City Regions Board – report from Sir Richard Leese CBE (Chair)

**Urban Leadership**

1. At its first meeting in October the City Regions Board agreed to assemble a coalition of interested and relevant parties to consider and re-articulate to a national audience the distinct concerns and opportunities that unite urban authorities – Core Cities, Key Cities, London Councils and SIGOMA (Special Interest Group of Metropolitan Authorities).
2. At Board meeting in November members agreed: there is interest in developing a joint platform to consider a broad sweep of urban policy issues on a long term basis; there is value in constructing a common evidence base for urban areas distinct from rural areas; work to advance the case for fiscal devolution should be prioritised in the short term.
3. Work to develop a campaign narrative and supporting evidence base is now underway and will be considered at the Board meeting in January.

**Industrial Strategy**

1. Stephen Jones, Director of the Cities and Local Growth Unit, MHCLG, attended the last Board on 18 June 2018. Stephen updated Members on progress with the design and implementation of key place-based policies announced in the Industrial Strategy, including Local Industrial Strategies and the LEP Review.
2. Members may recall the LGA hosted a roundtable event with the LEP Network on 15 March, attended by representatives of the People and Places, City Regions, and Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport (EEHT) Boards as well as LEP Chairs. Following on from this event, the LEP Network and the LGA wrote to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, setting out our joint offer to work with him and his Department on securing an ambitious Industrial Strategy that works for the whole country.
3. Subsequently, in the light of the limited information that has emerged regarding the process and principles underpinning key elements of the Industrial Strategy we have written again to the Secretary of State requesting further clarity regarding the geographic extent, scope and timings of local industrial strategies, as well as requesting a meeting before Parliamentary recess.

**Skills and Employment – Work Local**

1. Last year the City Regions and People and Places Boards agreed to establish an ‘LGA skills taskforce’. It was set up in recognition that employment and skills remain key priorities for the LGA and our members, and that our Work Local objectives are just as relevant now as they were when launched in July 2017 but more should be done to get it on the radar of opinion formers and decision makers. Co-chaired by Cllrs Sir Richard Leese CBE and Mark Hawthorne, the Taskforce agreed a work plan in October and agreed to focus its work on establishing and / or deepening relationships with stakeholders, industry and sector representatives on key issues identified in Work Local by convening three themed roundtables.
2. The first roundtable, *Local coordination of a fragmented employment and skills system*, took place in December. It was well attended with stakeholders including Association of Colleges, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, LEPs, NHS Employers and Universities UK. This was the first time we had brought together so many different organisations. All attendees felt improvements need to be made to the way in which job search and skills interventions are designed and managed, that there is more than unites than divides us, and that we should explore efforts to coordinate activity around the Spending Review. An LGA Skills Taskforce [webpage](https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/employment-and-skills/work-local/lga-skills-taskforce) is now live and includes a summary of discussions.
3. The LGA hosted a skills conference **i**n November 2018[Skills, employment and inclusive growth: Can we deliver the skills our local economies need?](https://www.local.gov.uk/skills-employment-and-inclusive-growth-can-we-deliver-skills-our-local-economies-need-27-november) The event was well attended with extremely positive feedback. The sessions ranged from post 16 pathways to supporting age-friendly employment with keynote address by Dr Emran Mian OBE, Acting Director General of Higher and Further Education, Department for Education. We are now planning to host a series of events to explore some of the specific topics.
4. Following on from positive discussions in the summer with the Rt Hon Anne Milton MP, Skills and Apprenticeships Minister, we are also continuing to pursue a strategic DfE/LGA political and operational partnership on post 16 skills to benefit both devolved and non-devolved areas. This is in progress with Whitehall officials.

**Trade and investment**

1. As Britain prepares to leave the EU, we have continued to work in partnership with the People and Places Board to inform the LGA’s policy work on trade and international investment.
2. To inform this activity, a survey of the LGA’s membership was undertaken at the end of last year to highlight the depth and diversity of trade and other international links established between councils and global partners, with a view to strengthening the role of sub-national government in future trade and investment activity.
3. In January, the Board will seek to use the growing evidence base emerging from its work on trade and investment to establish a set of principles to help respond to national developments in the short term and to guide our work over the coming year. This will include including furthering our engagement with the Department for International Trade and building on the recommendation of the International Trade Committee that local government should have a voice in all aspects of the trade policy process and that the Government should set out how it plans to facilitate this.

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