

Urban Leadership

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This report advances the proposal set out in the City Regions Draft Work Programme 2018/19 to assemble a coalition of interested parties and representative bodies and make the distinct case for urban authorities on the national stage.

Recommendation

Members of the City Regions Board are asked to:

Consider the four options, set out in more detail below, and agree which of these should be taken forward for further development.

Action

Officers to develop the agreed option in line with Members' direction for further discussion with Lead Members and Elected Officials from relevant representative bodies.

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Overview

1. The United Kingdom's impending exit from the European Union continues to consume an overwhelming proportion of the political and administrative capacity of Government. The pace of devolution has slowed, with no new devolution deals agreed since the Autumn Budget in November 2017 and the national pre-eminence attached to the economic success of cities and city regions has softened.
2. In the likely absence of a swift and sudden change in context it falls to councils to consider their future position. Including, whether more might be done by local leaders to articulate a compelling vision for cities and urban authorities that harnesses their distinctive identity and gains traction with national and local stakeholders.
3. 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.
4. Recognising the Board's unique sector-wide co-ordinating role, the Board's Draft Work Programme for 2018/19 proposes 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.
5. With a view to securing early engagement with Members this paper provides a number of initial options for consideration by the Board, which might be further advanced by the stakeholders highlighted above, if Members are content to proceed as proposed.

Context

6. The central proposition underpinning this ambition is a desire to bring urban authorities and their representatives together and, where possible, identify those policy issues where they might speak effectively with a single voice.
7. It is a matter for discussion and further research as to what those areas of common agreement might be. There is likely to be a degree of common interest to be found in both implemented and proposed devolution deals across the relevant parties, including: decentralised skills and employment, fiscal autonomy, the need for inclusive growth and attracting international trade and investment.

8. These proposals could serve as a useful starting point for further development. Equally, the Board may wish to explore aspects of urban leadership that sit outside a narrow focus on economic growth and productivity, such as the consequences of austerity on public service provision and the persistence of social issues, including those related to health and housing.
9. It has been suggested that the upcoming Spending Review in 2019 provides a useful milestone for this work. While Departments are currently engaged in drawing up their plans, very little is currently known about the timing and scope of the Review, including how many years it will cover, or indeed when it will take place. However, we do expect the quantum of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to be confirmed as part of the Spending Review, if not necessarily the local allocation methodology.

Options

10. Four potential options for next steps to take forward this proposition are:

- 10.1 An internal LGA-resourced commission similar to the [People and Places Board's Post Brexit England Commission](#), which is currently running over a period of two years and will produce its final report in July 2019. This approach would have the benefit of generating a substantial body of evidence, of attracting national visibility, and leveraging the wider corporate support of the LGA. It would afford Board members a greater degree of control regarding the final output and its costs could likely be met within existing LGA staffing and budget resources. However, it would have to work within the LGA's established political and policy framework and, potentially, would impact on the wider work programme of the Board.
- 10.2 An external commission similar to the RSA's [City](#) (2014) and [Inclusive Growth](#) (2016) Commissions. Both of these were substantial projects, funded and supported by a range of organisations, including the LGA, London Councils, Core Cities and Key Cities and each took about a year to complete. This approach would have the benefit of attracting 'heavy-weight' political and technical expertise and potentially draw in a greater number of external partners. It would require less LGA staff time, but would incur a greater financial cost. It would be independent and able to make recommendations outside established policy lines. It could also potentially take some months to put together the necessary funding before any commission was able to commence.
- 10.3 An event or publication that looks to take forward thinking around the City Region Board's commissioned research into messaging that supports further and fiscal devolution, but with a focus on public leadership in urban authorities. This would cover less policy terrain than the two options above, but could potentially cut through on an innovative and challenging subject that directly concerns elected members, and which arguably sits outside their capacity to tackle individually. The role of the LGA could be to provide thought leadership and policy advice, potentially supported by a small scale independent research commission. Based

on previous experience and current resources it is suggested that this approach would be able to produce outputs by late spring 2019.

- 10.4 As an initial step, a narrower piece of work that aims to agree joint lobbying lines arising from the overlap of existing policy positions of representative bodies. As indicated above, current and proposed devolution deals could provide a useful starting point for this option, but would not necessarily provide the entire set of subject material. Rather than seek to determine these lines the role of the LGA would be to convene relevant parties and facilitate a discussion, a view might then be taken on the extent to which these lines might be supported by the LGA on a national cross-party basis. This approach would likely be quickest and least resource intensive of the four options to undertake with outputs ready in early 2019.
- 11 Members will note that of the four options outlined above, the indicative timings suggest that only two (options three and four) are likely to have any real impact on a Spending Review held in 2019. Based on previous experience options one and two are more likely to have impact on a subsequent General Election.

Next steps

- 12 **Members of the City Regions Board are asked to consider the four options set out above and agree which of these should be developed in advance of further discussion with Lead Members and Elected Officials of the relevant representative bodies.**