

Placecast Episode 15 - Transcript

00:00:05 Dr Nicola Headlam

Welcome to Placecast, a Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub production based at the University of Birmingham. Placecast is essential listening for those keen to explore the ins and outs of knowledge mobilisation for influence in central and local government, based on the view that it is only through animating the power of place-based leadership that the wicked problems of 2026 can become more manageable.

Whether you are a researcher, a citizen scientist, an activist, a professional working in the public sector, a civil servant, politician, analyst or entrepreneur, we think that it is through our networks that most solutions can be assembled, tested and the learning shared before we go again, and that universities can act as the repositories and observatories of these efforts.

We are based in City-REDI and rooted in the LPIP programme funded by the ESRC and Innovate UK. This podcast aims to highlight knowledge and evidence-based ways of working and the strategies needed to make a real impact on the decisions that shape our society. Our guests are change-makers from across the UK with stories about the ways in which influence can be achieved. We focus in particular on some of the connective tissue within and between sectors for clues as to how to animate place-based leadership, as innovating is a team sport best done in the open.

My guests today: one of them is local economic development royalty, and one of them is a rising star of the Institute of Economic Development. So Richard Jeffery, you are the royalty, if you do not mind.

00:01:33 Richard Jeffery

I was going to wonder, which was which.

00:01:36 Dr Nicola Headlam

You have worked at the regional, national and local level in your career, always in very senior roles, and you are currently the National Director of. If you could just explain how the Growth Hub is a national organisation. Tell us a bit about that. You have got roots in Greater Manchester, but you are national now.

00:01:51 Richard Jeffery

Great to be part of this, a very thorough introduction! My name is Richard Jeffery. I am the National Director at GC Insight. We are a consultancy firm that is part of the Growth Company, headquartered in Greater Manchester but operating across the whole of the UK. We are a social enterprise and we are all about enabling growth, creating jobs and improving lives. We have a whole range of different services. One of them is the Growth Hub that we provide in Greater Manchester, and we also coordinate the National Growth Hub network across England, as well as doing work across Scotland, Northern Ireland and a whole range of other areas. We have consultancy teams, data teams, and we have GrowthFlag, which is a tool that identifies companies with the greatest growth potential, along with a whole range of other performance tools and delivery activities. We work for combined authorities, local authorities and others across the whole piece. Hopefully we'll be able to have some answer to some of your questions.

00:02:52 Dr Nicola Headlam

And I think it is fair to say, Richard, that you are known for almost relentless optimism in what can be a very difficult policy space. How have you come to be so upbeat when the policy area can be so challenging?

00:03:04 Richard Jeffery

I think that is a fair point. I think we've had a number of transitions over the years, and there have been moments when many of us in economic development have faced some pretty challenging times over the last twenty years. I have largely focused on business support amongst other things, and that has had some particularly challenging times over the last twenty years.

But what I have always found is that no matter how kind of challenging the national policy landscape or funding landscape might be, if you are really clear on what you want to achieve, if you can set an exciting vision that people can buy into, and you can have a plan and prove you can get there and coalesce people behind that, you can achieve great things.

When we set up that first Growth Hub, there was hardly any funding around, and yet we got people to buy into a vision. It took a few years to get there, but eventually we managed to get a whole range of different partners behind it, and we went on to achieve some really great things. I think you can always achieve something, no matter what the landscape, if you have got an exciting enough vision, a rallying point for people to get behind and see the benefit it brings, great things can be achieved. X`

00:04:25 Dr Nicola Headlam

And of course a big part of that is bringing on colleagues. I know you are very good at that too. So Nathan, you have really come out of the gates firing in your chosen career. You have received national recognition and I see you on LinkedIn all over the place, on stages, doing talks. Having fewer years under your belt, how do you find reasons for optimism in the sub-national environment?

00:04:49 Nathan Shoesmith

What we see every day is that there are lots of opportunities out there. My background is more in helping people understand often confusing and complicated topics, and I guess the world of economic development and business support certainly falls into that category.

I think often it is not necessarily the really complicated things, but actually the basics, the really simple things that, if you spend the time to look at them, reveal lots of really exciting stuff and lots of opportunities to make things better. What we are all about, and what I love about doing this job, is that we are able to help people make better-informed decisions and have a positive impact by pulling all that information together, whether it is the data or different viewpoints, and helping people unpick it. That is what gives us the optimism, but also empowers us and other people to drive that change.

00:05:51 Dr Nicola Headlam

I think that is right. And full disclosure, the three of us have worked together closely over the years, so we do have a bit of a shorthand. At times I am definitely more of the doom-and-gloom persuasion, but the thing that really gives me hope at the moment is seeing the change in my own neighbourhood. My own fifteen-minute neighbourhood in Stockport is unrecognisable to when I moved up here twenty years ago. That is the bit that keeps you hopeful and honest: when you can actually track change in neighbourhoods. Sometimes it feels like the national missions are very big and far away, but actually if you are engaged in the craft of local economic development, you need to focus on the local.

Thank you. Well, I will see you at UKREiiF. I was just talking to somebody the other day about how UKREiiF has established itself so quickly that someone in the built environment sector had not heard of it. I did reflect that in the last five years of this national built environment jamboree over in Leeds, it is quite exciting to see, if you think about the end of the last government and this government, the state of the mayoralities for example. There are institutions that will be at UKREiiF that did not exist

when UKREiiF was set up, and when you are in it every day, you forget how fast that pace of change has been.

So I just wonder if you would like to reflect a little on the state of the art in the mayoralities and within local government reform and devolution.

00:07:16 Richard Jeffery

We have got some really good examples around the country of people who have been doing this for some time. One concern I had when we started down the process of every area getting a mayor, getting a combined authority behind them and getting going was that there were a lot of people looking to some of the more established areas and saying that is how you do it. But every area is different, and there is always a question of whether that can be replicated elsewhere.

I have been really heartened to see how those who have come in the second and third wave of combined authorities and mayors are starting to gain some traction and maturity. It is not an overnight thing. Those who have been around five, six, seven, eight years are really starting to gain some traction and starting to do some serious work, have got local partners behind them, have got the right people in place, and it is having a genuine impact. There is an awful lot that can be learned from other areas, and you can get there quicker if you lean in and get the support you need.

I also think it is just the right geography on which to operate. I have tried to do things at a national level and it is really hard to design something in Whitehall that you then land in Pontefract and have it deal with everything a business needs. It is much easier to start at a much more local level, start with what that business needs and look at the environment it is in, the people, the infrastructure, the support systems. Doing that at a mayoral level is just a whole lot easier than doing it at, say, a North West level. That was tough, I did that for a while.

It also builds in a lot of stability. As we have seen a lot of change at the national level over recent years, having those mayors in place gives the long-term stability that the things we are tackling really require.

And bringing it back to UKREiiF, it is really good to see the way places are articulating their offer. We have helped a number of areas around the country to really articulate what that means, getting beyond the brochure of hey, we are great, come here, to the nub of what is unique and genuinely special about that place, what genuinely interests investors and people from across the UK and internationally.

00:10:22 Dr Nicola Headlam

The best thing about UKREiiF, you heard it here first: if you come out of the station, go to the back entrance and get on the water taxi with some guys from Venice who serenaded me all the way to UKREiiF. It was amazing.

00:10:41 Dr Nicola Headlam

Nathan, as we were saying, you have been in the game a couple of years now. What is your take on the mayoralities moving at different speeds? Do you feel, as Richard does, that they are maturing nicely? Are there any standout places you have worked with recently, any grounds for optimism in the sub-national?

00:10:58 Nathan Shoesmith

I would agree with Richard. The key point is that these things take time. Quite often the patience for growth is not necessarily there, but it is really important to have those long-term plans. When we look at places through the Growth Outlook report, the places that are actually doing really well in

terms of growth are those that have really strong messaging, a long-term plan, and the right infrastructure in place.

When we look at where we have got to now, yes, they are all coming along at different speeds and I think that is natural. There is potentially a concern in that, because of the different speeds and the differences between areas, some are going to get quite different outcomes to others over the next few years. So there is a real challenge there.

But UKREiiF brings along a very good opportunity, and every year bringing those people together is valuable. Though it should not just be once a year at UKREiiF. Throughout the year, more of what we are doing increasingly is bringing those people who are working in the sector together, because we should be learning lessons from lots of different places. Whether you are a mayoral area, an area prioritised for devolution, or a long way off devolution, talking to people in different parts of the country, learning those lessons and building those connections ahead of what is coming down the track is really important, and UKREiiF is perfect for doing that.

00:12:35 Dr Nicola Headlam

The main thing we are going to talk about today, and as I say we work together on the data that sits behind GrowthFlag, I presented some of the Growth Outlook data at a summit in Birmingham last week, as I discussed earlier with Nathan. So if you could just say something about how you are using GrowthFlag at the moment.

Richard, you mentioned mayoral geography, and I think what is really fascinating about the high-growth geography of GrowthFlag as it has matured is things like the Solihull example, one of the top local authorities for high-growth propensity. That is not your core city, but it is able to benefit from some of the spillovers from the core city. So if you start with the question of what is the power of GrowthFlag, and if it were fully mature and embedded and everyone were using it, what could change as a result?

00:13:23 Richard Jeffery

The reason we created GrowthFlag was that we already had a whole range of other tools, but when I was at the front end trying to work with growth businesses and understand the local area, trying to get into the right businesses at the right time early on in their journey, I realised we just were not getting to enough of them early enough. Those that we did reach, great, we did amazing things with. But there were others we got to just too late, after they had already raised finance, spent some money, and not quite gone in the right direction. So we were really keen to get to people early. When we went through the process of creating GrowthFlag, we built a tool that we were originally going to use just for ourselves. Over time, we realised the power of it and really wanted the economic development community to benefit. The way that we and others are now using it is really diverse.

The original reason for creating GrowthFlag was to improve business support delivery on the ground, and that is 100% how it is being used. A whole lot of people have got it embedded in their dashboards to make sure they are really well informed when they see a client. They have worked out a clear strategy of who they want to work with, they have got the ability to assess clients as they come in, and they have got a properly stratified, properly segmented view of their business base. That frontline work is 100% there.

Where it is really exciting is how it has been embedded into the development of strategies, so that places are not just defaulting to what a national report says about high growth in certain sectors. They are able to make their own view of what their own priorities are. GrowthFlag lets you look at all stages of growth, not just the top end, to understand what the pipeline needs to look like. It enables

places to say: how can we work with our business community to achieve growth, improve productivity, improve the lives of people living and working in our local area, improve health outcomes? If you have got a thriving business base, many of your policy objectives are achieved, and that is something I think we have lost a little bit of focus on.

My vision is that more and more places use GrowthFlag to have a solid approach to reimagining how they can do business engagement and business support, and to reimagine what growth looks like in their area. Different places have different growth characteristics and that has massive ramifications for what they should be doing. It is not an identical approach that people should be applying. I was involved in some of the work in Greater Manchester, but we have also done a lot of work in West Yorkshire, Liverpool and lots of other places, and there are unique things that need to be done in each.

Nathan has come up with a very useful way of assessing that, a way to look at areas and determine what different approaches they should be taking. I think it is worth talking a bit about the Growth Outlook and some of the different ways you can look at a local area.

00:16:47 Dr Nicola Headlam

We share a frustration that when government is talking to business, it can feel very high-level, treasury to big business, but it is the SME that drives it. And incremental gains for SMEs, that is what is really going to change communities.

00:17:06 Richard Jeffery

Exactly. One of the challenges has been that business support has been marginalised a bit. It is seen as lots of little micro impacts, but add them up and you have got huge macro impacts. You only have to look at the Greater Manchester example: a recent evaluation showed a half-a-billion-pound net impact on the local economy from growth support there. That is a tremendous story to build on.

00:17:30:65 Dr Nicola Headlam

The frustration is you are never going to get the macro numbers you want unless you do a lot of things at the micro level, and that has been split apart slightly.

00:17:40:46 Richard Jeffery

A lot of things, but done well. The days when we had money to spread and try lots of things to see what stuck are gone. We have to be really focused with however we apply the funds we do have.

00:17:52 Dr Nicola Headlam

So Nathan, we alluded to your categorisation of different kinds and types of area. Can you speak to that a little? It is not an economic geography that people might be familiar with, because it does not follow an economic geography designed to fit institutions. It is a true high-growth geography, truly about the business base that is really there. I would argue that a couple of years into GrowthFlag, it would have been easier if it fit neatly to cities or to any other constituency with a lobbying base, but it is purer for being a genuine economic geography.

00:18:25 Nathan Shoesmith

Yes, exactly. First off, what are we talking about specifically? Growth Outlook. We have mentioned it. It is a report we have been doing for three years now. It is the UK's most comprehensive analysis of business growth potential at local authority level, and it is quite different to other reports in a few ways.

It looks at absolutely every business with one set of accounts, right across all sectors. Quite often analysis can take a quite narrow view depending on whatever narrative is dominant, but we do not

do that. It is also forward-looking, which is quite rare, and we are the only ones doing that at the individual business level in the UK. Just because a business has grown in the past, it does not mean it is going to grow in the future. We also know that how growth happens has been shifting nationally and globally, which is why we wanted to take a new approach. By doing a national comparison, we hope to be able to share best practice and insights from other places, and that is exactly what we have done with Growth Outlook.

We look at every upper or single-tier local authority in the country. We look at what the distribution of growth potential is in those places, what the growth is worth, and also how risky that growth is likely to be.

00:19:46 Dr Nicola Headlam

And just to be really clear, the data you use is up-to-the-minute, and it is the kind of data that would be used for lending decisions rather than secondary or scraped data. It is the data that lenders would use if they were making a decision about a business.

00:20:02 Nathan Shoesmith

It is based on main government datasets, enriched with even more information, yes, exactly as you say. And what that does is it allows us to get a picture of what is happening right across the country and to do a classification breakdown of how different areas compare.

As you alluded to earlier, between mayoral areas but also within mayoral areas, it can be very different from one place to another in terms of what the growth geography looks like. And it is often not the trendy narrative of big cities and high-growth sectors. A lot of the time we forget that the majority of the UK business base is in the foundational economy. It is often not the really exciting stuff on paper that is grabbing the headlines, but when you look at those businesses, how they are innovating, the stuff they are changing and the impact they have on local people and communities, it is really exciting and it is something we should be talking about a lot more.

This year in Growth Outlook, we highlighted that the top ten areas by growth potential include places such as Perth and Kinross, Aberdeen, Southwark, Solihull, Telford and Wrekin, Antrim and Newtownabbey in Northern Ireland and Oxfordshire, a whole mix of areas. They are not necessarily your big cities. They are quite often close to your big cities, and within those regions what they are benefiting from is connectivity, really strong messaging and the right infrastructure.

Each year we go around these places to try and work out what is really helping them click, because we want to share that insight and help places replicate it. Being really connected in their thinking and having that long-term view does make a real difference. It is often difficult to do, but having things joined up, pulling intelligence together and doing things based on actual evidence is really important. Still in 2026, we might be talking about AI every day, but actually a lot of the time we do not use data in our decisions, and places that do can make a much bigger impact than those that do not.

00:22:24 Dr Nicola Headlam

There are still definitely gains to be found from doing things right and doing the right things. Economic development has a bad reputation for being interested in the bright and shiny rather than the foundational economy. But they are not mutually exclusive, are they? You found that around forty per cent of your high-growth companies were operating in the foundational economy, so it is not a separate category.

00:22:44 Nathan Shoesmith

No, and they have to work together to make an economy grow. If you are going to get growth in the frontier economy, in those high-tech sub-sectors and ISH (Industrial Solution Hub) clusters, they

only work if you have got those supply chains, those businesses, those people and those jobs in the foundational economy there to support them. If you turn off all the support to them, you are going to struggle to get the frontier working as well.

00:23:14 Dr Nicola Headlam

It is such an important lesson to be evidence-led and data-led, and then develop your policy accordingly, rather than engaging in policy-based evidence-making, which we sometimes see in this space.

We would like to spotlight solutions then. Can either of you describe something from work you have done recently that is really working well? It can be GrowthFlag being used in a place or something else. What we find is that the story is normally about what made it work: whether it was the people being great, the political commitment, the longevity. We always say that any fruit that Manchester is gleaming now in terms of comparative GVA has been forty years in the growing, and the governance structures have been a long time coming. So can you tell us something that has worked well in the sub-national space recently?

00:24:08 Richard Jeffery

I am going to mention Greater Manchester, though I have not worked there for quite a long time, but also many other areas as well. I think it is worth pointing out some of the differences and lessons that can be learned across the piece.

Working in a place that had relatively long-term political stability, and a mechanism in place for decisions to be made collectively with a commitment to the longer term, that is massive. Not everywhere has got that quite right yet, but it is getting there. Having clear plans, clear strategies, sticking to them, and having a clear evidence-backed ask of government. Greater Manchester has been doing that for a very long time.

It is really interesting to see how other areas are now starting to really nuance their approach. West Yorkshire has some really interesting work taking place on clusters, using their priority clusters to drill down and focus some of their energy. Tees Valley has really embedded a strong data strategy into what they are doing, which is really interesting. You have also got other areas taking a very proactive stance on becoming beacons of AI adoption, starting to do some work in Scotland and in West Yorkshire on that, drilling down to ask how we make sure our local area can actually seize all the potential benefits, and sooner.

The Liverpool City region is using some really intelligent tools to diagnose what businesses need, to benchmark those needs, and to have an integrated approach where lots of different partners can have a single view of a client. So there is lots of really good practice around the country. But for me, a lot of it at the minute starts with getting the right data approach and the right strategy approach, and Nathan has been working with people across the country who are doing that.

00:26:26 Nathan Shoesmith

There have been, as you say, lots of areas which have massively expanded what they are doing around data. Tees Valley and some other places in the northeast have been among them, starting with more of a strategy focus and then rolling that out to day-to-day delivery, which has been really powerful. Likewise in the West Midlands and also in other areas in Scotland and down in the south of England. There are lots of places where that is starting to happen.

There is still lots of work to do, and just because places are using data, that does not necessarily solve all the issues. It is about how we look at that data in other ways and connect it to some of these other things. As you talked about, a strong business base can solve lots of other problems, and in some places that is really starting to come together, drawing the links between business outcomes

and health and other things. Increasingly we are seeing some of that national policy view looking more at the importance of the social economy as well. If local areas can connect their data across lots of different fields, not just economic development but into other realms of public policy, that will be really beneficial too.

00:27:52 Richard Jeffery

There is another area that I think is really interesting: getting a better approach to evaluation and using data to do it. We are doing some really interesting work in South Yorkshire on an innovation programme, looking at how you can take a long-term view of evaluation and do live evaluation throughout a programme, rather than just delivering for three years and then bringing someone in at the end to ask what went right and what went wrong, by which time everyone has moved on. Doing it in parallel, getting really deep into the data as you go, I think that is really interesting and is an often-missed aspect of economic development. We have come on leaps and bounds, but ultimately at some point you have got to go to the Treasury and say you want to do X, Y or Z and convince them. Having those arguments stronger is something the economic development community needs to really focus on.

00:29:09 Dr Nicola Headlam

And I think you are right, that notion that evaluation can be formative and generative also pulls you away from the idea that government should not pick winners. Government should pick winners, but not arbitrarily. It should pick them on the basis of really strong data and really sound evaluation. Then everybody feels much more relaxed about government doing what only government can, which is crowding investment into places.

So what are you working on next that is really exciting? We talked a bit about the networking and everything coming together at UKREiiF. The Mayoral Data Council made me laugh. My old department, MHCLG, had five jobs up for people to work on data and UX. I know those conversations are relatively well developed, but even when the government five or six years ago was interested in the Northern Powerhouse, the central civil servants held the data and then worked with places to see how they would respond to it. The notion that there will now be agreed sub-national data standards puts the conversation in a much more formative place for mayoralities, and that seems right.

00:30:20 Richard Jeffery

I agree and I am really excited about the work taking place on that. Seeing those conversations happening is just really heartening. Back to your original question about what gives me hope, it is things like that, because if you get that bit right you can drive so much other activity.

00:30:37 Dr Nicola Headlam

And it seems so obvious now that having an infrastructure of really sound data within the department, to then lead its work in places, is going to make that work in place much better.

00:30:46 Richard Jeffery

Absolutely. And on what else we are working on: using that data to create investment prospectuses, using it to help inform skills strategies and better target businesses within them, creating sector plans, sector strategies, sector offers and sector narratives. We are doing a lot of work like that around the country at the minute, and bringing in sound, unique data is really key.

We have also been experimenting a lot with AI, identifying how we can create new tools: diagnostics tools, tools that help people go through an AI adoption process, a digital adoption process, and a whole range of others. One thing I have always been really keen on, going back to the origins of GrowthFlag, is how you can better inform advisors, how you can use AI to draw together that

massive amount of information to help create a better tool when they are going out to see people. We are well down the path on some quite interesting work in that space, so watch out for that, it is going to be a launch later this year.

What excites me about it is that it can enable you to focus more limited resources on certain types of businesses where you want to do some face-to-face work, while also providing massive support for others where you are not able to do it in the same volume because of the resource constraints that are endemic in the system at the moment.

00:32:36 Dr Nicola Headlam

Well, I am not sure I want to interview your AI. I would much rather interview you and Nathan.

00:32:40 Richard Jeffery

Well, you will certainly get me and Nathan. We will just be better informed because we will have the tools.

00:32:45 Dr Nicola Headlam

And I guess the last piece of the jigsaw is also using the growth data to inform decisions where the state can be the leader of first resort, like the investment fund for example, which has always had the idea that Greater Manchester is able to actually buy into high-growth businesses in terms of their fundraising.

00:33:04 Richard Jeffery

Yes, there has been some really good practice around that, some of the work done with angel networks and filling some of those gaps, which has been really exciting. There is a lot of finance around, though there are still some gaps along the way, and it is about how you coalesce all those things together. But that is the subject of a whole other debate, I am sure.

00:33:24 Dr Nicola Headlam

And I remember there was some research when we were working together about giving people aspiration towards high growth for an area, the smell of the sea piece. Research showing that people got their idea of what was available from their accountant or whoever, but that intervening with the full suite of possible finance and lending options at the right time, and making sure people did not try to fund business growth off business credit cards, that was really powerful.

Nathan, what are you working on next? What is exciting you?

00:33:57 Nathan Shoesmith

There is an awful lot going on. Last year was very much a year of strategy, both nationally for local places and for us in supporting what is going on nationally, helping people understand industrial strategy, supporting local growth plans and a range of other things. I think this year the emphasis is going to be much more on delivery.

At the same time, we are going through another transition period in terms of where different funds are at in supporting local places. We are still in the early stages of implementing the new national strategies, and devolution for different areas is at very different stages. I do not think there is necessarily a single thing that will characterise the year. There are going to be lots of different things to continue working on, and amongst all of that will be helping people understand what these strategies mean for their local places, because it means very different things for different places, whether that is industrial strategy, things like small businesses, or support for places with high economic inactivity.

Certainly over the next few months, there is lots around UKREiiF. Before and during UKREiiF is, as Richard said, a very productive time for the whole sector. As that concludes, picking up those

conversations, we have come together, we have had these discussions, learned some lessons, what can we actually deliver? There is a huge amount coming from government every week, and who knows where we will be in six months or a year's time, but plenty of exciting stuff on the horizon.

00:35:55 Richard Jeffery

One of the really key things at the minute is that a lot of places need to get out of the year-to-year mindset, which we have been stuck in for a while now, and move to a place where they have a good line of sight of what the next two, three and beyond years are going to look like. I still see places operating as if it is year to year, rather than going, actually we have got a three-year plan and beyond that we need to put in place and crack on with.

This is a chance to stand back and say, right, this is what we are going to do over the next three years, and get a really deliverable plan together. You might not have all the pieces in place, you might not have sight of all of those funds, but if you have got a core you can build from that, build your intelligence, build your data repository, build that understanding as you go, and bring those other partners with you.

Set the bigger vision and you can achieve more, and be ready to scale up for other activity as it comes along. It is those areas that have got the core infrastructure right, have got the plans right, and have that ability to say yes, we can do that when those opportunities arise. As they undoubtedly will, not just from government funding but from corporates coming in and backing business support and other activities. You have got to get your core fundamentals right, and be ready to put your hand up and go, we can do that and scale it quickly.

00:37:33 Dr Nicola Headlam

So having said all of that, we are talking about quite a specific set of skills needed to work in economic development and place leadership. I wonder if you could reflect a little on specific people who have that can-do, know-will, can-garner-scope-at-scale, crack-on quality. I have got them written down as brokers, because they are taking something that is done somewhere else, or knowledge from somewhere else, and importing it into a place. Can you think of anybody who is really good at that kind of brokerage function? They do not have to be working right now in the UK, but who is able to add policy to data to strategy and then put the car into drive?

00:38:15 Richard Jeffery

I am going to dodge this one slightly. I think you have got to look at what some of the metro mayors are doing at the moment and their senior teams. They are driving so much activity and getting on the front foot, being really proactive. The Liverpool City region is really starting to pick up that mantle, looking at some of its strong international links and developing really clear plans around its higher growth areas. West Yorkshire is doing similar activities. There is a lot of collaboration among those mayors, especially across the north, and I think other areas have got things to pick up on from that.

I have also got to call out the iED winners, the economic development winners over the last few years. Nathan is one of them, but it was the category of younger people coming through that gave me a huge amount of hope. People who are really passionate about economic development. It is not the easiest career pathway to go down, but it is a hugely rewarding one. Some of those people coming through have got some really smart ideas and are doing a whole load of great work.

00:39:50 Dr Nicola Headlam

And I am quite glad, because obviously I have known Tom Stannard his whole career, and the fact that he has always been an iED person and is now the Chief Executive of Wakefield Council, that speaks very well to us. Nathan, I suppose it is you. You are a good broker. Being in touch with that

cohort, is that a meaningful thing to you as you are starting out in your career, having all those ideas and people to draw on?

00:40:15 Nathan Shoesmith

Yes, I think it is really important. I would probably take it in a slightly different direction to Richard. Yes, you absolutely have those mayors and people in the top teams in those areas who are driving really important stuff. But quite often there is not enough value put on connectors.

Sometimes that can be business support advisors, sometimes it can be people in universities. People who are just embedded in local ecosystems are absolutely crucial. I have been involved in a number of different co-working spaces and they can be really powerful when you get a community like that together, not just the members within them, but actually the people who are there day in, day out connecting people up to each other and making somewhere a welcoming place to work. Connecting those businesses, helping people work together, brokering those connections in local places, that can make a really, really big impact. As we said earlier, lots of micro things turn into something macro. Yes, absolutely the leaders, but also people on the ground in local places who are there doing the work and connecting people up. It is really important not to forget them.

00:41:45 Richard Jeffery

Just to add one more thing. I was with the Growth Hub network the other day and there are people who have been through so much change over so much time, and yet ten years on for some of them, getting on for fifteen years now, they have just kept going with a passion to pull people together, to pull networks together and make change happen. That whole network, a massively under-celebrated network of people running Growth Hubs across the country, they are real superheroes in my eyes.

00:42:13 Dr Nicola Headlam

And the Growth Hub network, you are absolutely right. It does not always leap to mind, but brokerage and networking is in their DNA, is it not? It is what they do. So you have already shouted out the mayors, we have spoken a bit about the Mayoral Data Council and other things. Nathan, can you think of a really good place leader, not necessarily someone you have worked with, but someone you are aware of? Who would you give the flowers to?

00:42:36 Richard Jeffery

I will let Nathan kick off with that.

00:42:38 Nathan Shoesmith

You could dodge that, Richard! I think I would also like to dodge the question, as you say, there are quite a few you could go for.

00:42:53 Richard Jeffery

That is why it is so hard to call out any one person or team. You have got Sarah and the team over in West Yorkshire doing some amazing work. You have got Simon Reed and Janice and others doing some really interesting work in Liverpool. I have been really impressed by the teams up in places like Gateshead doing on-the-ground work and driving forward activity, people like Helen Lee in the Northeast. But it is no one person that is going to change the whole thing. It is that network of people making it happen.

00:43:31 Dr Nicola Headlam

Suddenly it all came tumbling out! Just to finish, I am going to let you have a wave of my place-based innovation magic wand. Be careful with it, it has powerful magic and can grant you a wish. You have absolute power to make a tangible change to a specific place. Your change will be specific, measurable, actionable, recordable and transferable. SMART Magic is hard to get hold of at the moment and is subject to a twenty per cent reducing multi-year budget settlement.

You can have GrowthFlaggers; a ten-million-pound project fund; half an hour with the cabinet; one of Nathan's beautiful slide decks; editorial control of the front page of a tabloid; a clause to insert into a bill; something simple to go viral on social media; anyone as an advocate for this work; or the answer to something that has always bothered you that you think would unlock it. Do any of those leap to mind?

00:44:35 Richard Jeffery

We are allowed to confer. You are not going to go for the money on that one because that is not going to change everything on its own. Social media, well, we do that all the time anyway. I think if I am going to pick one, it would have to be the half an hour with the cabinet, to open their eyes to what life is like on the ground and how you can practically achieve change. Whether you could actually do it in half an hour I would need to practise, but that is the one that certainly intrigues me.

00:45:13 Dr Nicola Headlam

It would be very interesting to see the level of data literacy within the cabinet. Nath, which would you do?

00:45:15 Nathan Shoesmith

I would probably do the same. And I think it is because of that point around data literacy in general. Money does not solve these things. What we have been doing an awful lot of over recent years is helping explain to people why they should be using data and evidence to make decisions. Putting money there does not really solve that problem.

It is about building those relationships, helping people understand what the value can be, showing them where it has worked really well and how we can drive that forward for national growth. If you roll that out nationally, the impacts would be really, really significant.

00:45:59 Richard Jeffery

So Nic, when is our time slot?

00:46:02 Dr Nicola Headlam

It is at 4.17. You have got to go now.

00:46:05 Richard Jeffery

We are in. Let us go.

00:46:07 Dr Nicola Headlam

I would love to know about a cabinet away day and what they actually get up to. I know they have got a lot on their plates, bless them.

Thank you so much for joining us. We set out in Placecast to offer insights from experts, that is you two, real world case studies from people working all over the country, and practical tips and career advice. Today we have done all of that: alongside the Young Network at the Institute of Economic Development, we have spotlighted solutions such as GrowthFlag, and waved the place-based innovation magic wand to get us into cabinet with a data-led view of high-growth potential in the UK. Thank you for joining us.

00:46:47 Richard Jeffery

Thank you so much.