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Report Title: Long-Term Plan: Data Pack Briefing

Introduction

This paper summarises the information that is contained within the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) Long-Term Plan for Towns Data Pack that has been issued to Hastings Borough Council and its partners, to provide the evidence base to develop its 10-year vision and 3 year Investment Plan.

It provides a headline, initial summary of what is in the Data Pack, what it might mean for Hastings, and it considers how it can best be used to support the development of the Plan

What the Data Pack Contains

The local data profile has 17 pages and draws on the latest available data that supports the three Long-Term Plan for Towns themes:

- Safety & Security;
- High Streets, Heritage & Regeneration; and
- Transport & Connectivity.

Its initial summary of place suggest that, compared with the England benchmark, Hastings has:

- Higher than the national average crime rate
- A higher number of town centre outlets per head of population
- Higher footfall
- A higher commercial property vacancy rate
- A higher proportion of 16-64 year olds with no qualifications
- A lower proportion of 16-64 year olds with Level 3 qualifications
- A lower level of social trust
- A Lower level of premises with gigabit capable broadband
- A lower level of people who work from home
- A lower job density
- A lower level of productivity, as measured by GVA per job filled

Hastings' employment rate is similar to the national average, but, interestingly, the IMD suggests that the town has high levels of employment deprivation.

Initial Summary of Key Issues

- According to the data, recorded crime per 1,000 residents and lack of social trust are both much higher than the national average. There is an absence of trend analysis in the data packs, so it is not clear whether or not the situation is improving or getting worse. It is not clear whether trend data on social trust is available.
- Footfall data is much higher in Hastings (178 index where England = 100) than in England. It is not really clear what this is stating, however. The data is taken from Virgin Media O2 and relates to "outbound" journeys that are undertaken within the urban area for the period March 2022-March 2023. Again, there is no trend data, there is no indication what the purpose of the journeys are and how they compare with town centre footfall data that may or may not be collected at local level. Based on this data, Hastings town centre should be vibrant, but this appears not to be the case, so it is difficult to know what the data is suggesting at this time.
- Although Hastings has a higher proportion of town centre outlets than the national average, it also has higher commercial vacancy rates. However, there is no trend analysis in the data pack. Also, the types of outlets can make a big difference to the economic vibrancy of town centres. Generally, town centres that have large numbers of hot food take-aways, betting shops and charity shops tend to be less economically vibrant than those that have a different mix. This is not captured in the data, but may be better understood by the council's Planning and Business Rates teams.
- Hastings scores poorly on most of the economic measures in the data pack, compared with national averages: GVA per job filled is significantly below the England average, although the data is from 2020 and there is no evidence of trend analysis. More detailed data by sector is available at local level, which could be used to better understand the drivers behind low level of productivity. Furthermore, arguably, a better measure of productivity is GVA per hour worked, this eliminates that number of hours worked per job.
- Qualification levels amongst working age residents are also lower than the national average, based on 2021 Census data, as are job density and the employment rate.
- A very low proportion of premises have gigabit-capable broadband (29.4%), based on data from Ofcom. This makes it one of the least digitally connected places in Britain. It is possible to compare this with other local places. Worthing has 96.9% coverage; Eastbourne 70.2%; Adur 93.2%; Crawley 94.1%; Rother 50.9%; Lewes 54.3%; Arun 38.2%; Chichester 38.8%; Crawley 94.1%; Mid Sussex 56.7% and Horsham 57.6%. It may be worth exploring why coverage is so low in Hastings and what scope there is for improving it. At national level, it tends to be peripheral places that have low coverage, although this is not always the case.

- Average journey times are shorter in Hastings for all services and by all modes, except for using public transport/walking to a Further Education college.
- The median age of residents is marginally higher in Hastings (43) compared with England (39), but population growth between 2011 and 2021 was slower (+1.1%) compared with England (+6.6%). It has a marginally smaller proportion of 0-16 year old residents and a marginally larger proportion of residents aged 65+ compared with England.
- Hastings has a high proportion of deprived LSOAs (40% within the top quintile) with the most widespread acute (top decile) being employment and income deprivation.

Initial Comments

The data in the Data Pack is useful, but limited. It uses District/Borough, Regional and England benchmarks and we would expect most of the 55 Long Term Plan for Towns locations to perform below national averages. The distinctiveness of each location may have been enhanced if the 55 towns were compared with each other or with other local districts/boroughs.

The data is high level and shows no trend analysis. It would be useful to compare this data with other locally collected data that are held by local partners. For example, is this the best measure that can be used for security and safety, or would Sussex Police be able to provide additional insights into the limited data that is available?

For transport, the minimum travel time by public transport is not much use if there is not a regular service or if the cost of travelling by public transport is prohibitive. It is hard to believe that walking and public transport have the same journey times as each other, in the way that the Department for Transport categorises them. Local knowledge about bus routes, times and costs is likely to be much more useful than the minimum travel time data that is provided.

Generally, there is limited sub-district data available, which may restrict how data can be used to support the Plan. No data on heritage seems to be included in the data packs and, whilst the footfall data is interesting, it is not clear how well it reflects town centre footfall.

The way that the data for access to gigabit broadband is presented, highlights some of the limitations of the data pack. Whilst the difference between Hastings and England is stark, only when it is compared with other districts/boroughs in the UK, does it become clear that, on this measure, there are only eight local authorities in England that have less gigabit broadband coverage than Hastings.

Board Considerations

1. To note the headline summary of the DLUH&C Data Pack.
2. To consider if any further data collection and analysis is needed to help inform the 10 year vision and 3 year investment plan for Hastings.