

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

1. The City Regions Board had a successful inaugural meeting on April 7, featuring a lively discussion with the Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Minister of State for Cities and Constitution. The Minister spoke about the increasing consensus around returning powers to cities but acknowledged that government policies have been slow to reflect that. He urged members to continue to evidence the case that every place is different, with its own history, challenges and opportunities and demonstrating why Whitehall's default approach of imposing national solutions will not work; instead local solutions tailored to local circumstances are needed.
2. The Board agreed to sponsor the City Growth Commission, which is examining how a fundamental devolutionary shift from the centre to cities could help drive growth in the UK. The Commission is chaired by Jim O'Neill, the retiring Chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management, and features a number of significant voices from the business community as well as experts on local government and economic growth among its Commissioners. The Commission will be releasing reports on skills and infrastructure over the summer, with its final set of recommendations due to be launched at the end of October.
3. The Board also agreed an ambitious work programme focused on three key themes: devolution and public service reform; skills, employment and welfare reform; and trade and investment policy. Over the next year, the City Regions Board will have an important role to play in championing the case for devolution by forming a clear evidence base which demonstrates that the social and economic issues facing English city regions now and in the future can only be effectively tackled by devolving funding and powers, ultimately resulting in both national and local prosperity.
4. To develop our work on employment, skills and welfare, the LGA has commissioned the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion to deliver a series of research reports. These will explore whether the current national employment and skills system can deliver for a growing economy with has increasingly diverse sub regional economic and social characteristics. Eleven areas - a mix of cities and counties - have been invited by the chairs of the Cities and People and Places Boards to be involved in the development of this work.

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