

City Regions Board - End of Year Board Report

Background and Context

1. The City Regions Board was created to provide a clear voice and resource for city regions within the LGA and to advocate on behalf of English cities.
2. Members are asked to consider the achievements of the board over the last year against the use of allocated resources and to reflect on whether the board is continuing to meet its purpose in response to the emerging priorities of metropolitan areas.

Priorities and Achievements

Skills and Employment

3. The Board works jointly with the People and Places Board to steer our employment and skills work through our Work Local proposals for devolved and integrated employment and skills. During the last political cycle, the Boards agreed to establish a cross LGA Skills Taskforce to forge links with skills industry experts and stakeholders on this agenda. Co-chaired by Cllrs Sir Richard Leese and Mark Hawthorne, the Taskforce convening three themed roundtables between December 2018 and March 2019. Through it, we engaged 28 leading organisations and trade bodies that are key to improving skills and employment in England. A Taskforce [webpage](#) includes video interviews from stakeholders and summaries of each roundtable meeting. We aim to strengthen these links over the next Board cycle. Already we have started to develop follow up work on apprenticeships and the National Retraining Scheme.
4. The LGA and 23 leading signatories wrote an open letter to the Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP, Secretary of State for Education, which called for a series of reforms to support councils and combined authorities to deliver quality apprenticeships locally. This included calls on the Government to pause plans to begin clawing back unspent Apprenticeship Levy funding following delays to the standards in adult care, early years and building control against which the Levy funds must be spent. The letter was featured in the Financial Times. The LGA has welcomed a Public Accounts Committee report raising concerns about the apprenticeship programme, having previously submitted written evidence to it.
5. The Boards will launch a refreshed Work Local proposal at our annual conference in July 2019. This also includes findings from the skills taskforce roundtables.
6. The LGA hosted a skills conference in November 2018. The event was well attended with extremely positive feedback. The sessions ranged from post-16 pathways to supporting age-friendly employment with keynote address by Dr Emran Mian OBE, Acting Director General of Higher and Further Education, Department for Education. We are now planning to host a series of events to explore some of the specific topics.

7. Following positive discussions last year with the Rt Hon Anne Milton MP, Skills and Apprenticeships Minister, the LGA proactively put forward a plan for LGA politicians and skills leads from councils to engage strategically with DfE on the development of post 16 skills policy and funding. The proposal was well received by DfE officials with a go-ahead to proceed. However more recent discussions with the Department suggest that while political level meetings are expected to continue, plans to engage council skills leads have been watered down. The LGA will seek clarity from DfE on this.

Devolution

8. With the People and Places Board, the City Regions board continued to develop the LGAs sector led improvement offer for Combined Authorities (CAs). This included a number of key policy networks that allow CAs to share best practice and look at collective issues. A Governance and Scrutiny network and a HR network have also now been set up.
9. The housing and planning network commissioned research into the opportunities for collaboration between combined authorities and their constituent councils.

Industrial Strategy

10. Work continues to engage Whitehall officials on the key issues for councils relating to the Industrial Strategy, including Local Industrial Strategies and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This follows LGA lobbying successes including the confirmation that every area will be invited to agree a Local Industrial Strategy with government and the announcement that funding for EU programmes will be guaranteed until the end of 2020 in the event of a no deal Brexit.
11. Together with the People and Places Board, the City Regions Board has overseen the LGA's joint work with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to support local areas in the development of local industrial strategies. The LGA has held well-attended masterclasses on inclusive growth, effective collaboration with businesses and stakeholders, and developing a place-based narrative. It also hosted a series of action learning sets with officers from around the country. Write-ups from these events alongside learning notes and a good practice toolkit to support the creation of a robust evidence base will be available on the LGA website by late June.
12. We have continued to respond to developments arising from the Government's review of Local Enterprise Partnerships. Activity included a letter to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and responses to work led by the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee into LEP progress. This has included a focus on strengthening LEP accountability, particularly in light of changes to LEP board composition.

Trade and investment

13. As Britain prepares to leave the EU, we have continued to work in partnership with the People and Places Board to inform the LGA's policy work on trade and international investment.
14. A survey of the LGA's membership was undertaken at the end of last year to highlight the depth and diversity of trade and other international links established between councils and global partners, with a view to strengthening the role of sub-national government in future trade and investment activity.
15. The LGA has continued to engage with the Department for International Trade and key national stakeholders on the role for local government in future trade policy. In April, Marian Sudbury, Director of UK Regions at the Department for International Trade (DIT), attended the City Regions Board to talk about the Department's sub-national work. The Board discussed with Marian how councils could most effectively contribute to the Department's work and highlighted examples from across the country of the important role for councils in supporting exports and inward investment. This activity at the Board has been supplemented by Parliamentary activity including written questions on trade from the LGA Chairman and a meeting between Cllr Kevin Bentley and Graham Stuart MP, Minister for Investment.

Urban Leadership

16. The City Regions Board agreed to assemble a coalition of interested and relevant parties (Core Cities, Key Cities, London Councils and SIGOMA) to consider and re-articulate to a national audience the distinct concerns and opportunities that unite urban authorities.
17. Consequently, the Board decided to undertake further work to advance the case for fiscal devolution, commissioning research to explore the particular cost pressures facing urban areas that might best exemplify the case for greater local autonomy.
18. This research is due to report in early July and will be used to inform the Boards lobbying and policy work over the next political cycle.

Programme of work and priorities 2019/20

19. Recognising the national political context, the Board will seek to restart the English devolution debate, supporting the development of an English Devolution Bill and continuing to push on further fiscal devolution.
20. The Board will also continue to play a role in shaping LGA's work on place based growth, overseeing work on skills and employment support, inclusive economies, trade and international investment and, the creation of a place-based UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
21. Subject to discussion at the June Board, members may seek to dedicate Board capacity to pursue additional priorities over the next political cycle, such as the particular

opportunities and challenges for urban areas arising within the context of a renewed focus on sustainable development.

Financial Implications

22. All work programmes are met from existing LGA budgets and resources. Additional funding was secured from BEIS to support the LIS improvement work.