Levelling up:
placemaking at its heart

Placemakings role at levelling up and some practical steps for local councils

Capita

Preface

The Levelling Up White Paper, released in February 2022, presents a comprehensive review and understanding of geographic and economic disparity across the UK, laying out 12 mission targets to help address these inequalities.

Arguably, at the heart of these 12 missions is an inherently place-based discussion. Placemaking can help address some of the biggest cultural and societal challenges of the last 100 years.

As we compare our regions to those in other industrialised nations; talk about the urban/rural divide, inequalities at ward level and differences in outcomes for people across the country, it is clear we must act now.

This paper discusses how placemaking can and will play a significant role in helping drive the Levelling Up agenda, with some practical steps on what councils could do next.

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Summary

We all want more for our local communities, the places where we live, work and play. And we want this to be fairly distributed across the UK, so that everyone can share in the benefits.

Across the country, where you live or work affects your entire world. Your place can have an impact on your prosperity,   your prospects and your children's futures. Addressing the geographical disparities of this effect will be vital for the   public sector as it looks to create the next generation of   public services.

In February 2022 the Government published its long-awaited White Paper, "Levelling Up the United Kingdom". Recognising that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work, the paper outlines 12 national missions that cover four broad areas:

- boosting productivity and living standards by growing the private sector

- spreading opportunities and improving public services

- restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging

- empowering local leaders and communities.

As the Local Government Association has highlighted, levelling up is at the heart of what councils and combined authorities want for their communities – and placemaking must be absolutely central to those difficult delivery decisions.

In this guide we explore what levelling up will mean for local government and how placemaking is so strongly linked to its success, and suggest five areas in which a difference can be made quickly. We also offer advice on planning how to deliver the next generation of public services.

EMPOWER

COMMUNITIES

The essence of Levelling up

The essence of levelling up... is what local authorities are striving for on behalf of their communities. It is based on the premise that all human beings are fundamentally of equal worth and deserving of equal opportunities, but circumstantial factors linked to where they live can unfairly influence their lived experience and outcomes across a wide variety of measures – particularly social and economic.

For example, is it fair that the average male resident of Westminster lives 10 years longer than their counterparts in Glasgow? Or that only 9% of people in St Albans don't have five good GCSEs compared to 30% in Barrow-on-Furness?

Levelling up seeks to address these inequalities by supporting other regions to achieve parity with London and the South-East.

For local government, this means ensuring that local communities delivering change and progress must also deliver at the county, borough and ward levels.
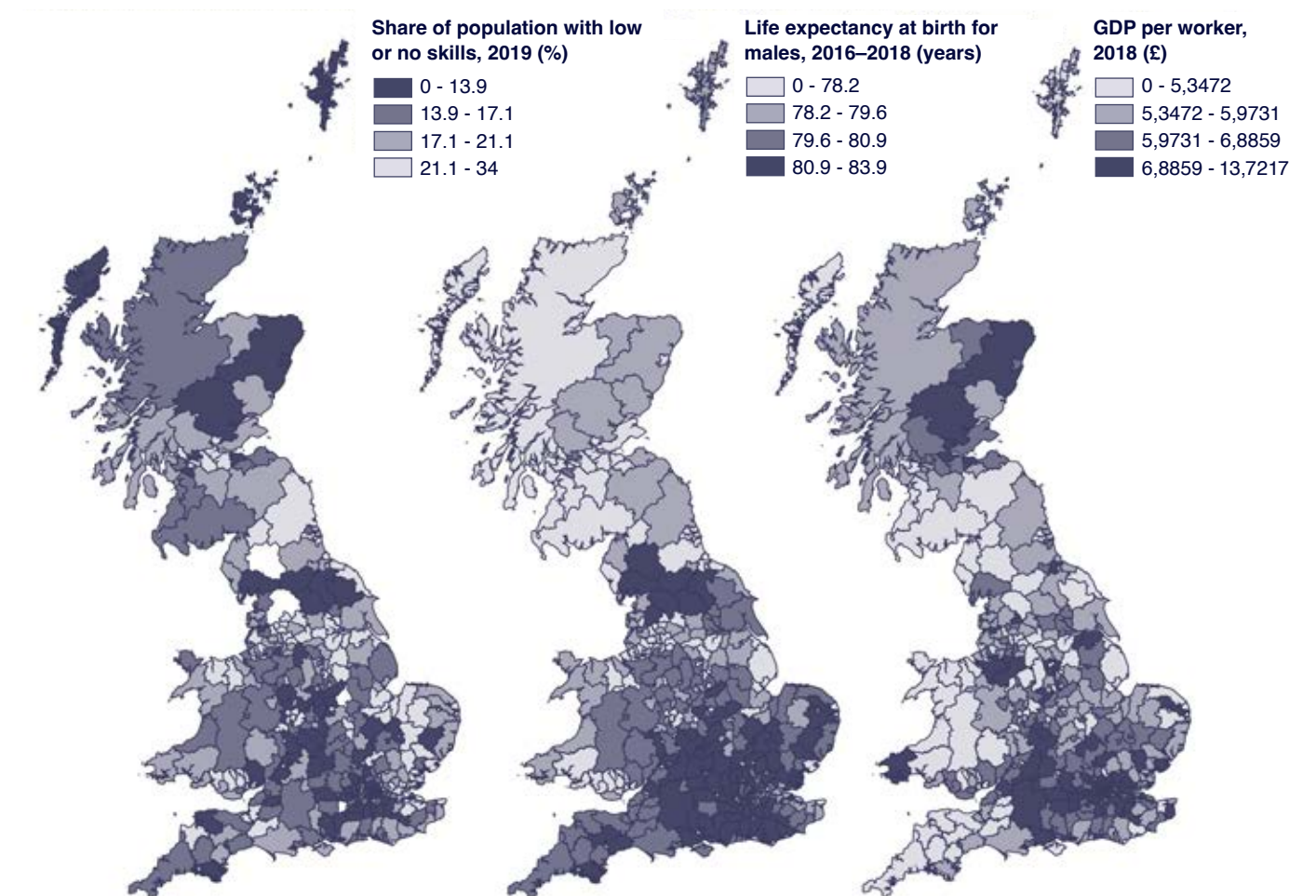
The moral argument for improving opportunities and life chances for people across the country taps into strong historical narratives of "fair play" – and of course is the right thing to do.

A growing sense of frustration in parts of the North of the UK, much of it linked to Brexit, changed the distribution of political power. The Government now has a strong mandate for levelling up and a political imperative to deliver it – but this is a complex issue that cannot be oversimplified; nor can the importance of delivering the next generation of public services be underestimated.

The local response to the pandemic has demonstrated that central and local government can work together successfully towards a shared goal, with councils playing a vital role in responding to the needs of local communities. This same approach is needed to achieve levelling up – and we all must act now. Is it right that higher income jobs are more concentrated in the South-East? Is it acceptable that you'll live a shorter life because of where you are born? Are we willing to accept that there is more child poverty in urban areas? The answer must be "no", surely – but what can be done about it?

How the North lags behind the South on a variety of indicators:
The uneven outcomes in health, skills and productivity across Britain

Share of population with low or no skills, 2019 (%)
- 0 - 13.9
- 13.9 - 17.1
- 17.1 - 21.1
- 21.1 - 34

Life expectancy at birth for males, 2016–2018 (years)
- 0 - 78.2
- 78.2 - 79.6
- 79.6 - 80.9
- 80.9 - 83.9

GDP per worker, 2018 (£)
- 0 - 5,3472
- 5,3472 - 5,9731
- 5,9731 - 6,8859
- 6,8859 - 13,7217

Source: www.centreforcities.org/levelling-up/

So, how are we going to "level up"?

Councils and combined authorities have a critical role to play in the "Levelling Up the United Kingdom" White Paper, which lists six categories of "capital" to be addressed.

> Levelling up

The

6

capitals

Physical capital

←01—

Infrastructure, machinery and housing

Human capital

02→

The skills, health and experience of the workforce

Intangible capital

←03—

Innovation, ideas and patents

Financial capital

04→

Resources supporting the financing of companies

Social capital

←05—

The strength of communities, relationships and trust

Institutional capital

06→

Local leadership, capacity and capability

Placemaking at the heart of change:

The Levelling Up White Paper sets out 12 national missions whose delivery the six capitals will support.

Each of these medium-term missions will rely on or be influenced by the placemaking approach adopted by local authorities; from expanding digital connectivity and achieving net zero, to creating pride in place and supporting local businesses. But placemaking is a complex and wide-ranging topic, so what practical steps can you take now to help you along the levelling up journey?

Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging

Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest

Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost

Empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency

01 Living standards

02 Research and development

05 Education

06 Skills

09 Pride in place

10 Housing

12 Local leadership

03 Transport infrastructure

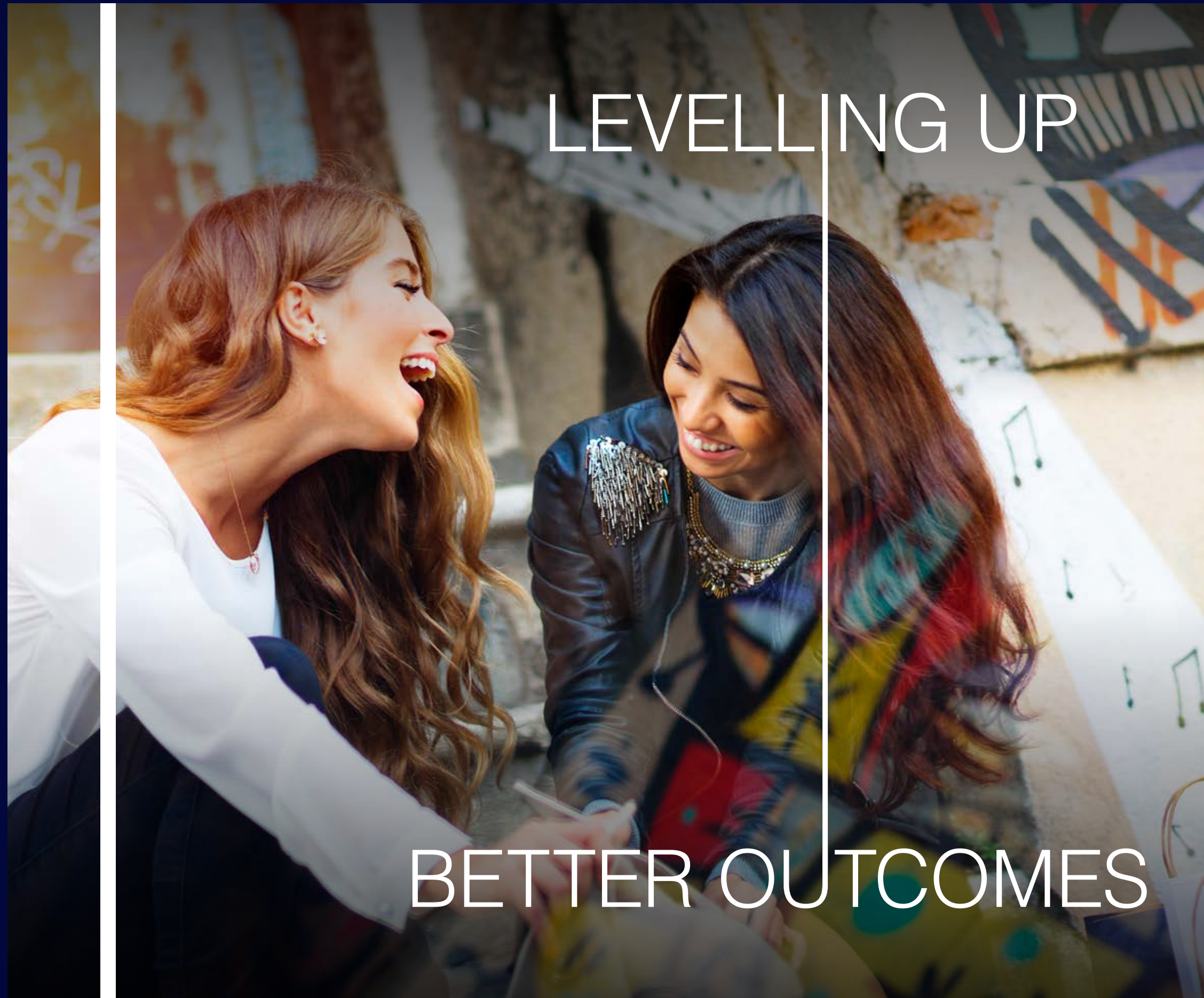**04** Digital connectivity

07 Health

08 Wellbeing

11 Crime

Five practical placemaking steps to start your levelling up journey

LEVELLING UP

BETTER OUTCOMES

01

Regenerate town centres – placemaking at its best

The pandemic changed many things elements of our lives – but the ways we shop, commute and work were probably the most significant for communities across the country. Between the collapse of 83% of the UK's department stores, consumers moving online and many high street shops now becoming obsolete, town centres are no longer the beating heart of local economies they once were.

The government has pledged £10bn in funding to help drive the regeneration of town centres through place-shaping. Local government is pivotal to this and must continue to act as "the voice of a whole community and as 'an agent of place'."

Town centres have been retail-led for 20 to 30 years, but prior to the 'identikit' high street trend – the usual selection of familiar chain stores on every major thoroughfare – town centres used to be places where people not only shopped, but lived, played and worked. Town centres were the hub of life – and well thought-out placemaking can revive this ethos of experience-based shopping in physical stores. There is a pressing need for this kind of regeneration, or communities and businesses risk being left disconnected and characterless.

A House of Commons committee report, "Supporting our high streets after Covid-19", states: "What is noteworthy is that since restrictions have lifted, the proportion of online purchases as a total of retail sales remains above pre-pandemic levels: 26.3% in October 2021 compared with 20.2% in January 2020." Clearly, relying exclusively on brick-and-mortar retail to revive the high street is not an option.

This complex challenge of addressing town centre regeneration opportunities will require a layered approach.

Public realm

For many councils, improvements in the public realm to create a vibrant communal space can be the first step toward regeneration, as this is the one area over which they have guaranteed, complete control. A new park, for example, provides green space for residents to exercise, meet up and socialise. It can also smarten up a location, help people feel safer – and the livelier, more inviting environment is more likely to attract investment. Public realm can also include event spaces, helping to reimagine our town centres as a place of unique entertainment.

Repurposing infrastructure

Shopping malls are fast becoming white elephants in many town centres. Even as things return to normal, customers' propensity to spend long periods of time in enclosed spaces remains diminished.

We have seen empty stores repurposed as vaccination centres, but in the long-term what can be done with defunct shopping centres and department stores? Converting them into a multitude of other uses including medical, leisure or office space is the obvious and achievable option.

But as outpatient services are increasingly relocated from hospital premises into the community, authorities are struggling to find suitable spaces to accommodate them. These relocated services create opportunities to re-occupy underutilised retail space, generate footfall and stimulate the development of health clusters for services such as physiotherapy, opticians, mental health professionals and pharmacies.

With some adaptation and imagination, these obsolete spaces could be repurposed as housing for mixed and balanced communities – although the physical and structural constraints of doing so shouldn't be underestimated. Others can simply be demolished to make way for something new.

Public-private partnerships

A lack of economic viability and fragmentation of ownerships has the potential to be resolved through partnerships between local authorities and the private sector, working together for the common good. Where appropriate, the public sector can unlock fragmentation on high streets through their compulsory purchase powers to acquire multiple interests, assembling separately held facilities into one all-inclusive site and bringing whole-scale regeneration together.

Indeed, some authorities are already partnering with developers to placemake the town centre, planning and building a strategy from the ground up. Brent Cross Town, for example, a development of Barnet Council in partnership with Argent Related, is a project that will continue to evolve well into the next decade.

The Brent Cross development, one of the biggest regeneration projects in Europe, includes 7,000 new homes, sports facilities including 50 acres of green parks and playing fields, and environmentally sustainable office space for 25,000 people. Not only will the regeneration create local jobs, but some of the workspace will be geared toward supporting small and medium enterprises, providing affordable non-residential floorspace as part of the local commercial strategy and nurturing creative commercial thinking.

New engines of economic growth: generating revenue without relying on retail

Perhaps counter-intuitively, a lot of placemaking will require a reduction in the amount of available retail space. Do we need as many shops on the high street as before? From a socio-psychological perspective, empty shopfronts are a depressing view for the local community to encounter, but from a commercial point of view, reduced supply will increase demand for existing retail space, stimulating the local economy.

Placemakers will need to become more creative when it comes to reviving local economies. The value of open spaces such as town squares, which can bring people in by virtue of being appealing places for them to spend their time, is often underestimated – yet they generate footfall for adjacent businesses. Nick Searl of Argent says of an earlier development: "It's quite a nebulous thing to define and achieve. Sometimes at King's Cross when we ask people why they're there, we get the best answer: 'We just like hanging out here.'"

The pandemic has deprived people of social experiences and it is this void that town centres can help fill. Spaces for leisure activities that generate revenue – cinemas, nightclubs, go-karting tracks etc, can be developed on high streets, subject to the availability of suitable space – and here, too, redundant shopping centres and department stores can be put to work.

As an example, "competitive socialising", which involves playing a sport or game, or undergoing a challenge while spending time with friends and colleagues, is a massively rising trend, and there is consumer demand for spaces such as golf or table tennis bars, darts clubs and escape rooms.

Another potential town centre use is last-mile logistics, the final link in the supply chain to the customer, which is the most expensive and challenging part of the supply chain. By their very nature, these hubs need to be in or around towns or cities where space is limited and costly. Some placemakers may choose to create more space for this type of logistics operation in their communities and reap the rewards.

While the City of London remains a buoyant commercial property market, property companies and investment funds are bolstering investment outside of the South-East by investing in regional offices in the North. Additionally, much new development is aimed at small and medium enterprises in set industry sectors, such as digital, to develop an area's identity. Good tenant covenants can be found here, while creating jobs, increasing footfall and reinforcing the growth of some regional cities.

The importance of local identity

Before a local authority can begin the journey of placemaking, it is vital that it has a clear vision of the town's identity. A strategic local authority is one with a placemaking plan. With town centres in competition with each other, you've got to be clear about what you stand for, about who you are – and build on your strengths.

Those authorities with a high level of ownership of place are better positioned to move quickly and succeed within the next five years. We need a shift in focus from traditional activities around delivering services to individual people, to serving places and communities.

One such example is Crawley in West Sussex, which has ploughed £21.1m of funding into reinventing itself as a cultural centre. The council is building up to 1,000 new flats, declared a cultural quarter in the town centre to bring people into the area at night, and is working with theatre-makers, artists and other creatives to revive the night-time leisure industry. Crawley has also established an innovation centre for advanced engineering and digital technologies.

Location can be key to establishing a town's identity. A new garden village is planned in South Ribble, Lancashire, comprising 1,300 new homes close to the government's planned new £5bn National Cyber Force headquarters and GCHQ support centre.

The placement of South Ribble's new garden community development also makes it ideal for commuting to major regional centres such as Liverpool, Manchester, Preston and aircraft manufacturers at Salisbury and Wharton.

Cheltenham, meanwhile, is investing heavily in its identity as the Golden Valley: the UK's answer to Silicon Valley. The planned Cyber Central development will cover two million square feet, including housing and support for social needs, and is due to open in 2023. The city's proximity to 19 UK universities is hoped to engage young people and attract them to the burgeoning cyber industry.

The must-haves for successful placemaking of town centres

01 Be brave and distinctive – decide what you stand for and what gives your town its identity.

02 Begin with a placemaking plan and galvanise community and stakeholder support to help deliver, keeping channels of communication open.

03 Make a start – choose your team and get going!

Local authorities like London Borough of Barnet (at Brent Cross) and Cheltenham are demonstrating that they don't need central government intervention to devise a local plan that serves people, places and communities. While central government can provide grants and support, ultimately each local authority has the ability to control its own destiny to some degree. Indeed, if they have a placemaking plan and a vision in place, then they are ready to apply for government funding. The overwhelming message is for local authorities to take matters into their own hands and provide the vision for how their particular brand of regeneration will be implemented through their placemaking plan.

02

Maximise the community benefits of property developments

Most councils have under-used land or buildings that could potentially be developed (especially if put aside with other land holdings) to kick-start regeneration and growth. But for many, large-scale developments are daunting due to their complexity and risk. The good news is that they don't have to do it all on their own. The key to success is to find the right partners and to structure those relationships so that the local community and businesses benefit as much as the developer does.

Property development partnerships, as part of a placemaking strategy, can generate financial benefits for local authorities by increasing the value of their land and adding income-generating properties, which in turn can create surplus long-term revenue for future reinvestment. They also stimulate a community's economy by creating more homes and places of work, as well as growing the base for taxes and business rates collections.

They generate direct social benefits such as upskilling small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and supporting and empowering local suppliers. Carefully thought-out development partnerships can enable skills training and education or integrate apprenticeship programmes into the supply chain. They can also reduce waste, power consumption and pollution.

All these benefits mean that local authorities can meet policy objectives such as supporting people, places and the economy through a property development partnership. But they can only realise these benefits by planning ahead and engaging a partner that knows how to work these benefits into the project.

Set out a clear business case and rationale

Before engaging with a potential partner, it's important to know what your goals are for the development, not just financial ones such as revenue and profit margins but also developmental ones such as neighbourhood regeneration, skills development or reduced carbon emissions. Determining and prioritising your goals will help you to select the appropriate partner and structure the relationship so that you achieve them.

Lead organisations need a well-articulated vision and a structured business case with defined and ranked objectives. The Five Case Model, as set out by the Treasury, is a generally accepted approach that takes into account the strategic, economic, commercial, financial and management considerations that should go into any investment proposal.

You should also include a demand analysis in your business case to understand the potential for end users and plan to meet their needs so that, wherever possible, they are identified and secured to help de-risk the project and maximise revenue generation from day one.

Plan a streamlined, achievable and well-managed programme

Create a detailed plan and make sure that your interests and those of your development partners are aligned by setting incentives for reaching key milestones that will keep the project on track. Take care to avoid any conflicts of interest between parties that could cause delays and misalignment – for example, your partner should not have a financial interest in any of the other suppliers.

Structure the partnership to match your appetite for risk and reward

Local authorities can carefully manage, assign or mitigate development risk when acting as the primary sponsor – and reap more of the rewards, too. This may mean sourcing a commercial loan to fund the development and contracting a developer to do the work.

Alternatively, you can de-risk the development by finding a partner to take on the role of primary developer – but you will have to relinquish a greater margin in return.

It's also worth considering that stepping back, by appointing a primary developer to take on all the risk, for example, may not deliver the scale of outcomes you originally planned.

Get the right partner(s) on board

Make sure that all the parties involved are contributing in such a way that plays to their strengths and for which they are being appropriately rewarded. This ensures the best possible outcome in terms of the standard of what's delivered and the project's financial sustainability.

Much will come down to how much risk you are willing to take on, or whether you choose to outsource the risks to your partner.

Planning risk: You should decide whether you want this underwritten and paid back by the partner on signature of the development agreement as an early reward.

Construction risk: Underestimating construction costs is a prime example of optimism bias by public sector partners, as demonstrated by the underestimation of project duration and total cost along with overestimation of benefits seen in several major government contracts in the last five years. The extent to which you want this risk to be borne by your partner is crucial to the negotiated deal. For example, you can ask for this to be substantially underwritten, but it will affect the return that your partner offers you.

Development finance: The cost of financing construction and fees over the lifetime of the building programme is an important element. You can ask for the offer to reflect a forward funding solution that allows you to draw down finance immediately, or delay payment until revenue return starts coming through on completion.

Investment finance: Some partners, such as Capita, have access to a range of funds that will consider investment based on the covenants in the scheme. These can include long-term debt finance at rates that are competitive with government sources.

Manage costs – but not at the expense of generating value

It's essential to manage costs strictly to ensure that your project achieves its financial goals. If the development costs more money than it generates, you won't be able to invest excess revenue in improving community services.

However, take care not to cut costs at the expense of the project's purpose, which may include non-financial goals such as creating employment, providing homes or making the neighbourhood safer or greener. This means ensuring that the decision-making structures in your partnership are appropriately balanced, so that one partner can't override the achievement of an important outcome in the name of cost saving and profit margins.

In summary, successful property development partnerships that embody the approach set out above will:

01 Help you to build trust and relationships, through a well-structured process

02 Identify and successfully manage development risk

03 Use your land and property assets more productively to achieve the maximum benefit for your communities.

03

Tackle and prioritise digital inclusion

Digital inclusion means that everyone has access to the devices, data and digital skills support they need to live well – and safely – in a digital world. Digital inclusion spans:

01 Internet access – affordable data, suitable devices

02 Everyday skills for life and work, including online safety

03 The confidence and motivation to go online and keep adapting.

While progress has been made in many areas over the last three years, the Covid-19 pandemic laid bare the urgent need for even greater digital inclusion – to ensure people from all backgrounds have equitable access to the right devices, sufficient data and the skills they need to navigate a digital world.

Our work with the Good Things Foundation has helped produce a roadmap for combined authorities which sets out the case for action and the commitment to support the development of a new model for digital inclusion at scale.

The report highlights two key facts that stand out for combined authorities. First, the dial can shift. According to a measure used in Lloyds Bank's UK Consumer Digital Index 2021, the Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber made the greatest leaps in usage since 2020. Second, and significantly, more than two-thirds of people would improve their digital skills if they knew there was support available to help them if they needed it.

Research by Cebr in 2018 found an estimated benefit of almost £15 for every £1 invested in helping people acquire basic digital skills. The case for investment is economic, moral and inclusive: combined authorities have an opportunity to take a strategic view across regional priorities, to look beyond adult skills to consider wider community benefit and to use digital inclusion to drive collaboration.
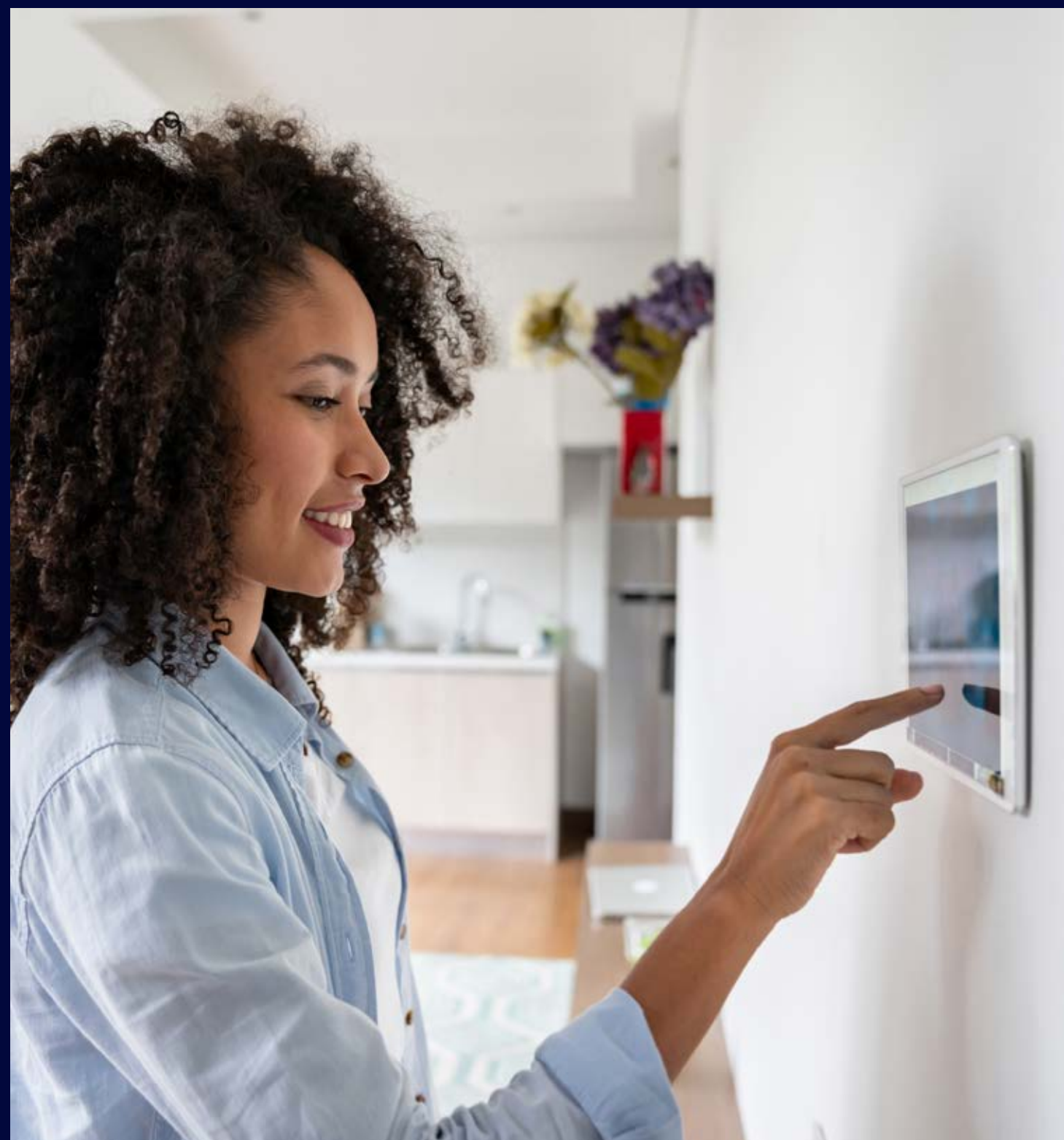
Considering digital inclusion as part of your overall placemaking strategy can help deliver significant change, covering:

01 Inclusive growth with a balanced, sustainable and fair economy

02 Adult education by building a pathway for digital skills progression

03 Employability for the ever-changing needs of the labour market

04 Community integration to reduce isolation or provide work prospects

05 Aging and older people who need help to stay independent and connected

06 Disability and accessibility, by helping with assistive technology and multiple communication channels

07 Health and social care, by helping tackle health inequalities

08 Housing, by helping improve quality of life

09 Levelling up so nobody is left behind in the digital revolution.

Digital inclusion needs to be considered in any element of place. Read the full report and roadmap for combined authorities.

04

Accelerate your housing decarbonisation journey

Climate change is accelerating rapidly and having catastrophic impacts on our weather, environment and the future of our planet.

At COP26 the UK Government re-committed itself to reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2050, pledging to invest £90 billion by 2030 and create 440,000 well-paid jobs. From corporates to households, the private sector to the public, every part of society has its part to play in making this vital goal a reality – this is a universal necessity across industrial, commercial, retail and residential industries alike, unprecedented in its scale and scope.

Public sector estates comprise 300,000 properties which contribute to 3% of all UK carbon emissions. Local authorities across the country therefore have been set targets to achieve net zero by improving the energy efficiency of their property and housing assets. Quality public services, innovatively designed and powered by technology and people, are critical to delivering safer, greener and healthier communities that support everyone – including society's most vulnerable.

Any approach to placemaking needs to have sustainability and decarbonisation running right through it. We believe there are five crucial steps local authorities can take to deliver on the decarbonisation goals:

Assess the data you already have on your housing stock

Is it enough to establish a baseline to track progress against? Before you start work, assess the size and scope of what needs to be addressed and formulate a strategic outline. Once you know what you have to work with, the more likely you are to secure funding by being able to demonstrate that your ambitions are feasible and achievable. The more you know, the more flexible you can be in adopting various options to achieve decarbonisation targets – as well as demonstrate value for money.

Develop a decarbonisation strategy

Break down the housing or property stock by type – you may choose to categorise buildings according to age, type or use – whatever works best for you. Then assess which technical fabric changes would effect the most significant change – this can form the basis of your pilot programme which will inform your long-term business case for large-scale change. Start small but be innovative – collaborate with local colleges and higher education institutes and see what they have in the eco-friendly pipeline.

Apply for funding

After assessing the work required, you'll need to identify the best way to secure funding for your project, whether through government assistance, private-sector financing such as Climate Bonds or green, sustainably-linked private placement deals.

You'll need to make a "demonstrator bid" to be granted funding for your pilot programme and develop a business case justifying your needs, taking into consideration:

01 Strategic policy reviews

02 Market failure assessment

03 Optioneering

04 Ambitions

05 Financial implications of your proposed development.

We recommend adopting the HM Treasury Green Book business case process to make sure you've covered all aspects of the proposed strategy. Again, start small with an initial pilot programme to test and see what works for your properties. This knowledge is extremely valuable for informing future iterations and retrofit/new build development.

Implement your pilot programme and monitor it

A successfully delivered pilot programme provides a wealth of knowledge and strategies that can be applied to cover a wider scope of your property assets. Make sure you track any changes and continue to compare against the baseline you've set, identifying and investigating any anomalies. Continuous learning feeds into the cycle for maximum efficiency and best, lowest-carbon results. This will enable you to find out the most effective measures and expand these to apply across wider stock.
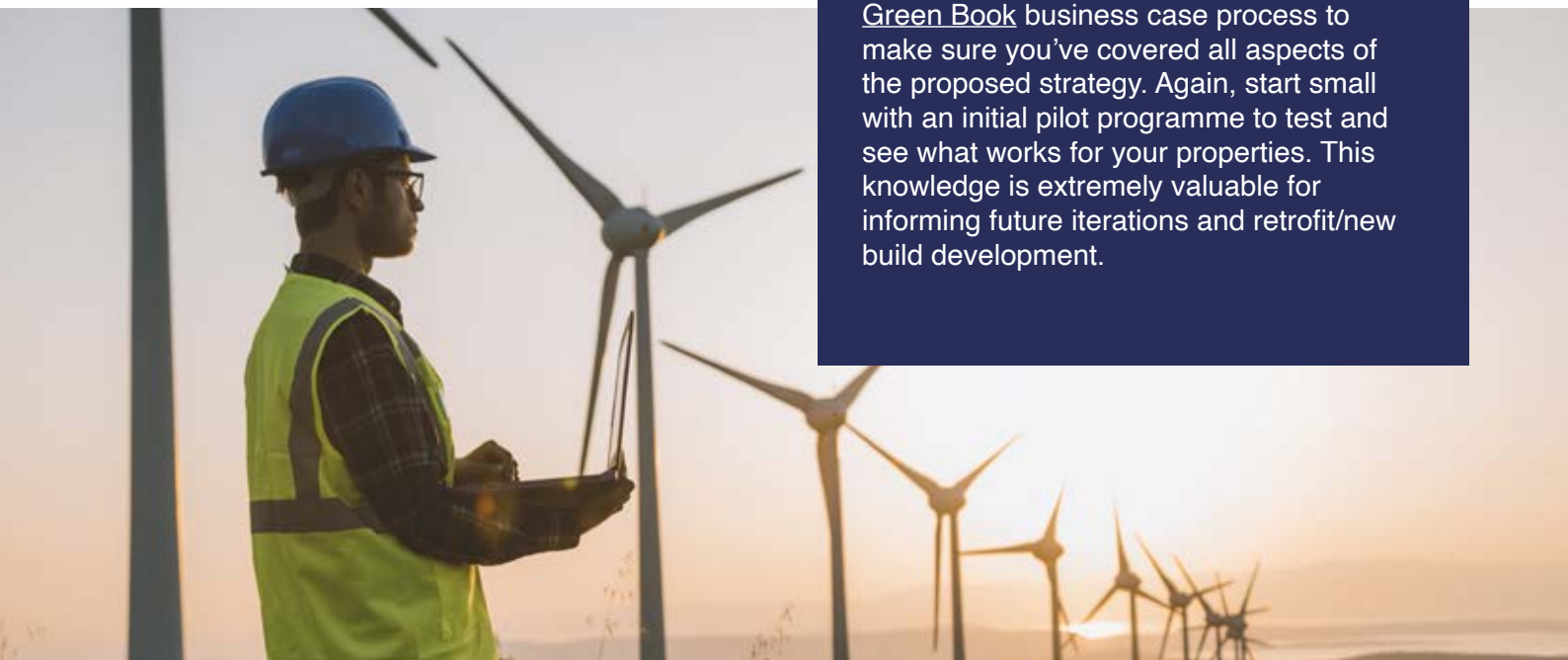
Behaviour and local skills

Remember: decarbonisation isn't just about the latest high-tech energy saving equipment: it's also about human behaviour. The key to achieving carbon neutrality is stimulating a change in people's habits and behaviour towards carbon saving and net zero. Any measures you implement should be easy to understand and practical, modelled around human psychology and designed to maximise uptake. Any interventions should be catered around tenants to minimise disruption and maximise engagement.

Resource shortages across the public sector mean many councils lack the in-house capacity, skills or expertise to plan and implement the retrofitting of their estate and social housing as needed. Job creation in local communities is therefore an important part of the drive toward retrofitting for decarbonisation. Local skills should be assessed, and training provided where needed.

The scope for job creation is broad: a single refit can require a wide range of expertise in insulation; electrical and mechanical engineering; heat pump and solar energy installation, etc.

05

Create thinking space for levelling up

As political leaders and civil servants react to an ever-increasing array of challenges, it leaves little time to step back from the frantic pace of service delivery to think about the bigger picture. For those on the front line, it's a case of running just to stay still as demand rises and resources decrease.

If we are going to make changes, even incremental ones, we need to free up the public sector to do things differently.

While council-wide digital transformation may be desirable, it must comprise more than channel-shift and digitisation of processes – and rethinking your entire process of delivery is a substantial project. Taking a pragmatic approach to productivity can help create the space you need to think differently about your placemaking strategy for the future.

Efficiency vs productivity

In the academic world, productivity and efficiency have distinctly different meanings: "productivity" is a measure of things done, whereas "efficiency" is a measure of things done *well*.

Outside of the realm of theory, efficiency often takes on quite a different meaning. It has become synonymous with the "more for less" ethos which, in most cases, equals costs out. For much of the public sector, the words "efficiency", "restructuring" and "transformation" are well-understood code words for services being delivered by fewer people, with lower budgets or with reduced resources.

With all the negative connotations now associated with the word "efficiency", we have opted to talk about "productivity", recognising that efficiency (doing things well) is a core part of this.

More than digital

Digital alone is not the answer. It is merely a tool or a channel. It is what you do with that tool or how you utilise that channel that matters. When poor processes are digitised, they don't cease to be poor – they just get faster.

We need to ask ourselves:

01 What outcome do we want?

02 What does success look like?

03 How will we measure it?

04 What is the ideal customer journey?

05 What is the ideal officer journey?

06 Where is the data coming from and where is it going?

07 How can we share this data to help others?

08 How do we automate the boring bits like reporting?

09 What extra work are we creating in the system by doing this?

Frontline first

An organisation's finance, procurement, commercial, legal and other functions are important but can create complexity and organisational drag as other teams struggle to comply with procedures and policies. Often the confluence of these requirements means that those serving citizens directly are tied up performing transactional activities and administration, rather than building relationships with local resident and businesses.

Taking a frontline-first approach means making your support functions subordinate to your customer-facing teams, focusing on how they can free up frontline teams and still get the management and compliance data they need.

You may even find that much of the information your support teams require is, in fact, not essential – and processes can be slimmed down as a result.

Too much data?

Organisations collect a vast amount of data while delivering services. We normally err on the side of collecting more than we need, just to be safe. However, it is estimated that only 3% of the data collected is ever used.

With pressure to spend every minute of our time on delivering better outcomes, having to collect data that may never be used or performing administrative tasks whose fitness for purpose has never been reviewed – this seems like something we can do better.

Power to your people

Decisions should be made at the lowest level within an organisation possible. If the level of decision-making responsibility within your teams doesn't make senior managers nervous, you probably haven't gone far enough.

This makes the volume of information flowing up and down the organisation leaner and more efficient, while empowering the people who know what they are doing to make the right decisions. Leaders need to ensure that people are trained and accountable, but then they need to let them get on with it.

Compound gains

Big changes usually take time to execute, and the benefits accrue only some time later. Smaller changes can be made more quickly and deliver benefits sooner. You might be able to achieve a number of these before you have even completes the governance requirements to implements a larger change.

> **For example, a planned large transformation that will deliver an in-year 12% increase in productivity will be outperformed by compounding monthly 1% increases (12.68%)**

Small changes can also be delivered within your teams without involving the whole organisation, reducing management overhead.

Coming up with some initial terms of reference will help define delegated authorities, what changes are in scope and how changes that impact other teams should be handled.

Making data work for you

Gathering data is all very well, but what counts is how that data is applied. Many organisations have lakes of data that flood in from every part of the organisation, forcing those compiling reports and looking for insight to fish around for the information relevant to their needs.

Getting to grips with your data is essential if you are to make the best use of it and deliver services that are quick, efficient and successful.

You can significantly boost productivity by looking at the way data moves throughout your organisation. It's likely that, even with expensive and widely used systems, somebody, somewhere is downloading your data in a spreadsheet for a report, spending valuable time on a process that can be automated.

Small automations can provide gains that really add up over a month – and might be as simple as creating a Microsoft Power Automate process that helps manage reporting requests, automatically sending a form once a month to a set group of people and then consolidating the results into a PowerBI dashboard. Small changes that compound yield big results.

Conclusion

Levelling up is the right thing to do, but delivering on the promises in the White Paper will be challenging, complex and difficult.
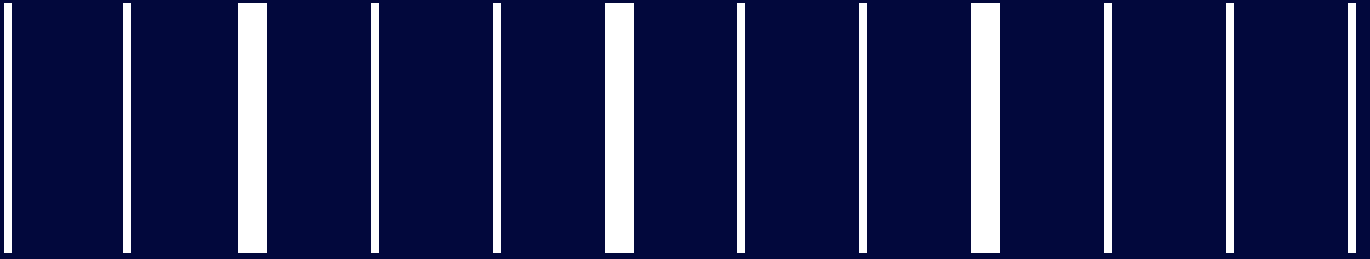
At the heart of any success will be local authorities, playing an ever-increasingly significant role in delivering on the needs and priorities of their communities.

By putting placemaking at the centre of developing the next generation of public services, it will be possible to drive change and improved outcomes across the UK. We hope the practical steps highlighted in this guide will start the ball rolling and allow authorities to find the time and space to level up.

CITIZENS

PRIORITIES

Capita