

## **Unified Urban Leadership – Scoping Document**

### **Context**

1. Brexit continues to consume an overwhelming proportion of the political and administrative capacity of Government and Whitehall. The pace of devolution has slowed, with no new devolution deals agreed since the Autumn Budget in November 2017.
2. Urban areas and their representatives, while individually possessing significant policy expertise and political capital have, since the last general election, struggled to craft a unified voice that gains traction at the national level, particularly with ministers in key departments such as HM Treasury, MHCLG and BEIS.
3. Within this context the LGA's City Regions Board agreed on 5 October to assemble a coalition of interested and relevant parties to consider and re-articulate those distinct concerns and opportunities that unite urban authorities to a national audience.
4. Recognising that the forthcoming Spending Review is likely to present the most significant opportunity to influence government policy in the medium term it was decided that this work should move swiftly in two phases:
  - 4.1. As an initial step, a piece of work that aims to agree joint lobbying lines arising from the overlap of existing policy positions of relevant authorities and representative bodies, with a view to producing an agreed position statement by the end of January 2019.
  - 4.2. Building on this, a more detailed report, underpinned by proactive public affairs activity that seeks to influence the forthcoming Spending Review, which is expected in April 2019.
5. This paper presents headline elements of this project with a view to supporting an initial scoping discussion with key partners and then quickly moving to engage a wider group of stakeholders to advance a unified urban leadership agenda.

### **Membership and Format**

6. The Local Government Association is the national, cross-party body representing all councils, both urban and rural. Recognising this, and in line with the focus of this project, it is proposed that both policy priorities and direction should be determined by those representing urban areas.
7. In the first instance it is proposed that the political group leaders from the LGA's City Regions Board and a representative member from three organisations, Core Cities, Key Cities and London Councils form a steering group to provide overall strategic direction for this work.

8. Recognising the limited availability of members and the tight timescales involved, it is recommended that day-to-day development of this work be undertaken by senior officers from each of the relevant organisations as a working group. It is proposed that the steering group be chaired by Sir Richard Leese, as Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board and the working group be chaired by an officer of the LGA.
9. The LGA is able to provide policy analysis, logistical support to facilitate joint working between members and political oversight through the City Regions Board. It may also be possible to secure external technical expertise to support the further development of joint policy, such as econometric analysis to underpin any financial proposals.
10. It proposed that the working group meets monthly to facilitate the development of the first phase of work, with light touch progress updates provided to the steering group for discussion via teleconference.
11. This approach can reviewed before the second phase begins. It is proposed that LGA officers provide both secretariat support and 'hold the pen' in the production of any policy or lobbying material.

### **Proposed Focus**

12. Given the large swathe of relevant policy issues that might be pursued, the restricted timescales and the desire to secure a unified urban voice it recommended that this project seeks to identify two or three big issues with which to seek swift agreement on.
13. The Work Programme of the City Regions Board presents three immediate suggestions: the further devolution of skills and employment support; fiscal devolution; and, the ability of urban leaders to hold national government and its agencies to account for their public service and investment decisions.
14. Steering group members will have existing priorities in relation to devolution, inclusive growth and urban leadership and it is proposed that the first meeting of the working group agrees the priority issues for focus.

### **Next Steps**

15. Once a core policy script has been agreed, it is proposed that the additional individuals and organisations are brought in to support the campaign, recognising those urban areas outside the membership of the organisations highlighted above, including councils in Wales and the distinct institutional leadership of the Greater London Authority and the eight Mayoral Combined Authorities.