

Collaborative Working between the Local Government Group and Sub-National Local Government Partnerships

Purpose of report

For decision

Summary

This paper provides context and proposals for further strengthening the collaborative relationship between the Local Government Group and sub-national partnerships of Local Government.

This report invites the Executive to discuss and provide direction on the following issues:

1. Consider how councils can make best use of the relationship between the Local Government Group and sub-national groupings of Local Government.
2. Enable members to consider the long-term direction for stronger links between the Local Government Group and sub-national groupings of Local Government.
3. Consider how the contribution of sub-national representatives on Local Government Group Executive can be maximised.

Recommendations

The Group Executive considers and endorses the basis for national and sub-national partnership working and the potential to strengthen collaborative arrangements in accordance with the principles outlined in paragraphs 12-20 of this report.

Action

To further discuss and progress proposals, representative(s) of sub-national partnerships to meet with the Chairman and Political Group Leaders of the Local Government Group, supported by Chief Executive and (seconded) Director of Local Government Partnerships.

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Background

1. The LG Group is committed to an effective and mutually supportive relationship with groupings that Local Government has voluntarily established at the sub-national level.
2. This commitment was reflected by the agreement of the Local Government Group at its Annual Conference on 20th June 2010 that the nine sub-national groupings¹ nominate the chair of their organisation (or other, as appropriate) to the Local Government Group Executive Board.
3. The inclusion of sub-national (regional) representatives onto the Local Government Group Executive Board has been well received by the sector and seen as a positive development by Members. However, the potential benefits offered by membership of sub-national representatives remain to be fully exploited. There is concern that the role extends little beyond attending meetings of the Executive Board with a corresponding lack of clarity over specific purpose or 'voice'.
4. The significant challenges faced by Local Government means that the sector as a whole is now in a very different place than 12 months ago. Sub-national organisations and the LG Group itself are going (or have already gone) through a period of organisational change to become smaller, more focused organisations.
5. Resource constraints oblige a more effective working relationship between partnerships of Local Government - one where appropriate, joint working on issues of common interest can be better supported.
6. In May 2011, the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Local Government Group met with the representatives of sub-national partnerships to reflect on progress over the past 12 months and to discuss how to further strengthen collaborative arrangements. Many of the issues raised in this meeting are reflected in this report.

¹ Association of North East Councils, East of England Local Government Association, East Midlands Councils, Local Government Yorkshire and Humber, London Councils, North West Regional Leaders' Board, South East Councils, South West Councils, West Midlands Councils.

Context of Collaboration

7. Since the removal of a nationally prescribed basis for collaborative sub-national working, Local Authorities across England have chosen to collaborate voluntarily to pursue work they see value in. This includes:
 - 7.1 National bodies, including the Local Government Group.
 - 7.2 Sub-national Local Government partnerships on a regional basis.
 - 7.3 Local Enterprise Partnerships.
 - 7.4 Joint local arrangements, for example on shared service delivery, joint procurement or more general collaboration and cooperation on decision making or service provision.
8. The Local Government Group and sub-national partnerships, while both focus on supporting the wider sector and promoting the interest of members, have differing but complementary roles. For example, the Local Government Group has a key role to play in promoting, supporting and improving Local Government as a whole and, in particular, is well placed to work with national Government on behalf of the sector. Sub-national partnerships perform a wide range of functions on behalf of their member Councils including invaluable intelligence, lobbying on issues locally and nationally and informing national collaborative priorities linked to local needs.
9. It is clear that each organisation values its independence to set its priorities and undertake work valued by its membership, though in some areas, e.g. consultation and policy development, optimum value for Councils might be realised with a more flexible, joined-up approach. This could be achieved by aligning the capacity of the Local Government Group and sub-national groupings in areas where there is sufficient common purpose and clear lines of accountability.
10. It is an opportune time to further consider the working arrangements between the national and sub-national partnerships of Local Government. The Local Government Group should look to the sub-national representatives, supported by their respective associations, to further strengthen connections with all member Councils, provide greater transparency in decision making and provide political direction for all its work.
11. This will not only provide for a more effective, efficient and accountable relationship between Local Government Group and sub-national Local Government partnerships but should also support the sector to work alongside

and provide appropriate links to current and any future sub-national arrangements.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The Executive is invited to consider the following:

12. Consultation, Policy Development and Programme Delivery

12.1 To achieve greater input to consultation, policy development, delivery and lobbying, there is potential to establish stronger and more focused mechanisms for members to 'feed in' locally-specific issues. In particular, there is also potential for greater strategic input and advisory support from sub-national partnerships to the Local Government Group Programme Boards and Commissions.

12.2 Both the Local Government Group and sub-national partnerships are subject to significant resource constraints. However, there remains significant policy and programme expertise that could be better exploited at the outset of sector activity on policy development and delivery.

12.3 There also remains the potential to better 'join-up' consultation responses. Responses to national consultations will therefore be better able to reflect sub-national and local issues in addition to the sector's response as a whole benefiting from an emphasis on those issues of common importance.

12.4 A key issue for the sector and reflected in the agendas of both the Local Government Group and sub-national partnerships is self-regulation and improvement. Success will, in part, be dependent upon effective co-ordination and collaboration of activity, intelligence and resources across the sector.

13. Member Accountability and Transparency

13.1 There is the potential to further enhance transparency, accountability and a more place-based approach by involving the sub-national groupings in the process of nominations to Boards, commissions and ad-hoc national groups. While nominations are appropriately a political group-led process, accountability and transparency to the sector may be enhanced by reference to, and consultation with, sub-national groupings.

14. Resources

- 14.1 Future resource models that underpin collaborative working between the Local Government Group and sub-national groupings should be explored. Models for consideration may include devolved resources to support locally based delivery against sub-national priorities, or programmes commissioned by the Local Government Group through sub-national partnerships.
- 14.2 Recognising that resources, whether embedded at the national or sub-national level, are resources of Local Government, a more effective collaborative approach that allows freedom for the Local Government Group and sub-national groupings to make best use of – perhaps even sharing - professional capacity and resources where there is a business need, may deliver efficiency savings and clearer lines of accountability.

15. Way Forward

- 15.1 The Executive is invited to consider the appropriate basis for strengthening the organisational and political links between the Local Government Group and sub-national groupings. This should be agreed by the Local Government Group and sub-national groupings, once they have had the opportunity to formally consider these issues.
- 15.2 To further discuss and progress proposals, it is suggested that representative(s) of sub-national partnerships meet with the Chairman and Political Group Leaders of the Local Government Group, supported by Chief Executive and (seconded) Director of Local Government Partnerships.