

City Regions Board – report from Sir Richard Leese (Chair)

Devolution

1. Over the summer, the LGA has taken forward a wide-ranging programme of work in support of further devolution and has continued to develop and deliver a bespoke offer of support for areas across the country, including: Greater Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and the Tees Valley CA.
2. A meeting with the Chief Executive of Liverpool City Region took place on 12 September and discussions are currently underway to firm up the LGA's support offer to cities and established combined authorities. The first meeting of the Combined Authority Chief Executive Network chaired by Martin Reeves took place on 26 September and considered papers on the LGA's devolution support offer, Brexit, housing and the Commonwealth mayoral network. It was agreed that the network should meet bi-monthly with the LGA providing the secretariat. Proposed future agenda items include: fiscal devolution, health devolution and employment and skills.
3. On 4 August, LGA officers from across the finance and policy directorate facilitated a day-long workshop attended by council officers and officials from DCLG that explored the potential devolution of new responsibilities relating to employment and skills that might arise from the government's proposal for the full retention of local business rates. The discussion from this event was used to inform the LGA's response to Government.
4. On 9 August, supported by senior council representatives, LGA officers attended a workshop facilitated by DCLG to identify key risks and opportunities to devolution arising from the outcome of the EU referendum. The outputs from this discussion have been passed to the Department for Exiting the European Union. In addition, the LGA will be working across Whitehall to ensure full consideration of the potential implications for local government.

Skills and Employment

5. The board continues to work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on the new Work and Health Programme (WHP). This programme is designed to assist the long term unemployed into work with as much local government involvement as possible. Ten devolution deal areas are currently working bilaterally with DWP on the design of the programme in their local area.
6. The board are working jointly with People and Places Board members on this, and are continuing to make the case for the current national system to be more integrated and localised. With the Chair of the People and Places Board, Cllr Mark Hawthorne, I met with Penny Mordaunt MP, Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work, on 12 September to discuss the sector's concerns and to propose a way forward which could allow the minister to launch the WHP with the backing of local government. On Friday 30 September, the Minister responded with a detailed response setting out why the LGA's asks could not be met. An LGA response is currently being drafted.

7. The board's Deputy Chairman, Councillor Robert Light, attended the Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy on 14 September to give oral evidence on apprenticeship for the apprenticeships inquiry.

RSA Inclusive Growth Commission

8. Work continues on the RSA Inclusive Growth Commission which the LGA is co-sponsoring. Chaired by Stephanie Flanders and directed by Charlotte Alldritt, the commission aims to understand and identify practical ways to make local economies across the UK more economically inclusive and prosperous. In June, the commission hosted a series of seminars to examine how new approaches to skills and labour markets might drive growth and productivity alongside greater inclusion and participation in local economies. Speakers included David Hughes, Chief Executive of the Learning and Work Institute, and Tony Tweedy, Director of Lifelong Learning, Skills and Communities at Sheffield City Council.
9. The commission has also held deep dive research sessions in the cities of Sheffield, Bradford, Cardiff and Newcastle, involving private in-depth interviews supplemented by analysis of public strategy documents, data and other available material. A formal call for evidence has now been launched inviting responses to a broad range of questions across three themes: economy, place and governance. The Commission launched its Emerging Findings report on 23 September. The report calls on Government to make inclusive growth "its working definition of economic success and give policy makers at all levels of government a mandate finally to bring economic and social policy together."

Leading Places Project

10. With input from both the City Regions and People and Places Boards, the LGA is continuing to work with HEFCE and UUK to deliver the [Leading Places Project](#): a programme of leadership development for both the higher education and local government sectors in support of devolution, public service reform and economic growth. The [website](#) for the project is now live.
11. Four of the six pilot areas have now held their Senior Leadership Group Meetings and confirmed their project themes. Notably, the Manchester pilot has identified a project on Health improvement supported by digital innovation. Arrangements are underway for the peer challenge event on the 21st November, which will give each pilot area to showcase their work in front of a national audience. The event will provide a clear milestone against which to evaluate progress and to make an early assessment of the value of the approach to strengthening collaborative leadership between councils and universities.

Other Events

12. On 7 September, Cllr Robert Light spoke at APSE's Annual Seminar on the challenges and pressures facing local government in delivering frontline services. He discussed a range of issues, including the economic regeneration of local areas in the face of declining resources, initiatives to work with citizens and improve local democracy, and the need to maintain progress with devolution deals.

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