



Date	13 September 2023
Time	15:30 -16:30
Venue	Room R, Portcullis House Hybrid meeting supported by Zoom for virtual delegates.
Chair	Andrew Lewer MBE MP Member of Parliament for Northampton South, Chair of the Devolution APPG.
Speakers	Osaro Otobo – Levelling Up Locally Inquiry Steering Group Member and Higher Education Consultant, Trustee of the British Youth Council Professor Michael Kenny – Levelling Up Locally Inquiry Steering Group Member and Co-Director of the Bennett Institute for Public Policy at the University of Cambridge Cllr Kevin Bentley – Leader of Essex County Council and Levelling Up Locally Inquiry Co-Chair

NON-VERBATIM MINUTES

Chair of the APPG for Devolution, **Andrew Lewer MP** convened the meeting and gave background on the group and previous focuses. He welcomed speakers and guests.

Andrew introduced the first speaker **Osaro Otobo**, Levelling Up Locally Inquiry Steering Group Member and Higher Education Consultant, Trustee of the British Youth Council.

Osaro first discussed how levelling up impacts children and particularly those from marginalised backgrounds. She outlined that although the Levelling Up agenda seeks to address the disparities between economic prosperity and opportunities, many communities have not yet seen progress.

She acknowledged the work of the Local Government Association's work to ensure the promised progress and why it is important to continue to examine how levelling up is delivered. The lack of progress has left many young people disheartened. She called for the levelling up agenda to be more focused on education, skills development, and job creation to support young people to succeed.

She highlighted that marginalised communities have been disproportionately impacted by these disparities and they must have a voice in decision making processes. These communities face additional barriers when accessing levelling up benefits.

Andrew thanked Osaro and invited **Professor Michael Kenny**, Levelling Up Locally Inquiry Steering Group Member and Co-Director of the Bennett Institute for Public Policy at the University of Cambridge, to speak.

Professor Michael Kenny explained that the inquiry was a great opportunity to reflect on the Levelling Up White Paper published by the government. The inquiry and its recommendations focused on the need to create conditions for levelling up, more cooperation between levels of government, and developing a more place-based approach. Professor Kenny highlighted that these recommendations are still relevant despite a change in Government priorities and economic standing. He noted that there is still a need for the Government to provide support and guidance on levelling up funding and implementation for place-based leadership

Andrew thanked Professor Kenny and invited **Cllr Kevin Bentley**, Leader of Essex County Council and Levelling Up Locally Inquiry Co-Chair, to speak.

Cllr Bentley explained that he sees levelling up as the way for self-determination and greater decision making locally. He gave an example of skills locally and that the difference in skills needs locally. In Essex there is a need for a coastal skills sector which other areas do not need. He also explained that housing targets are not enough and there is a need for community planning with proper transport and other public services like schools and health services.

Andrew thanked Cllr Bentley for his contribution. Andrew asked, in relation to the speakers' comments around the deprioritisation of levelling up, if the rhetoric around levelling up had changed and if what would levelling up look like if it made a resurgence after the next election.

Professor Kenny responded that the rhetoric has definitely changed in the sense that we don't hear as much about it from the Government. He said that there seems to be a consensus from both the Conservatives and Labour around what devolution looks like. The issues levelling up seeks to address will not go away and therefore levelling up will not go away.

Osaro reflected on her experience at previous Party Conferences. She noted that there was a lack of interest from both national and local leaders to discuss youth issues within the context of levelling up. The people who need it the most haven't forgotten about levelling up even if national leaders talk about it less.

Andrew asked Osaro what the main thrust of levelling up concerns were for young people.

Osaro explained that the main concerns were employment and training opportunities, There are concerns about how issues are expressed to national leaders.

Andrew asked Cllr Bentley if the levelling up agenda has taken hold in Whitehall or if they have moved on.

Cllr Bentley said the bidding process presents issues as the best bids don't always denote the areas that need the funding the most. He said there needs to be more autonomy locally to decide how to fund their community.

Andrew asked if Cllr Bentley thought combined authorities and devolution settlements or if there will be other models that emerge.

Cllr Bentley said he hopes there are more local government focused governance and devolution.

Online participant, Virginia, asked Osaro about Youth Mayors.

Osaro explained that the British Youth Council engages with the Youth Mayors and Youth Parliament Members across the country but not everywhere has such youth representation. She said it is something very worthwhile to invest in further.

Andrew thanked everyone for their contributions and closed the meeting.