

End of Year Board Report

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This report provides an overview of the issues and work the board has overseen during the last year. It sets out key achievements in relation to the priorities for the **City Regions Board** in 2019/20 and looks forward to next year's priorities.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

1. Note the achievements against the board's priorities in 2019/20; and
2. Note the board's proposed priority areas for 2020/21

Action

Officers to take forward actions as appropriate.

Contact officer: Thomas French
Position: Member Services Officer
Phone no: 07584271128
Email: Thomas.french@local.gov.uk

Background and Context

1. The City Regions Board was created to provide a clear voice and resource for urban authorities within the LGA.
2. Members are asked to consider the achievements of the board over the last year against the use of allocated resources and to reflect on whether the board is continuing to meet its original purpose in response to the emerging priorities of urban areas.

Priorities and Achievements

Devolution

3. Following the General Election, the returning Conservative Government included a commitment to publish a Devolution White Paper. The Queen's Speech briefing notes outlined that the White Paper, expected the autumn, will set out the Government's strategy for 'continued local economic growth and increased productivity across the country, including plans for institutions, spending priorities, local economic plans and local growth funding'.
4. Within the context of this renewed focus on devolution and growth funding to non-metropolitan England alongside other commitments to 'level up' the United Kingdom, the Board commissioned a range of research pieces to inform the LGA's influencing of the White Paper and conversations with civil servants about the future of devolution in England. These are detailed below.

'The Devolution Parliament'

5. City Regions Lead Members agreed to support IPPR North in the publication of an independent research report: *Devolving Power to England's Regions, Towns and Cities*. This report highlighted the UK's centralised policy-making arrangements and made the case for an ambitious programme of economic and political devolution to help redress the causes and challenges of regionally imbalanced growth. It was launched in late February and received wide-spread and supportive press coverage.

Urban Cost Pressures

6. Building on previously commissioned research into the particular cost pressures facing urban areas and the scope fiscal devolution might play in meeting these pressures the board undertook further work to produce more quantitative evidence on urban cost pressures, with a view to influencing future funding arrangements for councils.
7. WPI Economics were appointed to carry out this work and following discussions with Members and Senior Officials the decision was taken to focus on housing and homelessness. This project is in the process of completing and the findings will be used to inform the Board's work in relation to the Spending Round and the English Devolution White Paper.

Building more inclusive economies

8. In recent years, the concept of creating more inclusive economies has risen up the local government agenda. Breaking with traditional models of economic development, councils have increasingly begun to explore how local policy levers can create growth that benefits all residents, including those who have historically been cut off from the proceeds of growth.
9. It was in this context, and with oversight of the Board, that officers commissioned IPPR North to conduct a piece of research and engagement with national and local stakeholders on the activities being undertaken by councils to build inclusive economies across local areas. The report will be launched as part of an online webinar on Wednesday 24 June.

Freeports

10. In February 2020, the Government launched a consultation on its proposed freeport policy, inviting stakeholders to provide views on the policy by 20 April 2020. Officers prepared a consultation response in partnership with a range of LGA Boards, including this one, on areas of specific interest to members, particularly its impact on local skills, business support and the wider trade and investment landscape.

Subnational Bodies

11. Building on the LGA's work to support the development of successful local industrial strategies and strengthen England's trade and investment landscape, and with a view to influencing the English Devolution White Paper, a research commission was issued in early February 2020 in order to better understand the functions and future of both established and emerging sub-national bodies. This project will be used to inform the development of the LGA's position regarding future devolution.

Supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals

12. At the 2019 LGA Conference, a motion was passed in support of the SDGs. The motion asked councils to consider how they incorporated SDGs into their planning and with local partners. Following the motion, and with oversight of this Board, officers have worked with the European and Commonwealth LGAs to look at best practice abroad and engage with international institutions, such as UN-Habitat. A piece of work has also been from UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD) to explore the role of councils in delivering the SDGs.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund

13. The Board works jointly with the People and Places Board in further developing the LGA's position on the domestic replacement for EU funding – the UKSPF. This is in advance of the consultation we expect to be announced at the Comprehensive Spending Review. To enhance the LGA's agreed lines, the Boards have put forward the position for the UKSPF to be led by councils and combined authorities that meets the needs of our communities and driven by locally determined outcomes. Members have also

expressed the need for a greater alignment with wider growth funding and the movement towards a single funding pot.

EU Funding

14. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the City Regions Board, in conjunction with People and Places and Resources Boards, have provided intel on how the pandemic has impacted on current European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) programmes relating to economic growth, training and skills. This has shaped the assurance and guidance the Government has provided local areas.
15. The Boards have also provided steers on how the remaining unspent ESIF funds (the Reserve Fund) should be used to support local areas tackle COVID-19 and support economic recovery. £50 million of the European Regional Development Fund Reserve Fund has been secured as a grant for councils to spend on implementing social distancing measures in high streets. The LGA will continue to push for the greater involvement of councils in local decisions relating to remainder of the ESIF Programme and the Reserve Fund to support the economic recovery from COVID-19.

Skills and Employment

16. The Board works jointly with the People and Places Board to steer our employment and skills work through our Work Local proposals for devolved and integrated employment and skills. Last July, following a successful series of LGA Skills Taskforce roundtables which engaged 28 stakeholders and representative bodies on our proposals, we published [Work Local: Making our vision a reality](#). It included a range of stakeholder voices and recommends that Work Local Pathfinders, funded through existing national budgets, should run in each region by 2022 with more to follow in 2024. We launched this at a skills plenary session at last year's LGA annual conference.
17. We also commissioned new [skills gap analysis](#) for England and six local areas from the Learning and Work Institute. It set out that by 2030 skills gap predictions for the LGA by the Learning and Work Institute revealed there would be an oversupply of three million people with low and intermediate qualifications compared to jobs generated, and 2.5 million too few higher skilled workers.
18. Last September, the Boards asked us to enhance our employment and skills work. We have done this in the following ways.
 - 18.1. A more dedicated policy focus on young people's participation in education, employment and training, as well as adult learning.
 - 18.2. Commissioned new analysis on projected low carbon jobs by local authority and by sub-sectors in 2030 and 2050. The analysis by Ecuity, will be launched shortly. In the context of the current COVID-19 crisis, it will be helpful for local and combined authorities to support recovery plans and the need for more influence on skills.

19. Alongside our policy work, we have started to develop improvement support on employment and skills. These include:
- 19.1. An improvement support project on place-based employment and skills commissioning delivered by Shared Intelligence to support eight local / combined authorities' work with partners to address skills and employability challenges and opportunities. Areas involved were Bristol, Essex, Haringey, Nottinghamshire, Reading, South Ribble, Surrey, and West Yorkshire CA. Report findings will be launched in coming weeks. As Covid-19 makes collaboration essential, further improvement support may be suggested to support the sector and partners.
 - 19.2. A case study report by the Learning and Work Institute highlighting the evolving skills and employment role of combined authorities. The learning from this project will be useful to all parts of the sector.
 - 19.3. A councillor's guide to council run adult and community education which includes top tips and case studies from a wide range of councils and combined authorities.
20. As the Government draws up a jobs and skills recovery plan to address the Covid-19 crisis, local government will need to be part of it. Over the coming months, the Boards will play a key role in steering this work. In June we will bring forward reports evidencing the excellent work of the sector pre COVID with a view to publishing them. Boards may want to consider commissioning further activity to continue to promote and support the sector in this space.

Programme of work and priorities

- 21. Within the context of COVID-19 and the forthcoming English devolution white paper the board will pursue a programme of engagement with Government and urban stakeholders to ensure councils in metropolitan England have the powers and resources to lead a successful and sustainable recovery and drive improved outcomes for their communities.
- 22. The Board will continue to take forward the LGA's lobbying work on skills, making the case for the Work Local model and continuing to engage with key stakeholders. The Board may want officers to focus on the role employment and skills will play in the Government's recovery plans.
- 23. The Board will consider the key elements of a vision for sustainable and inclusive growth and recovery in urban areas.
- 24. The Board will seek to ensure national policies, including the UK Shared Prosperity Fund meet the demands of urban authorities.

Next Steps

- 25. Officers to take forward actions as appropriate to draft a work program for the board.