

Note of last City Regions Board meeting

Title: City Regions Board
Date: Tuesday 14 January 2020
Venue: Westminster Room, 8th Floor, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as [Appendix A](#) to this note

Item Decisions and actions

1 Chair's Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

The Chair welcomed members back after the break due to the general election 2019.

The Chair noted the apologies and there were no delectations of interest.

2 Brexit Update

Paul Green gave a verbal update on preparations on Brexit in light of the UK leaving the EU on 31 January 2020 and the transition period that will follow it.

Members made the following comments:

- Now that no deal planning is being stood down, there needs clarity on whether unspent no deal preparation funding given to local government will have to be returned to central government.
- Shared Prosperity Fund seems like it will go straight to the Welsh Government, but to have the biggest impact it should go to Welsh local government.

Paul Green responded:

- We understand that the Government will not request unspent no deal funding to be returned. Colleagues in the Welsh LGA have been bringing up this issue and members will be updated on the process.

Decision

Members noted the verbal update

3 Devolution and Future Priorities

Rebecca Cox introduced the paper, setting out the work to date on refreshing the LGA's devolution position following the 2019 General Election. Rebecca Cox highlighted the impact future governmental budgets will have on devolution arrangements.

Members made the following comments:

- There needs to be more clarity over the relationship between EU processes and what will happen next to structures of local government
- While devolution needs to be a bottom up process, having a central point in national government can help with joining up the different levels of local government and different political groups within the local area. A voice of unity is often what is needed.
- While considering changing from a two-tier structure to a one tier structure, it can see a break down in collaboration of services between different tiers. The feeling of not wanting to put the work in, if it feels like a short-term timeline.
- Councils and regions should not be economically disadvantaged if they do not take up Devolution plans.
- The need for sustainable financial landscapes going forward is very important in any position that LGA is considering taking. Fiscal Devolution is an important foundation in any consultation towards change.
- Investment rules from the treasury need to be updated as new authorities are formed through devolution.

Decision

Members approved the updated programme of activity.

4 Urban Cost Pressures

Philip Clifford updated members on the recently commissioned work to further explore the cost pressures facing urban areas, WPI Economics has been commissioned to support this project.

Phillip Clifford introduced Steve Hughes, Associate from WPI Economics to present to members the latest developments and findings from this work.

Steve Hughes, Associate from WPI Economics gave a presentation setting out current findings of the research, highlighting the cost pressures that were unique to urban areas.

Steve Hughes stated that the recommendation of the project is that housing and homelessness should be the focus of the research using the following criteria:

- Good availability of quality data. There is more publicly available data related to housing and homelessness than there is for looked after children. In addition, housing is a subject area where – in our experience – there is greater potential to identify credible proxy data for economic modelling.
- Political and policy relevance. Housing – for many and varied reasons – has much more prominence in the current political debate than looked after children. That is not to say that the issue of looked after children is not important – it clearly is. But policymakers – on the whole – have a much greater focus on solutions to the housing problems across the UK.
- Clear lines of argument. Linking the qualitative and quantitative research on looked after children would be less straightforward than for the topic of housing and homelessness. In our previous research, the urban cost pressures arising from services related to looked after children were described in abstract ways. Whilst these abstract descriptions did provide a convincing case of heightened urban cost pressures, it is difficult to convert this type of qualitative evidence into quantitative assessments.

Members made the following comments:

- Students, housing and homelessness are a linked concept of cost pressures and should at least be included as a factor.
- Low Standards in the private sector are only adding to costs in housing for local authorities
- Looked after children can see other authorities picking up the costs of authorities who move to different communities.
- Domestic violence and breakdowns in relationship in looked after care can lead to costs for authorities
- There needs to be robust evidence at the end of this research, to ensure it is taken seriously for funding consideration by the sector.
- Affordable housing is a unique cost within urban areas when developers are redeveloping buildings like offices in cities.

Steve Hughes responded:

- Universities are a key stakeholder in any urban discussion of housing and will be researched as part of this project.
- There are clashes between duties of the authorities and national government policy, with tensions at a local level over health.

Decision

Members noted the presentation and agreed the focus and direction for the next phase of the research.

5 Growth Policy Update

Daniel Gardiner updated members on national developments across key areas of growth policy. Daniel Gardiner outlined current LGA work on Urban Cost Pressures and proposed a reframed set of priorities for the Board's work on growth.

Members made the following comments

- Investment in towns should not just a regeneration project, but an ongoing investment in new towns and struggling urban areas. Investment in towns needs to see a similar agreement in Wales as it is in England.
- The government should not be setting up competitive funds for towns and cities. It should be joined up to ensure the economy between these areas grows, rather than a fight between different councils. City Centres and surrounding towns need to have a greater economic understanding of supporting mutual growth in local government.
- Industrial Strategy need to be a part of long-term frameworks, rather than quicker investment proposals to the government.

Decision

Members noted the proposed reframed set of priorities on growth policy.

6 IPPR North Report- Devolving Power to England's Regions, Towns and Cities

Philip Clifford introduced members to the support the LGA has agreed with IPPR North in the publication of an independent research report.

Philip Clifford introduced the board to Luke Raikes from IPPR North.

Luke Raikes from IPPR North introduced the Devolving Power to England's Regions, Towns and Cities report, highlighting the following draft recommendations:

1. Roll out an inclusive devolution process for all of England
2. Devolve fiscal powers in phases, in a fair and sensible way
3. Develop a locally-led regional tier of government
4. Devolve economic powers to city regions and counties
5. Permanently reform central-local relationships with a new constitution

Luke Raikes stated the timeline for the report, with a publication date 14 Feb 2020, with planned further collaboration with the LGA.

Members made the following comments:

- Residents are unclear what part of local government runs which service. While regional areas have different agreements on running services, it does not matter if there is a mayor, council or different authorities, residents will not be clear on who runs what. It is hard for residents to effectively scrutinise services in this case.
- How can authorities hoping to take part in devolution ensure they get the powers they need to run their communities effectively?
- The referendum in the North East of England on Devolution came before any major public consultation happened around greater powers for the north east.
- Comparisons between East German and regions within the UK is not as helpful due to the relative economic placing of the different regions. Taxation within Germany is also changing and using it as a model might not be helpful as time goes on within this process.
- Transport for the North is a good example of achievement driven collaboration
- The withdrawal bill in Parliament has seen Scottish and Welsh governments being concerned about their scope of powers, which will impact the concerns greater within local government. The partnership model is a way forward in developing services as the UK leaves the EU.
- The report highlights real regional inequalities, with transport being an example of where funding and falls short. Even the difference between inner and outer London has inequalities to note.
- The London Finance Commission and the arguments that came out of it with the last two mayors will be a helpful place to start with fiscal devolution on a regional basis.

Luke Raikes Responded:

- Transport is an area most residents understand where powers lie within different councils, but other services this is clearly less clear.
- Process around devolution is not transparent and currently councils are not clear what powers they would receive if they started the devolution process.
- While large areas of constitutional change would need a referendum, areas of the country have seen devolved powers without holding a public vote.
- The recommendations are open for different case studies to highlight regional inequalities.

Decision

Members noted the draft report and presentation.

7 Employment and skills update

Jasbir Jhas introduced the report and sought member comments of the policy work on Employment and skills since the General Election 2019. Members were asked for a steer on lobbying for increased funding for adult skills and new idea to enhance our skills gap work.

Members made the following comments:

- Adult education is important, and it needs to be flexible, informal and fit around other responsibilities learners might have
- Exploring options to identify skills and labour market demand across sectors would be a good idea.

Jasbir Jhas responded:

- The LGA is producing work on adult and community learning
- Officers will progress sector-based skills work

Decision

Members note the report

8 LGA Business Plan

Members noted the LGA Business Plan 2019-22.

9 Note of the Previous Meeting

Members agreed the minutes of the previous meeting.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Sir Richard Leese CBE	Manchester City Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Anita Lower	Newcastle upon Tyne City Council
	Cllr Gillian Ford	Havering London Borough Council
Members	Cllr Robert Alden	Birmingham City Council
	Cllr Joanne Laban	Enfield Council
	Cllr Shaun Davies	Telford and Wrekin Council
	Cllr Martin Gannon	Gateshead Council
	Cllr Debbie Wilcox	Newport City Council
	Cllr Peter John OBE	Southwark Council
	Cllr Danny Thorpe	Royal Borough of Greenwich
	Cllr David Mellen	Nottingham City Council
	Cllr Sean Fielding	Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Shama Tatler	Brent Council
	Cllr Gareth Roberts	Richmond upon Thames London Borough Council
Apologies	Cllr Abi Brown	Stoke-on-Trent City Council
	Cllr Donna Jones JP	Portsmouth City Council
	Cllr Toby Savage	West of England Combined Authority
	Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe	Bradford Metropolitan District Council
	Mayor Joe Anderson OBE	Liverpool City Council
	Mayor Marvin Rees	Bristol City Council
	Cllr Julie Dore	Sheffield City Council
	Cllr Timothy Swift MBE	Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council