

Leading Places Project Update

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This paper updates members on recent activity of the Leading Places project, advises on planned future activity and suggests principles the board may wish consider in advance of a second phase of the project.

Recommendation

That members note the update and suggest, where appropriate, areas they would wish to see addressed in future activity as per paragraph 24.

Action

Officers to take forward their work as directed by members.

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Leading Places Project Update

Overview

1. This report provides members with an update on the Leading Places Project, a programme of innovative action learning partnerships aimed at strengthening collaborative leadership between councils and the higher education sector.
2. It briefly introduces the project, outlines recent activity, sets out immediate next steps and asks members to reflect on progress to date within the context of currently planned activity and the potential for a second round of the project beginning in April 2017.

Leading Places Project Outline

3. Leading Places is a joint project which has been developed in partnership between the Local Government Association (LGA), the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and Universities UK (UUK), that aims to encourage councils, universities and other anchor institutions to work together to better drive growth, re-design public services and strengthen civic participation.
4. It arises following a number of conversations between leaders from the higher education and local government sectors and a growing recognition of the potential for councils and universities to actively collaborate in the civic and economic success of their areas. The first, pilot phase of the project currently underway has been supported by grant funding from HEFCE of £48,000.
5. The project's design draws extensively on research undertaken by the project's consultants, the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE). This suggests there remains work to be done to strengthen operational working between councils and universities. It also sits within the context of a greater focus on the role of place-based partnerships in leading public service reform and the forecast of a substantial capital investment programme by the higher education sector.
6. Launched in May the project is now underway in six pilot areas with partnerships formed by a range of institutions:
 - 6.1 **Newcastle** – Gateshead Council, Newcastle City Council, University of Newcastle and Northumbria University
 - 6.2 **Manchester** – Greater Manchester Combined Authority and New Economy Manchester
 - 6.3 **Coventry** – Coventry City Council, Warwick University and Coventry University
 - 6.4 **Gloucestershire** – Gloucestershire County Council, University of Gloucestershire and the Royal Agricultural College

- 6.5 Bristol** – Bristol City Council, the University of the West of England and the University of Bristol
 - 6.6 Brighton** – Brighton and Hove City Council, Brighton University and University of Sussex
7. These participating areas have access to expert facilitation services provided by LFHE and are being supported through a process of ‘action learning’.
8. Broadly, this process entails the following steps:
- 8.1 Creation of a joint senior leadership group in each area, formed of council leaders, chief executives and university vice chancellors.
 - 8.2 Identification and agreement of a local priority challenge theme.
 - 8.3 Establishing a joint team to rapidly develop an innovative approach to tackling this challenge.
 - 8.4 Participation in an immersion event and a peer challenge event with the other project areas to share learning and strengthen the collective relationship between local government and the higher education sector.
9. The project is scheduled to finish in March 2017, at which point individual areas will be asked to evaluate progress against each of their priority challenges.

Recent Activity

10. Since the project launched, much of the initial effort has been focused on establishing partnerships within each area, identifying senior and project leads and putting in place a framework for action learning, facilitated by the Leadership Foundation.
11. Progress has been slower than anticipated, largely owing to the impact of the summer period, the exceptional political events of recent months and the generally significant pressures on the diaries of senior leaders.
12. However, all six partnerships are now underway and senior leads have been identified in each area. While Gloucestershire is the only area to have held a meeting of their senior leadership group so far, the remaining five areas are currently expected to have held their meetings by the end of September.
13. An outline of proposed themes is as follows:
- 13.1 Newcastle** – Urban living or the use of technologies for social purposes.
 - 13.2 Manchester** – Developing a science and innovation capabilities map for Manchester.

13.3 Coventry – Healthy communities (town and gown) within Coventry and Warwick.

13.4 Gloucestershire – Development of a 2050 and beyond vision and agreement on a range of strategic, economic initiatives to transform Gloucestershire.

13.5 Bristol – focus on engaging communities through the office of the newly elected Mayor.

13.6 Brighton – improving health and wellbeing in communities.

14. These are expected to be confirmed in the coming months as challenge teams are established to take forward delivery.

Planned Next Steps

15. It is anticipated that the next stage of the project will move forward swiftly.

16. Before the end of August, we expect to launch an LGA hosted microsite for the Leading Places project, creating a public facing communications platform and a source of information for those interesting in learning more about the project.

17. We then intend to follow this up in early September, with a range of press and wider communications activity.

18. Once each of the project areas have held their senior leadership group meetings, they will establish a local challenge team and participate in an immersion event ahead of a wider peer challenge on 21 November. This event will provide an opportunity to share progress and learning and will include the participation of an international expert in public leadership. It will also provide a hook for a wide range of communications activity and the potential to invite local partnerships to participate in a second round of the project.

19. Following this event, each challenge group will continue to develop their priority project theme in anticipation of a national conference in March 2017. The November event will also provide a clear milestone against which to evaluate progress and to make an early assessment the value of this approach to strengthening collaborative leadership between councils and universities.

20. As the project develops officers from the LGA will continue to monitor progress, look for opportunities to highlight successes through the media and report back activity to members, as appropriate.

Future Project Rounds

21. The Leading Places Project has attracted a significant amount of interest from councils and universities. In addition, officers at the LGA have become aware of similar forms of collaboration already starting to emerge between universities and local authorities outside the project's pilot areas.

22. It has previously been suggested that if this interest is maintained and the project proves capable of demonstrating its value in strengthening collaboration between local government and the higher education sector that a second round of the project might be commissioned, with an anticipated start date of April 2017.
23. If a second round were to be commissioned, it is expected that the LGA would play a more significant role in funding and therefore establishing the parameters of the project. In particular, given the strong interest from members it would seem appropriate to provide an opportunity for the board to advise on some of the broad principles that might underpin future activity.
24. For example, these might include closer consideration of area geography, requirements relating to the strength of existing partnerships, a greater focus on the type of support offered or on the overall outcomes expected from the project. **While thinking regarding a second round is still at an early stage, any steer members were able to offer on these or other subjects would be appreciated.**