

Public Chairs' Forum & Association of Chief Executives
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Planning for the Future: People and Places – Event Summary

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There is a political imperative to break away from London, with a government-wide impetus towards regional cross-departmental hubs to 'level up' other parts of the UK. With the [government's estate strategy](#) pledging to move 1,000 posts out of London by 2022 and 'thousands more' to follow, ALBs must be prepared for this change. But what can ALBs expect from this transition? In this joint seminar with Chairs and Chief Executives of public bodies, we discussed the practical consequences for ALBs.

The case for diversifying location

- **Diversity and inclusion:** Public bodies - and the civil service as a whole - cannot fully implement the diversity agenda unless they are also geographically diverse.

"WHEREVER YOU LIVE, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO HAVE A GREAT CAREER IN PUBLIC SERVICE."

- **Recruitment:** By tapping into nationwide expertise, you instantly broaden your talent pool.
- **Government policy** should be connected with all regions of the UK, for increased engagement and democratic accountability.

How to make it work

"THERE CAN'T BE AN OVERNIGHT CHANGE - AND THERE IS NO ONE SIZE FITS ALL"

- **Technology:** Infrastructure must support the demand. I.T and video-conferencing equipment is vital to maximise productivity and working relationships, but the speed of internet is paramount.
- **Government standards:** More standards for working practices are inevitable, if there is to be a long-term commitment to enact change fairly. One example is a public sector standard for equipment and telecommunications, which would ensure difficult-to-reach areas of the country are not left behind.
- **Long-term Investment:** Property and facilities should be at the heart of the policy agenda, investing in the standards and systems necessary. A broader view should also be taken about where there has been capital underinvestment and to improve these neglected facilities at pace.
- **Training:** Line managers should be prepared for the transition to managing colleagues remotely.

- **Tailored opportunities:** The ambitions and behaviours of employees in different areas is likely to vary, whether it be by region or urban/rural demographics. By treating employees as individuals, we can tailor our offer to meet their actual needs. In showing this understanding, we can engender a collaborative culture and greater pride in the organisation.

“ONE BUILDING FOR ANOTHER DOESN’T WORK – IT HAS TO COME WITH SMARTER WORKING”

- **Smarter working:** Drop-in offices, micro-hubs and co-working spaces loom large in the future. To adapt to this, smarter working should be embedded, for example in remote working, virtual communication – but also in the implementation of strategies to enhance employee engagement and safeguard employee wellbeing.
- **Be a part of the community:** It’s insufficient to transplant operations from London to another area. The cultural differences of each region must be factored in and policy arms must work in partnership with the community, for example local authorities and educational institutions.

“JUST BECAUSE YOU’RE IN A PLACE, ARE YOU CONNECTED TO THE PLACE? COLLEAGUES NEED TO FEEL ROOTS”

- **Entrenched sustainability:** Sustainability should drive the agenda, both in how much we travel and in how we manage our facilities. In breaking the cycle of last-minute ‘patch repairs’, we can invest in life-cycle replacement, which would improve working environments experience and make long-term savings. The use of existing buildings, perhaps historic buildings in need of preservation, is an option to reduce carbon emissions.

Areas to mitigate

- **Relationships:** Increased distance necessitates a decisive commitment to relationship-building across the board: within the organisation, with other public bodies, with central government, and external stakeholders.
- **Securing investment:** Success depends on securing the budget for technology necessary to make operations joined-up across the country, in this spending review and beyond.
- **Remote working and wellbeing:** Physical meetings will still play a role and are vital in building relationships and motivating staff. In response to increased home or remote working, employers must place a renewed emphasis on their duty of care – both in ensuring staff are physically well (with the right equipment and safe working conditions) and that their mental health is considered.

“NO ONE SHOULD BE OBLIGED TO WORK FROM HOME”

- **Diverse opportunities:** In any workforce change there may be disadvantaged parties. we should keep close watch on the diversity data to ensure that there is not a conflict between geographical location and opportunities for under-represented groups.
- **The wider offer:** While focusing on location of operations is important, other benefits should also be considered to ensure we are attracting the best talent. For example, ACE members often highlight pension schemes as a concern. Improving the pension provision could make the civil service more permeable and appealing to private sector leaders.