

## **City Regions Board – Draft Work Programme 2018/19**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion.

### **Summary**

This report sets out a draft work programme for the period to July 2019.

### **Recommendation**

Board Members are asked to consider the draft programme and, subject to their comments and amendments, agree that it be confirmed as the City Regions Board's work programme for 2018/19.

### **Action**

Officers to incorporate Members' comments into the work programme.

**Contact officer:** Philip Clifford  
**Position:** Senior Advisor  
**Phone no:** 07909 898327  
**Email:** Philip.Clifford@local.gov.uk

### **Overview**

1. The City Regions Board represents the interests of urban authorities. It provides a forum for leaders from metropolitan areas to discuss issues of common priority and a platform from which to advance the policy interests of cities and city regions across England and Wales at the national level. Together with the People and Places Board it covers a wide range of policy areas, in contrast with the majority of other LGA boards which focus on particular agendas such as social care, community safety or finance.
2. The Board was established within the context of a national Government actively in favour of devolution to local areas, most notably through a series of devolution deals with groups of councils across the country. Through this process there are now ten signed devolution deals and seven Mayoral Combined Authorities. The eighth Mayoral Election will take place in North of Tyne in May 2019.
3. Both the Board's membership and policy focus reflect this context, with significant representation from those areas at the forefront of the devolution agenda and a unique cross-cutting work programme that seeks to capture not only place-based issues relevant to cities and city-regions, but also those policy areas where the case for further devolution might best be made.
4. The next few months are likely to see both Whitehall and Westminster continue to be dominated by preparations relating to the UK's Withdrawal from the EU on 29 March 2019. In anticipation that the UK's departure will be followed at some point before May 2022 by a General Election there are signs that political parties and their aligned think-tanks are already beginning to develop policies suitable for inclusion in future party manifestos.
5. Throughout this period the onus will be on local government to continue to make the case for devolution. The City Regions Board has a crucial role to play in driving this agenda and the draft work programme set out below, provides a framework for achieving this over the short, medium and longer term.
6. Members are asked to consider this report and agree, subject to their amendments, that it be confirmed as the City Regions Board work programme for 2018/19.

### **Strategic priorities for 2018/19**

7. It is proposed that the primary objective of the City Regions Board remains the devolution of power and resources to local government. For those specific policy issues that lie outside this focus, but which the Board's membership believe to be of particular relevance to urban authorities it is proposed that in the first instance the priority will be to determine which LGA policy board, if any, has responsibility for this issue and what opportunities there are to contribute to ongoing and future activity.

8. The exception to this general approach will be those areas of interest shared with the People and Places Board, which represents the interests of non-metropolitan and rural authorities. In these cases, as is currently the case with skills and employment policy the presumption will be in favour of seeking to establish a joint position.
9. Reflecting the national context, the composition of the Board and its urban place-based focus it is therefore recommended that the 2018/19 work programme has four components:
  - i. **Delivering devolution** – overseeing work to support the delivery of devolution deals already agreed and to ensure that the lessons from those in the ‘vanguard’ are captured and shared with councils more widely;
  - ii. **Driving devolution** – advancing the case for devolution through national Government’s place-based growth agenda e.g. the Industrial Strategy and on a Department-by-Department basis, such as skills and employment and trade and investment;
  - iii. **Future devolution** – building the policy arguments and stakeholder networks to support devolution that goes beyond the current Government’s ambitions e.g. greater fiscal autonomy, with a view to influencing future manifestos.
  - iv. **Urban leadership** – assembling a coalition of interested and relevant parties to consider and re-articulate the distinct concerns and opportunities of urban authorities across England to a national audience

### **Delivering devolution**

10. The seven mayoral combined authorities represent the current high-point of national Government’s approach to local devolution. Their success is important not just for the councils, residents and businesses that make up each of the combined authority areas, but also for the rest of the country as Parliament, Whitehall and the public will, to varying degrees, wish to evaluate their achievements before devolving power more widely or indeed more deeply.
11. Reflecting this and the context set out above, it is proposed that, as set out in the report to the last board of the 2017/18 cycle the main focus of the LGA’s devolution improvement support offer this year will be to provide support to deliver for established combined authorities. The support offer also includes guidance for those without a devolution deal wishing to pursue devolution both within and outside the combined authority model.
12. Given the expertise and experience of the Board it is proposed that members might play a useful a role in overseeing the LGA’s devolution improvement and support offer in a number of areas, including:

1. The dissemination of learning arising from the negotiation, implementation and delivery of devolution deals
2. Assisting local efforts to strengthen relationships within combined authority areas between combined authorities and local councils,
3. Developing the combined authority peer review process, which builds on the LGA's current peer challenge and support offer to reflect their scope and institutional novelty.

### **Driving devolution**

- 12 Despite the apparent 'pause' in the Government's devolution agenda there remain opportunities within the short to medium term to push for the transfer of power and resources to local areas.
- 13 First and foremost amongst these opportunities is the Government's Industrial Strategy, which represents both the firmest commitment by national government to a place-based growth agenda and the greatest opportunity for engagement across Whitehall and with local anchor institutions such as universities and the NHS.
- 14 The Industrial Strategy has three place-based components: the Local Enterprise Partnership Review, Local Industrial Strategies and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Although the precise relationship between reforms within each of these elements has yet to be clearly articulated it will be important for the Board to shape this agenda as a key opportunity to unlock devolved funding for local growth and securing Departmental collaboration on local policy interventions such as skills and employment support. A report to the first board meeting of the year will provide an update on the latest developments in this area.
- 15 Second, the 2017 Conservative Manifesto proposed a new Common Devolution Framework, widely interpreted as a mechanism for securing devolution outside the combined authority governance model. While the difference in focus between the Devolution Framework and the Industrial Strategy is as yet unclear, early indications suggest that it may provide an opportunity to explore public service reform and elements of devolution that sit outside the economic growth agenda. Given the expertise of the Board there is a clear opportunity to influence the development of this framework and re-engage Departments across Whitehall to support the devolution of services and resources.
- 16 Third, alongside the People and Places Board it is proposed that the City Regions Board will continue to advance the role of local government in driving inclusive growth on a Departmental basis, reflecting both the priorities of members and the potential traction to be gained with Ministers.
- 17 Priority areas of work over the next year for the board to consider and contribute to include:

- 17.1 Influencing the design and roll-out of the Industrial Strategy, which has three key place-based components – the Local Enterprise Partnership Review, Local Industrial Strategies and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Ensuring areas across the country have an equal opportunity to develop ambitious and credible plans for growth that garner the support of Government, are backed by robust local governance arrangements that make the most of existing partnerships and are underpinned by devolved funding for growth that better reflects the need of local communities.
  - 17.2 Influencing the development of the Government’s ‘Devolution Framework’, now expected to be published in the autumn and drawing on the experience of councils with devolution deals to ensure those without a deal are best able to make the most of this opportunity
  - 17.3 Continuing to advance the arguments in favour of skills and employment devolution, pressing government to fully implement Work Local, the LGA’s positive proposal for change, working with the Department for Education to deliver the post-16 skills partnership through the combined authorities and non-combined authorities working groups and using the LGA’s Skills Taskforce to build an expanded coalition of stakeholders outside the local government sector to support the LGA’s proposals for skills and employment devolution.
  - 17.4 Developing the LGA’s approach to trade and international investment, by working with the Department for International Trade to understand and strengthen the existing sub-national trade and investment landscape, building an evidence base of place and sectoral priorities for future trade deals and agreeing with Government how the views and international relationships of local government might be harnessed during these deals.
- 18 Given the experience and position of City Regions members within the devolution debate, it is proposed that the Board consider whether there are any other policy areas where specific proposals for devolution might be developed on a Departmental basis in the short term.

### **Future Devolution**

- 19 In anticipation of both the opportunities and challenges following Britain’s departure from the EU, the inherent limitations in the medium term resulting from the current national political context and the time required to develop credible and coherent policy proposals there are a number pieces of work that will benefit from being developed over the next board cycle with a view to influencing the first General Election post-EU Exit.
- 20 Priority areas of work over the next year for the board to consider and contribute to include:
  - 20.1 Developing the detail of work to support arguments in favour of fiscal autonomy

- 20.2 Strengthening the Board's practical understanding of how best to make the case for further devolution to politicians and the wider public, for example by drawing on case studies that provide of international comparisons of devolution.
- 20.3 Restarting the debate on the 'English question', recognising that the current UK devolution settlement stops at Westminster, Stormont Bay and Holyrood, which means that English communities lack an equivalent voice in UK law-making. Building support for local communities across the UK to have an equal right to take control of the key decisions that affect their lives, by bringing forward draft legislation such as an English Devolution Bill to enhance the devolved powers of all areas in England.

### **Urban Leadership**

- 21 As highlighted elsewhere in this paper, the UK's exit from the European Union has come to dominate the national conversation and looks set to do for many months to come. While there has been some recent evidence of urban issues resonating on the national stage, for example following the disruption to Northern Rail's train service, there remains a sense that more might be done to articulate a compelling vision for English cities and urban authorities that harnesses their distinctive position and gains traction with national and local stakeholders.
- 22 The City Regions Board has representatives from a number of membership organisations concerned with the development of urban policy, including: London Councils, Key Cities and Core Cities. More widely there are a number of think tanks and academics with expertise and interest in advancing the urban agenda, including the newly formed Centre for Towns.
- 23 Recognising the Board's unique co-ordinating role, it is proposed that the Board consider assembling a coalition of relevant parties, to determine whether and how best to make a case for urban authorities within the national and international context and with a view to influencing future party manifestos and the wider policy and media agenda.
- 24 More detailed proposals regarding this work will be set out in a separate paper to the first Board.

**Forward Look**

25 While many of issues that form part of this work programme are sensitive to sudden changes in national policy and indicate forward look at the agenda for Board meetings until January 2019 is set out below:

<b>Friday 5 October</b>	Work Programme
	Industrial Strategy
	Urban Leadership
<b>Monday 19 November</b>	Trade and International
	Urban Leadership
	Devolution Framework
	Devolution Improvement/Support
<b>Friday 25 January</b>	UK Shared Prosperity Fund
	Brexit
	Urban Leadership
	Skills

**Next Steps**

26 Lead Members are asked to consider the draft programme above and, subject to their comments and amendments, agree that it be put before the City Regions Board as the Board's proposed work programme for 2018/19.