Special Interest Group annual report

SIG Name	Britain's Leading Edge
Lead Member	Cllr Nick Ireland – Leader, Dorset Council
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Membership

Please note that only those councils in LGA membership are permitted to be join a LGA Special Interest Groups

As of 1 May 2026, there are 14 local authorities who are members of Britain's Leading Edge:

- Cornwall Council
- Cumberland Council
- Dorset Council
- Durham County Council
- East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- Herefordshire Council
- Council of the Isles of Scilly
- Isle of Wight Council
- North Yorkshire Council
- Rutland County Council
- Shropshire Council
- Somerset Council
- Westmorland and Furness Council
- Wiltshire Council

Aims *brief summary of your SIG's main aims*

To advocate for the collective interests of communities that are characterised by dispersed settlement patterns, high levels of rurality and challenging connectivity by increasing awareness of the particular issues facing our populations. These include historic under-investment; lower productivity; greater difficulty accessing services and demographic imbalances.

Our cross-party group of local authorities aims to make the most of our natural capital, which provides huge opportunities for food and energy security, and for a net carbon-zero future. A further objective is to promote the essential contribution that member regions make to national security, through hosting key defence infrastructure.

Priorities

Does your SIG contribute to the any of the themes and priorities in the LGA business plan?

Goal 3: To inspire and promote innovation in local government.

Key activities / outcomes of work undertaken ***please keep this section to a maximum of one side of A4***

- We submitted evidence in response to an inquiry by the APPG on Rural Business and the Rural Powerhouse into the impact of devolution in rural areas. We are positive about the transformative potential of devolution for rural areas and called for the conscious consideration of non-metropolitan places in the design, governance, and funding of devolution arrangements.
- The Britain's Leading Edge Chair wrote to the Secretaries of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Energy Security and Net Zero, and Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Chair's letter emphasised the potential for Britain's Leading Edge regions to underpin current national missions and encouraged a meeting to discuss this further.
- We have refreshed the Britain's Leading Edge manifesto, championing the advantages and potential of placing rural regions at the heart of the national mission – particularly in respect of food and energy security, national defence, and the drive towards net zero. We are currently finalising the arrangements for launching the manifesto.
- To amplify the core messages of the revised manifesto, we have designed a rapid sequence of workshops to translate our strategic aims into concrete policy asks, to be held in spring/summer 2026. From this work, we plan for a programme of policy engagement and lobbying to be progressed.
- We have inaugurated a dedicated research sub-group to provide expert

advice, insight, and coordination of research activity for Britain's Leading Edge. Comprising research, analytical, and policy experts, the research sub-group held its first meeting in April 2026 and will meet at least quarterly. The research sub-group is contributing directly to the policy workshops discussed above.

- Leaders and chief executives from Britain's Leading Edge regions have met formally three times this year with a regular quarterly rhythm established. An officer's sub-group has met five times to progress the group's agenda and maintain this ongoing cadence.
- The chair and secretariat responsibilities have passed from Cornwall Council to Dorset Council, who will lead Britain's Leading Edge until December 2026. The leadership of Britain's Leading Edge will rotate to another member region in 2027.