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I would like to first thank both the honourable members, my fellow witnesses, and the excellent committee staff for the warm welcome and fruitful discussion experienced yesterday.

The below is written to provide clarification on a few points raised by both myself and the Councillors that I hope prove useful to the inquiry.

To understand the current and potential future role of local government in UK trade policy it helps to mark out several alternate models.

First, is interest aggregation. This fits a model of democratic politics as interest representation, in which central government responds to competing interests from within society. Local government is a lower institutional level in that process, as follows:

![Diagram of interest aggregation model]

The Local Government Association (LGA), and similar bodies that represent local government, mediate how the local level passes information on interests to the national level. Note how this model is one-way.

Second, is awareness-raising. This is a deeper model of democracy, in which interests are not assumed to pre-exist but require a process of education for groups and individuals in society to develop those demands. Local government’s role here is to not just collect interests, but work closely with local businesses and individuals so they are equipped to develop their interests.
What marks out this second model as distinct to the first is that politics is two-way. Actors at higher levels of the policy process do not just collect and balance interests, but are active in educating lower levels so they are able to formulate interests. Bodies such as the LGA here are not mere interest collectors but are engaged in educating local government to develop interests.

Third, is community-building. Here, democracy requires not just collecting interests and helping people become aware of their interests, but actively providing resources needed for groups and individuals to mobilise themselves into communities that can debate policy ideas. This is the ‘public sphere’ and, in the case of local government, that includes everything from having a free and open local media, to providing meeting rooms and other facilities necessary for debate. These communities are often issue-specific (e.g. agricultural exports). Local government is much needed here to ensure that there are real spaces for debate, not constrained by interests that might sometimes undermine the public good.
This third model is where local government has potentially the greatest role to play through being geographically closer to diverse sectors of society, each with their own potential perspective on UK trade policy. It is also important to consider to what extent there is a two-way, reciprocal relationship between central and local government. In addition to formally considering the views of representative bodies such as the LGA, it is important that central government work directly with local government to ensure they are able to engage local actors. That could include ‘loaning’ civil servant staff on a rotating basis around key local governments, as was mentioned in the committee. A more long-term solution would be to create a permanent forum – a ‘Local Government Trade Capacity centre’ - in which different local governments are required to attend through a process of random selection akin to jury service. That forum would need to provide the means to equip the nominated individuals with trade expertise, and its function would be limited to providing advice that required consideration rather than any decision-making power. Whilst providing input, its primary role becomes clearer if you consider the second and third model in which politics is a two-way process. Specifically, local government would via that process better understand trade policy and be able to bring that knowledge back to its constituents and the relevant local policy communities.

In practice, aspects of each model can be seen in existence today. However, there is a tendency to speak of local government exclusively in terms of the first model. This is unfortunate as it limits the ability of government at all levels to ensure there is a trade-minded public sphere. That doesn’t mean a public sphere where everyone thinks the same way. On the contrary, it means having a diverse range of perspectives but that are informed and, importantly, reflexive of their interests. That last aspect is crucial given that all trade deals create losers as well as winners, meaning that groups and individuals need to be able to see how they can adapt their interests to manage outcomes that fail to meet their initial demands whilst remaining supportive of the overall process of engaging in trade agreements.
As a word of caution, it is important not to confuse the potential of future engagement by local government with the likely reality given present national policy. There is, as yet, little evidence that local government will gain significant new powers post-Brexit. Nothing here is inevitable and its comes down to a series of political decisions, but it is nevertheless important to ensure that the potential for decentralisation is not used inappropriately to support broader national policies on the EU that turn out to mean an actual further centralisation of powers to Whitehall. This last point is significant, paradoxically, given that via the EU Committee of the Regions local government has had more influence, though limited, over EU Trade policy than has traditionally been the case at the UK national level.