

## **Devolution Improvement Support Offer**

### **Purpose**

For discussion and direction.

### **Summary**

This paper provides members with an overview of the LGA devolution support offer, including to established and aspiring combined authorities, in the light of the current devolution policy landscape and asks members to consider the devolution support needs of metropolitan authorities in the coming year.

### **Recommendations**

That the City Regions Board:

1. **Note** the national context relating to devolution policy and the LGA's engagement with the seven combined authority mayors.
2. **Consider** the LGA's devolution support offer for the coming year: against the needs of metropolitan authorities and current and emerging combined authorities.

### **Action**

Subject to Members comments, continue to deliver the LGAs devolution support offer, reflecting the current national emphasis on mayoral combined authorities.

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## **Devolution Improvement Support Offer**

### **Overview**

1. This report provides an overview of the current devolution policy landscape and describes how this has influenced the direction of the LGA's proposed devolution support offer for the coming year.
2. Members of the City Regions Board are asked to consider this overview, reflect on the LGA's proposed offer and comment on whether this is likely to meet the needs of metropolitan authorities and established and aspiring combined authorities.

### **Devolution**

3. The UK is one of the most centralised democracies in the world. Within this context devolution presents one of the most fundamental changes to the way decisions are made for local areas and how public services are funded.
4. Since 2014, devolution in some parts of England has meant a transfer of power and funding from national to local government. In line with the Government's preferred model for devolved governance, in all but two areas, Cornwall and London, this transfer of powers has been contingent on the creation of a Mayoral Combined Authority.
5. There are now seven Mayoral Combined Authorities across England. These are mostly concentrated in urban areas. The eighth Mayoral Election will take place in North of Tyne in May 2019.
6. While the 2017 Conservative Manifesto proposed a new devolution framework, widely interpreted as a mechanism for securing devolution outside the combined authority governance model, recent intelligence has suggested that the Government is likely to focus its efforts in the short term on consolidating the position of the mayoral combined authorities rather than seeking to roll out the devolution deal model to a significant number of new areas.
7. Reflecting this context, it is proposed that the main focus of the LGA's devolution improvement and support offer this year will be to provide support to established combined authorities. The key components of this offer are set out below.
8. However, the LGA remains keen to work with and hear from areas that are looking to propose devolution deals outside of the combined authority model. We also wish to support those areas minded to join existing combined authorities either as full or associate members. If and when the devolution framework emerges we will also provide support for those areas seeking to secure additional powers and resources through it.
9. Without further devolution, decisions will continue to be made in Westminster, removed from communities that they affect. The LGA will therefore continue to pursue this agenda, pushing the Government for further detail on a framework for devolution suitable for the whole country.

10. Separately, it has been suggested that Local Industrial Strategies may provide a parallel mechanism for the devolution of powers and resources related to productivity and inclusive growth. In line with commitment above we will continue to explore the potential of this approach both within and outside the structure of a mayoral combined authority.
11. Given this context **members are asked to offer their thoughts on where the LGA's wider devolution support offer might be tailored to better meet the particular needs of metropolitan authorities.**

### **Support to Combined Authorities (CAs)**

12. The LGA has continued to develop and deliver a bespoke offer of support for existing and prospective combined authorities. This support is financed by MHCLG's funding to the LGA. The deliverables and expectations aligned to this funding are set out in the recently agreed memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the LGA and MHCLG, and are based on a continuation of our work programme.
13. The nature of the support provided varies in response to the needs of individual areas. However key elements of the support provided to date include:
  - 13.1. **CA Chief Executive Network** - chaired by Eammon Boylan, Chief Executive of Greater Manchester CA, the network continues to provide an 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 CAs.
  - 13.2. **Officer Networks**- After discussion with the CA Chief Executives network a number of policy area officer networks have been set up and are supported by the LGA. Three networks, each of which have already met at least twice, are organised by the LGA and are focused on the following policy areas:
    - 13.2.1. Finance;
    - 13.2.2. Employment & Skills; and
    - 13.2.3. Housing & Planning<sup>1</sup>.
    - 13.2.4. These meetings are for officers from both current and aspiring CAs. A small budget has been earmarked for each network for improvement support purposes.
    - 13.2.5. At the CA Chief Executives meeting in March it was agreed that three further networks could be set up:
      - 13.2.5.1. Governance/Scrutiny;
      - 13.2.5.2. Communications – the first meeting has taken place; and

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<sup>1</sup> A fourth network focused on transport issues is supported by ADEPT, the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport.

13.2.5.3. Economic Development

13.3. **The Finance group has commissioned some work on fiscal devolution** - this work assesses the extent and nature of financial freedoms that have been provided to Combined Authorities and whether and how these have been used in practice. This report is due to be published in the coming months.

13.4. **CA peer support** – it was recognised that the sector needs a process through which it can reflect upon progress to date, consider areas for improvement, prepare for government reviews and identify where external support would be helpful. Therefore, following a meeting of the Chief Executive Network, it was agreed that a peer support tool be scoped with input from the CAs.

13.5. Initial thoughts around this tool are that it should include:

13.5.1. sector led support;

13.5.2. external input – e.g. private and other sector challenge; and

13.5.3. help to prepare for Gateway or government reviews.

13.5.4. The timing of the tool's use needs to be appropriate for the CA in question. This tool will be developed over the coming year.

13.6. **Bespoke support to CAs** – a range of financial, communication and in-kind support has been provided to existing and prospective CAs. The Principal Policy Adviser and Senior Adviser have recently met with the majority of the Mayoral CA Chief Executives to discuss their ongoing support needs and to understand the issues faced in year one. Examples of this include:

13.6.1. policy support;

13.6.2. preparing for a Mayoral Election;

13.6.3. implementation of communication recommendations; and

13.6.4. leadership support.

**Support to elected CA mayors**

14. As of the 3 May 2018, there are now seven elected mayors across the following areas: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, the Sheffield City Region, the Tees Valley, the West of England and the West Midlands.

15. Following on from the 2017 elections the LGA offered support and a 'home' for the new directly elected mayors. This included developing a package of support for mayors both as individuals and as a collective. As Chairs of their CA, it was agreed Mayors would automatically become members of the LGA.

16. During the first year, the LGA took steps to engage with the new mayors and the Mayoral CAs this has been replicated for the 2018 Mayoral election including;

- 16.1. Telephone calls to CA Mayors by Group Leaders during the weekend following the elections.
- 16.2. A letter sent from the Chairman to CA Mayors congratulating them on their election, welcoming them to the LGA, outlining our support offer and highlighting the programme of key mayoral events.
- 16.3. Meetings between LGA representatives and selected CA mayors.

## **17. Mayoral Support**

**17.1. Support to coordinate joint Mayors and CA work:** In parallel to the support provided to CAs through the Chief Executive Network, we have established a Mayoral forum. The Mayors have currently met twice in this format. The first event was hosted in partnership with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum in London. This event brought the new mayors together for the first time and introduced the Mayors to the LGA support offer. The second forum was hosted in partnership with the University of Birmingham and the WMCA. This event was attended by seven government departments. Future mayoral forums will involve relevant Ministers as well as senior officials and will be focused on one or two key topics.

**17.2. Bespoke political support:** available through the LGA group offices.

**17.3. Leadership development and top team support:** the transition to a Mayoral CA has required new ways of working for mayors, council leaders, frontline councillors and partners. The LGA is working with combined authorities and LGA Principal Advisers on support in this area for some CAs. LCR are working with the LGA on a leadership support offer which involves a member conference for all councillors within the CA area. We hope to share the principles and learning of this approach with other CAs.

**18. Members are asked to note the support provided to combined authorities and the engagement with elected mayors and to consider whether the LGA's devolution support offer to established and aspiring Combined Authorities meets their needs for the coming year.**