas.

However, a university education, or the presence of a university within a county is not enough in of itself to crack the problem of social mobility. Graduates do not always stay in the county or town where they studied. Indeed, research from 2016 suggested that 22% of all graduates move to London for employment.²⁸ As much attention needs to be expended on employment as it does on education.



Recommendation Ten

The Office of Students needs to ensure that universities work with schools in shire counties as well as cities to ensure that university options are as well understood as other work and training opportunities.

Suffolk: Raising the Bar



Like all counties, Suffolk has a range of communities – from urban communities with high deprivation as well as hidden needs that are harder to identify in sparse rural communities.

To raise education attainment, Suffolk County Council supported an independent inquiry to establish where efforts should be concentrated to maximise the benefit for young people. The result was the Raising the Bar Programme, which aimed to drive improved education outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children.

The programme was established in 2012, but was refreshed in 2015 following an Ofsted inspection. Between 2015-17, the programme worked to develop effective monitoring of achievement in schools for more rapid intervention where required; to implement a new school to school support partnership, a system of school-led self-improvement; and strengthen business links between schools and local businesses, to drive opportunities for young people.

The ongoing work to embed best practice in education and create opportunities for young people has shown strong early results. In 2012, 57% of disadvantaged pupils were achieving expected levels in English and Maths at age eleven compared to 68% nationally. With the Raising the Bar Programme, the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged children in Suffolk compared to national

levels at age 11 has reduced 6%, from 12% to 6%. The number of five year olds reaching a good level of development at the end of early years foundation increased 3.5% and at age 16, the attainment gap has reduced by 10% going from 12% to 2%.

Within Suffolk, Ipswich has been designated an 'opportunity area' by the Department for Education. Ipswich has wards which are highly deprived, with low attainment amongst children eligible for free school meals at key stage 2 and key stage 4, as well as a low proportion of disadvantaged children attending a school rated good or better by Ofsted. The opportunity area delivery plan builds on the raising the bar programme, and the council aims to continue their progress, and has refreshed the strategy for 2018-2020, with three main priorities:

- Exceptional leadership and governance across the education sector
- Excellence in teaching and learning, driven by system led improvement and innovation
- The best opportunities for every child and young person.

Work

Counties face significantly greater challenges than that of urban areas, cities, and particularly London, in providing skilled employment to residents. This is despite the scale of county economies, which collectively account for 41% of the country's GVA, and which have enjoyed growth faster than the English average in the past couple of years.²⁹

As has been shown above, at 18 a significant number of young people leave county areas to go to university in cities and larger towns, and do not return. In part this is because London is continuing to prove a significant draw for many graduates, further entrenching London's position within the UK economy at the expense of investment and opportunity in other parts of England.

This is reflected in the Localis rankings for work, where the map on page 44 shows the effect of London on employment options on its western side. As with the overall scorecard, the M4 corridor is notably strong for work. However the surrounding counties to the east of London suffer from a low concentration of skilled industries and job density. The effect of high-tech manufacturing and knowledge intensive services are evident in Warwickshire, and Cambridge and Peterborough.

A higher density of jobs contributes relatively good ranking for Cornwall, North Yorkshire and County Durham. The areas without either are clearly visible on this map, particularly Cumbria, Northumberland and the Sheffield City Region.

This disparity in work is in part because cities and large urban areas are endowed with a high skills base with which to attract businesses and other support workers. But this means that counties face a catch-22 where they are less likely to attract businesses that will provide high-value employment because of the size of the skills base; but highly skilled individuals are unlikely to move into or return to county areas without economic opportunities that are better than those offered by cities and urban areas.

Indeed, the Prince's Countryside Trust has identified the outward migration of young people, which is part the result of poor job opportunities, as one of the biggest challenges facing rural areas.³⁰

This migration creates a skills gap within counties that can often be hard to fill. For example Cumbria is "facing a demographic challenge, in which the numbers of jobs against the numbers of people available in the labour force is projected to widen from zero in 2011 to 45,000 by 2036." Their submission goes on to identify "a growing gap between the current skills base and the projected skills requirement to meet future jobs demand."

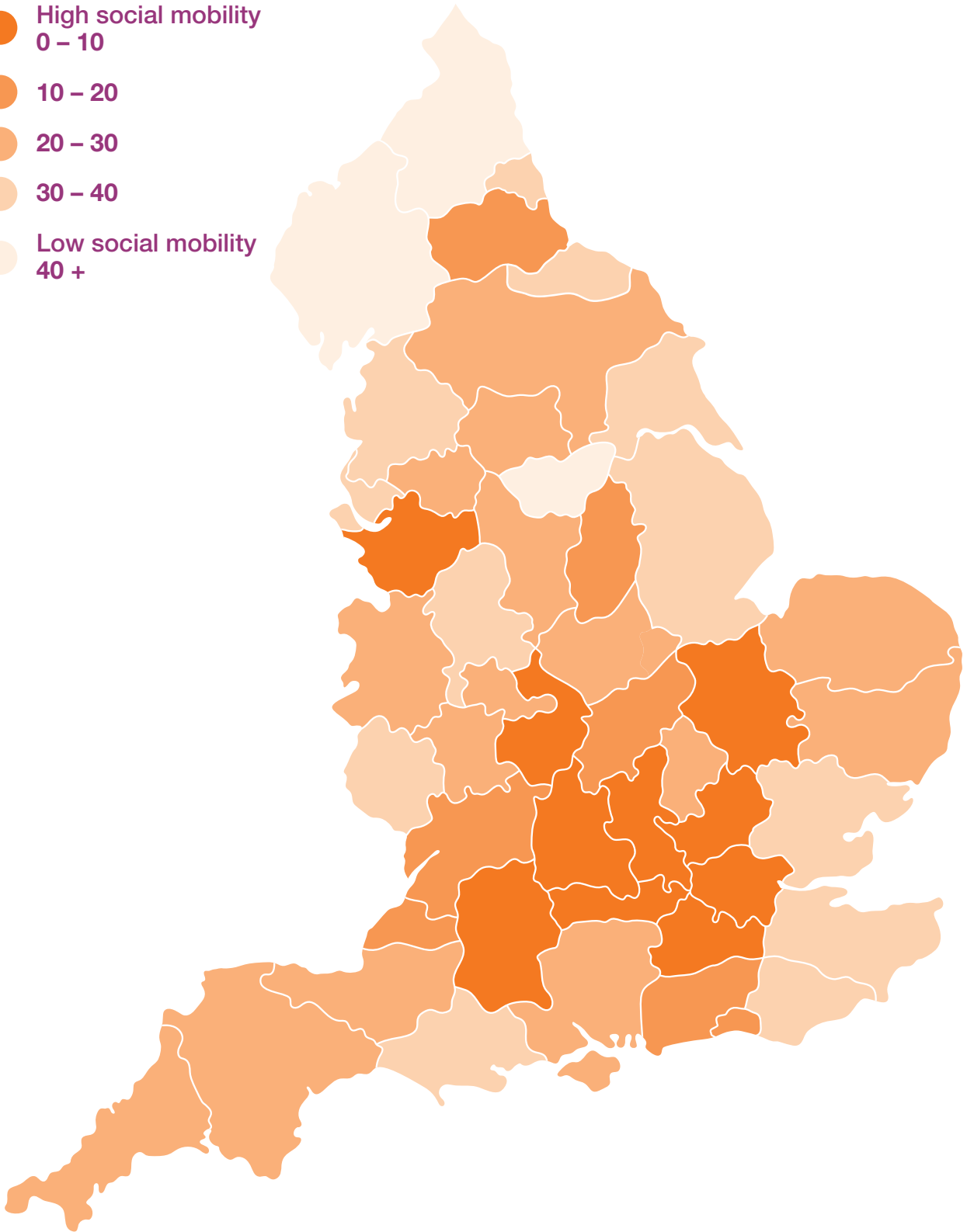
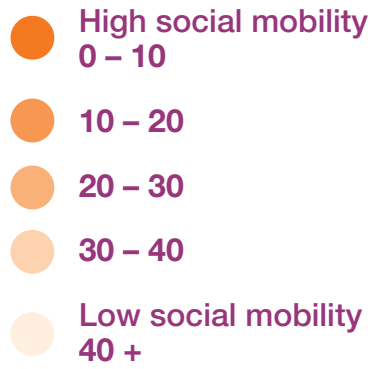
This comes at a time when demographic change is also impacting on county economies. Counties have large older populations, and their areas are forecast to have a larger-than-average migration of people either retired or approaching retirement, further reducing the available workforce.

The impact of this has been implicitly recognised in the government's creation of the Midlands Engine and the Northern Powerhouse, attempting to secure better investment and economic growth for areas outside of London. Their success could help to ensure that the benefits of social mobility can be felt more widely across the country.

Oxford Economics has previously found that whilst counties' occupational profile is skewed towards the skilled trades:

"Growth in recent years has been led by the service sectors, and this will continue going forward, with professional, scientific and technical sector employment becoming increasingly important."³¹

Work: Average rank



Analysis by Localis for the County Councils Network

It is therefore important to look at how counties can improve their residents' skills base. When looking at the qualifications profile of county residents; 36.5% are qualified to NVQ level 4, slightly below the national average of 37.9%, although it is clear that many county residents will work outside counties in cities and larger urban areas.³² Cumbria County Council further noted that they are:

“Projected to have a surplus of jobs, and a growth in jobs at levels 3 and 4. To achieve the social mobility potential in this requires a concerted effort across the public sector, third sector and businesses. The potential is also bolstered by the fact that Cumbria has the third highest number of apprenticeships in the country.”

Some of these skills challenges could be solved by the new apprenticeship levy that is being rolled out in county areas. This was considered at the evidence session, where participants highlighted difficulties about how the scheme is presently organised.

In some cases businesses prefer to pay into the central apprenticeship levy pot rather than providing local apprenticeships. Concern was also expressed that businesses struggle to recruit the apprentices that they need to make the scheme work.

It also appears that some high value apprenticeship opportunities will be concentrated in cities, which often host national companies that have multiple offices across the country, rather than in county areas. Residents in county areas seeking to access apprenticeships may therefore not be able to access the same opportunities open to people in other parts of the country.

The ability of county authorities and partners to shape the skills agenda is more constrained in county areas than other parts of the county as was explicitly recognised by the Social Mobility Commission's *State of the Nation 2017* report. Reflecting on the creation of the metro mayors, with their powers over housing, transport and skills, they noted that “only five out of 65” coldspots are part of these deals and the opportunities they bring. Some areas have benefitted from the Regional Growth Fund and City Deals, but it is the additional leverage of combined areas that is most likely to unlock social mobility across the country.”³³

The nature of these deals means that whilst combined mayoral authorities have responsibility for skills policy and provision, in others it continues to be guided at a national level. There is no duty for national organisations to consult with local authorities on provision in their areas, leaving county councils, LEPs and other partners without the tools they need to shape skills strategies and provision in their areas.

The landscape is often further complicated for counties by the way that LEPs have been put together. LEP boundaries are not co-terminus with strategic authority boundaries, with LEPs often crossing county boundaries or different parts of the same county being covered by different LEPs. This reduces the value of the time and effort that counties contribute to LEP. Whilst many counties have good relationships with LEPs, increased county representation on LEPs and looking again at their boundaries could further help counties to work with local businesses and shape their local economy.

We therefore believe that the government needs to consider devolving these powers to non-metro-mayor areas, including county

authorities, so that they are better placed to respond to the skills challenges in their areas and better guide and grow their local economies.



Recommendation Eleven

Responsibilities and budgets for skills have been devolved to metro mayors. The government should devolve the same responsibilities and budgets to county councils and unitary authorities.



Essex Employment and Skills Board: Inform, Enable, Deliver



There is a need for greater awareness and take up of training and employment opportunities in Essex to address challenges such as low pay, poor qualifications and skills and higher levels of deprivation which limit social mobility.

The education and careers landscape for both young people and adults is fragmented and complex, with many national, regional and local organisations funded to deliver skills and careers related provision. Simplifying the skills and opportunities landscape will ensure young people and adults are aware of and able to gain the skills demanded by local employers.

The Essex Employment and Skills Board (ESB) was established to give employers a platform to shape skills provision across Greater Essex (covering Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock). By working with large employers, academic institutions, small-medium enterprises and local government, the ESB creates solutions to the skills challenges that industries face and helps provide opportunities for people to build long-term careers.

The board aims to build a productive, responsive and inclusive Essex skills system that delivers growth for local people and employers.

The board has introduced a number of initiatives both to improve awareness of employment opportunities for young people and adults and also to ensure training provision meets the needs of local employers.

These initiatives include career guides for young people ('What's Your Thing?') and adults ('The Ultimate Guide to Getting a New Job in Essex') to promote the breadth of local job opportunities in Greater Essex. Copies of the 'What's Your Thing?' careers guide have been sent to 20,000 young people across 100 schools, with the ultimate guide circulated through Jobcentre Plus, further education colleges and adult community learning centres. The board also sponsors the delivery of an Education and Industry STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) programme in schools. Activities and events include construction and engineering-focused 'taster days', social care 'conferences', Royal Institution Computer Science and Engineering masterclasses and projects such as the bloodhound rocket car and build a rocket competition.

In addition, the ESB has recently launched its 'What's Your Thing' website (www.whatsyourthing.org.uk) to provide careers and employability advice for residents in Greater Essex. To increase accessibility, the website includes links to free online training opportunities including Universal Class, Future Learn, Open Learn and also to Google Digital Garage and the Khan Academy.

Conclusions

The factors driving social mobility are many and varied, with a complex relationship to national economic trends that can be difficult to disentangle.

Ultimately it is geography that provides the single biggest barrier to improving social mobility in the shires, with residents in rural areas and coastal areas struggling to access the same opportunities that are open to people living in more urban areas.

It is clear that the government must do more to support county authorities to overcome this through innovative policies in areas such as transport. This will also ensure that the excellent work being carried out by counties in early years is not lost as people move through the education system, and, in addition, people are better equipped to access a fulfilling and rewarding career after they have finished their education.

Some of this work can be replicated by councils acting on their own. We hope that county authorities will look at the case studies we have included to give inspiration for future workstreams that will help them to make up some of the ground they have lost compared to other parts of the country.

But we ultimately hope that government will look at our contribution to this debate with an open mind. The government has repeatedly stated its objective to improve social mobility, and in this spirit we hope it will consider how our recommendations can contribute to this.

This is not just about funding, but about working with county authorities to help them build on their excellent work. Government must ensure that the gap can be closed between counties and other parts of the country, securing improved social mobility for future generations as we start to grapple with the challenges and opportunities created by Brexit and other, broader changes within the economy.





Appendix One: Localis Indicators

Early Years	Education	Work
Average Ofsted children's service single inspection rating	Percentage of primary schools rated good or outstanding by Ofsted	Job density
Gap in Early Years attainment between Free School Meal students and all other students	Percentage of secondary schools rated good or outstanding by Ofsted	Percentage of employment in skilled industries
Percentage of two to two-and-a-half year olds offered the ASQ-3 Test	Gap in Attainment 8 (Key Stage 4) scores between disadvantaged students and all others	
	Admission to top 33% of universities – gap between disadvantaged students and all others	

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