

Update on current issues

Purpose of report

For information/ noting.

Summary

This report updates Members on current issues of interest to the Board which are not covered elsewhere in the agenda. Updates are included on:

- Rewiring public services
- Farrell Review
- Visitor economy
- Superfast Broadband
- Culture
- Sport and the economy

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the update.

Action

Officer to action as appropriate.

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Update on current issues

Rewiring public services

1. The LGA's campaign on 'Rewiring Public Services' was launched at the LGA annual conference in July. Coming out of ideas gathered from visiting councils in regional road shows, the campaign shows how public services can be transformed through local leadership by rebuilding democratic participation, fixing public services and revitalising the economy.
2. The CTS Board has a powerful role to play in delivering the wider aspirations of the Rewiring campaign - particularly in relation to economic growth and our leadership support for councillors. This is considered further under item 6.

Farrell Review

3. The LGA has responded to the independent review of architecture and the built environment led by Sir Terry Farrell. Following a discussion with the Review Team at the CTS Board in July, the LGA's response highlighted councils' central role in promoting high quality design and conservation and how investing in the built environment can support wider efforts to boost growth, attract investment and meet housing demand.
4. The response also highlighted the role of planning in delivering spatial aspirations, encouraging high quality design and build standards as well as ensuring appropriate and sensitive siting of development. The full response is attached at **Annex A**.
5. Members also encouraged the Review Team to engage more with councils as the review progresses to set out its emerging views.

Superfast Broadband

Super connected cities programme

6. A two month market test of the Connection Vouchers scheme, part of the government's Super-Connected Cities programme began in August 2013. The scheme allows businesses to apply for grants of up to £3,000 to cover the costs of installing faster and better broadband into their premises.
7. The vouchers scheme aims to stimulate the broadband market to improve digital connectivity in participating cities; Cardiff, Belfast, Edinburgh, Manchester/Salford. It particularly aims to benefit small and medium enterprises (SMEs), helping cities to create and attract new jobs and investment, and make the UK a more attractive place for companies to locate and do business.

Rural Broadband Programme

8. After long delays to the rural programme while the government clarified state aid issues and the Procurement Framework was signed-off, the projects are now progressing. 35 projects have completed procurement and the remaining nine projects are expected to sign contracts very soon.
9. Value for money has also been an on-going concern for councils. Only two suppliers – BT and Fujitsu – were appointed to the Procurement Framework, and in March 2013 Fujitsu withdrew, leaving BT as the only supplier. Although BDUK built in safeguards to help secure value for money (such as transparency over costs and benchmarking of unit costs), a recent National Audit Office report on rural broadband raised serious concerns about value for money, and highlighted the importance of the government effectively implementing the in-house controls it secured for the Programme.
10. The LGA is urging government to work closely with councils and to make available the necessary resources to ensure that the contracts are subject to the rigorous scrutiny that will provide the most effective check for on-going value for money in this situation.

Culture

Arts Council England investment plans

11. On 24 July 2013, Arts Council England (ACE) announced a new application process for organisations wishing to apply for ACE national portfolio and major partner museum funding from 2015 to 2018. Funding for 2015/16 will open in January 2014. Funding for 2016/17 and 2017/18 will be dependent on future Spending Reviews.
12. Although the LGA's arts and growth campaign helped to limit the reduction of arts spending to five per cent, meaning less pressure from ACE on council arts budgets, councils still face tough decisions. Cllr Flick Rea recently met Sir Peter Bazalgette, ACE Chair, and they agreed on the importance of ACE working in partnership with councils to ensure that difficult investment decisions are taken in the context of a place's wider approach to public investment and growth.

Sport and the economy

13. Recent Sport England research has shown that sport's contribution to the English economy was £20.3 billion a year, with grassroots sport responsible for well over half this total. The research puts sport within the top 15 industry sectors in England, having a bigger impact on the economy than telecoms services, car sales and repairs, insurance and accounting.
14. The research also examined the wider economic value of sport such as improving educational attainment and improving health. The annual value of health benefits generated by grassroots sport is put at £11.2 billion, with a £1.7 billion saving in healthcare costs. The economic value of sport-related volunteering is estimated to be £2.7 billion.

15. The LGA is working with Sport England to deliver a very successful sport leadership programme, which enables cabinet/portfolio holders with responsibility for sport to continue to link the wider benefits of sport to growth and other council priorities.