

Engaging communities in devolution and the LGA devolution support offer

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This paper provides a summary of recent LGA activity in the area of community engagement and devolution, as well as an update on the LGA's devolution support offer.

Recommendations

That the board:

1. Note updates on the LGA's work to support community engagement in devolution and provide a steer on any future activities.
2. Note progress on devolution support to date, emerging areas for ongoing support and provide a steer on any future activities.

Action

Officers to take forward as directed by members.

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Engaging communities in devolution and update on LGA devolution support offer

Background

1. The progress made through the devolution deals to date presents a new opportunity for local government to engage with their communities. The sector has long argued that democracy is best served at a local level. If devolution is going to deliver local ambitions then the skills and knowledge in communities, the voluntary and community sector, businesses and town and parish councils will all play an important role in making sure devolution and service reform are a success.
2. Above and beyond the requirement to consult on proposed combined authority arrangements, devolved areas have been working to inform and engage their communities on this agenda. However, there are calls for greater citizen engagement, both in the design of deals and in their implementation. This is something that councils are increasingly keen to address. The pace and nature of deal negotiations set by national government has in some instances proved to be a limiting factor for councils in the level of engagement however this is an area in which many councils would like to do more.

Supporting community engagement in devolution

3. In recent months, a number of activities have been undertaken by the LGA to support the development of effective engagement. Most recently, this has included a major event aimed at exploring the benefits of enabling citizens to influence local decision making and service design in the context of devolution. [Shaping Devolution: the role of communities and citizens](#) took place in October at Local Government House, and was well-attended by both officers and members from across the sector. Several key themes emerged from debates throughout the day, including:
 - 3.1 An acknowledgement from attendees that engagement is proving difficult, but that a proactive approach is important and necessary;
 - 3.2 An acknowledgement that areas often have existing partnership engagement structures that should be utilised to engage communities in devolution;
 - 3.3 Consensus that engagement needs 'designing-in' to devolved arrangements at the earliest possible point. It cannot be seen as an 'add-on' or 'nice to have';
 - 3.4 A view that culture and leadership is key- there was much discussion about the role of members and senior officers in pushing and embedding the engagement agenda;
 - 3.5 Re-engaging with 'place' as a useful way to build the conversation with citizens, rather than focussing on structures.

4. New and bespoke resources have also been produced. Officers commissioned the [New Economics Foundation](#) (NEF) in early summer to develop materials that assist councils and combined authorities engage citizens in devolution. These build the case for citizen participation and highlight a range of practical approaches. Tested with devolved areas, these materials were formally launched on the LGA's [DevoHub](#) at the *Shaping Devolution* event.
5. Other recent support activity in this area has included:
 - 5.1 A series of bespoke devolution communication workshops with staff at Birmingham, Newcastle and Somerset councils, recognising that effective communications play a leading role in informing, engaging and involving residents;
 - 5.2 The production of new toolkit and case studies to further assist devolved areas with their communication activities, made available via the [DevoHub](#). These outline how best to develop a strategic communications plan for devolution, offer insights around implementation and evaluating impact;
 - 5.3 An event examining the role of local councils in 'double devolution', delivered jointly with the National Association for Local Councils (NALC), in June. This event was also well received and well attended.
6. **Members are asked to reflect on the work undertaken to date, their experiences of community engagement and devolution locally and to provide a steer on future shape and direction of the LGA's work in this area. In doing so members may wish to consider the following questions:**
 - 6.1 How might the LGA best support councils to engage with residents on devolution, and in the design/delivery of services?
 - 6.2 What role can the LGA play in making sure the views of residents are represented in the debates around devolution?
 - 6.3 How can the LGA best assist devolved areas with the practicalities of engagement? What role should the LGA play around engagement in the run up to and post Mayoral election?

LGA devolution support offer

Background

7. The LGA has provided ongoing support for councils and Combined Authorities as they have developed devolution deals. The work to date (all of which has been funded from within the membership and improvement budgets of the LGA) has balanced the need for both policy and practical support as well as the need for general and bespoke support. Work has included: assisting areas in their negotiations with Whitehall, brokering better relationships between neighbouring

councils, developing a shared learning network of officers, establishing a combined authority CEX network and helping press teams prepare for new ways of working. There has been support from across the LGA including Principal Advisors, Andrew Campbell (DCLG Director General on secondment to the LGA), our member peers and the press and devolution teams.

Overview of direct support to combined authorities

8. Throughout the summer officers have worked closely with colleagues from Local Partnerships to align devolution support and have developed bespoke support packages for a number of areas across the country in direct response to local needs. This has included working directly with Tees Valley CA, West Midlands CA, Greater Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. A meeting with the Chief Executive of Liverpool City Region was also held and discussions are currently underway to firm up the LGA's support offer to other cities and established combined authorities.
9. In addition to the need to support areas with their approach to civic and democratic engagement (as above) a number of additional key areas for support have emerged, including:
 - 9.1 **Political leadership:** A number of CAs have identified that there can be challenges in engaging all members and in supporting Leaders, Mayors and Chief Executives who will be working together in CAs. The LGA is keen to work with councils, through our leadership team, to ensure that this and other examples of political change are supported. As a result we are developing a comprehensive leadership offer for CAs.
 - 9.2 **Policy support:** A re-occurring theme from our conversations with members and senior officers is that there is often limited capacity to support policy and strategy development locally for Mayors and CAs. The scale of the task facing areas who want to capitalise on the opportunities that devolution presents is significant. The shift in decision making from central government to local government is bringing about new challenges for political leaders and senior officers in relation to local policy formulation; with many taking greater responsibility for policy development across a much wider geography and across different agencies and partnerships.
 - 9.3 As such, feedback suggests that areas would benefit from dedicated capacity to work across policy work streams locally, ensuring long term visioning and practical implementation are entwined as well as helping to drive the local public service reform agenda. We have support that we can offer in this area locally and also to 'join up' with Whitehall departments.
 - 9.4 **Technical support:** including the development of assurance frameworks.
 - 9.5 **Press and communications:** Local press and communications teams have asked for support in developing strategies for new devolved arrangements and building public confidence.

- 9.6 **Governance:** The LGA has worked with the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CFPS) to support places with devolution deals to develop robust governance arrangements. Some areas have also expressed an interest in practical support to help develop robust overview and scrutiny arrangements within their CA.
- 9.7 **Support with Whitehall relationships:** We have supported councils in preparing and presenting devo bids and in helping develop a more productive relationship with individual departments. Officers recognise the need to refresh this approach in light of the new political context and ministerial appointments over the summer departments to ensure LGA role in national messaging on devolution.
- 9.8 **Workforce development:** As with leadership support, a number of areas have identified challenges in relation to their workforce as the devolution agenda gathers momentum and working across combined authorities brings about new challenges and uncertainty for employees. Building on existing support from the LGA workforce team, we are developing our offer to lead transformational change across CA/devo areas which will include employee resilience.

Wider menu of devolution support

10. In addition to the bespoke offer of support tailored to local needs, areas also have access to a wider support offer including:
- 10.1 **Mayoral support** - Whilst it was appropriate that our support so far has been demand driven, the requests from councils have been in areas where the sector has traditionally relied on LGA support. To ensure that areas are in the best position to address the challenges they face at both the scale and pace required, the LGA also wanted to formalise the support offer to combined authority and devolution and mayors. As such, work has begun to develop an LGA secretariat (led by Mark Lloyd) to support mayors collectively. This is being developed in consultation with candidates and ministers and will include a programme from May 2017 to ensure that Mayors have a distinct place within the LGA as part of the wider local government family and have collective support in discussions with Government. The LGA is also discussing the “mayoral offer” with international organisations and research centres in the UK. This will provide a unique support offer that not only adds capacity but is invaluable locally.
- 10.2 **Health and social care support** - from the dedicated LGA/DH team who have been supporting a number of local programmes. For example, two events have taken place, the first for health and care leads to learn from Greater Manchester’s early work in this area, and the second to brief health providers and voluntary and community groups on devolution and the changing local government landscape. Reports have been produced following both events and a further Devolution and Health event is planned for 14 December 2016.¹

¹ <https://lgaevents.local.gov.uk/lga/frontend/reg/thome.csp?pageID=89934&eventID=296>

- 10.3 Knowledge sharing - The Devo Next Hub provides a 'one stop shop' for local government colleagues and stakeholders for information they need about devolution including tools and resources. In the past 12 months, there have been 48,562 unique page views (with 69,457 overall page views). In the past six months, there have been 33,820 unique page views (47,116 overall page views) and demand appears to be increasing. Our '60-second explainer' videos on devolution (2) and combined authorities (3) have also been popular, with 692 and 1,984 views respectively. The Hub was also praised by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee.
- 10.4 **Officer devolution network** - involving a cohort of officers from councils who are negotiating or implementing deals. The network receive regular devolution updates and meets, when appropriate, to share experiences and learning on devolution.
- 10.5 **Combined authority CEX network** - The LGA has established and provides the secretariat for the combined authority CEX network, chaired by Martin Reeves of WMCA. The network, which met for the first time on 26 September, provides an invaluable opportunity for chief executives and chief officers to share learning and experiences, have space to discuss practical challenges and focus collectively on some of the key areas of policy development emerging within combined authorities and devolution deal areas.
- 10.6 **Performance management and sector led improvement** - In the future, it is likely that CAs may want to develop an approach to benchmarking and evaluation of impact with other CAs to support self-improvement. There is also the risk that Whitehall may start to develop its own performance management regime as devolved powers increase. For both positive and reactive reasons, members may wish to consider the value of the LGA developing a peer review methodology for CAs over the coming year.
11. **Members are requested to comment on the devolution support offer to date and provide a steer on future shape and direction. In doing so, members may wish to consider the following:**
- 11.1 Are there any gaps in the current offer to combined authorities and devolution areas?
- 11.2 How can the LGA ensure that the sector is capitalising on the offer of support available?
- 11.3 To future proof and ensure ongoing sector led improvement, should the LGA look to develop a peer support offer specifically for CAs?

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xYJuYyVkJfk>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtzL12d2eGk>