

City Regions Board - End of Year Report

Background and Context

1. The City Regions Board was created by the LGA General Assembly in early 2014 to provide a clear voice and resource for city regions within the LGA and advocate on behalf of English cities. The board's membership and terms of reference were reviewed this year as part of the Combined Authorities Working Group.
2. The LGA Executive has asked for short reports on the work of all boards over the past year. This paper sets out the City Regions Board's achievements during the 2015/2016 board cycle and offers reflections on its work.
3. Members are asked to consider these achievements against the use of allocated resources and reflect on whether the board is continuing to meet its original purpose within the context of rapid changes in the geography and governance of city regions and the ongoing need for a strong urban influence within the LGA. Views are welcome on any issues which could strengthen the LGA's work.

Priorities and Achievements

Devolution

4. In the past year, board members have continued to shape and influence the devolution agenda and offer support for areas as further devolution deals have been agreed. In late 2015, members steered LGA lobbying on the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill as it passed through the House of Lords and successfully pressed for amendments that would help to bring more transparency to the deals process.
5. With support from board members, the LGA has refreshed the online 'DevoNext hub' to provide a resource for councils with technical information, guidance, updates on the most recent activity at local and national government level, and key documents from devolution frontrunners. It is highly regarded and receives more than 6,000 unique visits a month.
6. LGA officers have also been active in shaping policy and thinking, working with the Centre for Public Scrutiny to support devolution areas in developing their governance arrangements, and, in consultation with board members, commissioning work, including a guide to Combined Authorities and academic research by Professor Robin Hambleton into Executive Models of Governance.
7. Steered by the Board, the LGA continues to support councils across the country in negotiating and implementing devolution deals. This has included a particular focus on governance, political leadership, and communication. With the consultation and support of board members, LGA officers are now working on a Devolution Green Paper, which will be presented at the LGA Annual Conference in July.

Devolving Skills and Employment

8. Securing further devolution of skills and employment support has been a key focus of the Board this year. With the People and Places and the Community and Wellbeing Boards,

the Board commissioned the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion to develop the detail of a devolved employment model for the most disadvantaged jobseekers / ESA claimants. The proposal was submitted to ministers at the beginning of November 2015 by the board leads with the aim of influencing Spending Review decisions.

9. In January, a new specialist Work and Health Programme (WHP) was announced in the Spending Review for claimants with health conditions, disabilities or those unemployed for over two years to replace the Work Programme and Work Choice contracts in 2017. LGA officers have been in discussions with DWP to ensure local government has as much involvement as possible in this area. Ten devolution deal areas are now working bilaterally with DWP on the design and commissioning of the WHP in their local area.

RSA Inclusive Growth Commission

10. In January, board members agreed to be one of the sponsors of the new RSA Inclusive Growth Commission, which will be chaired by Stephanie Flanders. Building on the success of the RSA City Growth Commission, the commission will seek to understand and identify practical ways to make local economies across the UK more economically inclusive and prosperous. The Commission was launched in April 2016 and will report in spring 2017.

Leading Places Project

11. In partnership with Universities UK and the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the LGA is working to deliver a programme of leadership development for both the higher education and local government sectors in support of devolution, public service reform and economic growth. Following the programme's launch in May, six pilot areas are currently in the process of developing the details of their local partnership and project arrangements, aiming to conclude in February 2017.

Programme of work and priorities 2016/17

12. The board will continue to work on devolution and support city regions areas to progress with deals. The board will respond to feedback from the sector on the Devolution Green Paper and officers will take forward work as directed by board members in the autumn.
13. Officers will undertake a programme of work on the future role of public employment services and skills devolution. They will also continue discussions with DWP on the Work and Health Programme (WHP) and ensure local government is involved in this area.
14. The board will continue to support and influence the work of the RSA Inclusive Growth Commission, particularly at key reporting milestones.
15. The board will monitor the work of the Leading Places Project pilot areas. Conclusions and learning will be drawn from the priority challenge themes chosen and the methods in which local authorities and local institutions successfully work together.

Financial Implications

16. All work programmes are met from existing budgets and resources.