

## **Mid-Year Review**

### **Purpose of report**

For direction.

### **Summary**

The report enables members to review the current work programme. It outlines the key issues which are likely to influence the work areas of the City Regions Board in 2021 and provides members with an opportunity to flag up future areas of interest or any additional focus which they would like within the current work programme.

### **Recommendations**

Members to consider:

1. Are members happy with the current work programme, are there any gaps which need to be highlighted?
2. Taking into consideration the work of the board in 2020, what issues would members like greater focus upon in 2021?

### **Actions**

Officers to follow up on any issues raised by members, and to use feedback to shape the future work programme.

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## **Mid-Year Review**

### **Background**

1. 2020 has been a difficult and unpredictable year for the sector. At the outset of the pandemic in March councils took a leadership role in ensuring their communities were supported and safe. Councils continued providing frontline services whilst standing up completely new forms of support, being developed in real time with direction from central government. The sector moved seamlessly onto an emergency footing which for many councils has lasted longer than originally anticipated.
2. Back in March 2020 it had been hoped that if the nation locked down for an extended period, we would be able to ease out and start thinking about what recovery would look like. However, the reality has been the introduction of a tiering system which has meant that different parts of the country have found themselves at different points in the cycle of lockdown. A full focus on recovery is still not yet possible as many councils are in a response phase and will be in this position well into the New Year.

### **Issues**

3. As the new board cycle began in August the City Regions Board set its workplan for the year. The focus for the boards work was to be:
  - Within the context of COVID-19 and the forthcoming English devolution white paper the board will pursue a programme of engagement with Government and stakeholders to ensure councils in urban England have the powers and resources to lead a successful and sustainable recovery and drive improved outcomes for their communities.
  - 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.
  - The Board will seek to ensure the key elements of place-based growth – fiscal devolution, public service reform, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, trade and investment fit with the priorities and ambitions of urban areas.

- Reflecting on feedback from lead members the Board will identify cross cutting policy issues which it would like to work on with other boards in order to help shape LGA lobbying lines e.g. planning, transport, housing, health
4. Based on further discussion with members the following pieces of work have been commissioned to support the broader lobbying work of the board. This compliments the regular programme of work officers are undertaking on the key work areas. Members have been provided updates on this through the various reports officers have brought to the board meetings.

Subject area	Project	Completion
Local Recovery	Urban growth and recovery	March 2021
Jobs and skills	Mapping employment and skills provision	March 2021
Jobs and skills	Unemployment predictions in local areas	February 2021
Local recovery (RSG funded)	Jobs and skills planning – 1) development of 'how to / top tips' to support the sector lead / contribute to local jobs and skills recovery 2) case material on local government's role to support jobs and skills during the Covid-19 crisis and as they plan for recovery	Both March 2021
Local recovery (RSG funded)	Supporting the UK tech sector and digital economy - forecasting advanced digital skills demand at a local authority level	March 2021
Devolution (RSG funded)	Devolution explainers	February 2021
Devolution (RSG funded)	Combined authority governance network support	March 2021
Devolution (RSG funded)	Lessons learned from devolution deals	March 2021
Post 16 (RSG funded)	Supporting youth participation	March 2021
Jobs and Skills (RSG funded)	Councillor Handbook on adult and community education services	Completed 2020
Jobs and Skills (RSG funded)	Evolving employment and skills commissioner role of Combined Authority	Completed 2020
Growth (RSG funded)	Councils Guide to supporting exports	April 2021

5. This is an opportunity for members to review the direction of travel for the board and to indicate whether there are any gaps which they would like to flag up. **Are members**

**happy with the current work programme, are there any gaps which need to be highlighted?**

**Moving forward – 2021**

6. Early 2021 will continue to be dominated by COVID19 and the progression in and out of the tiering system. The rollout of the vaccine programme brings hope that in 2021 there will be some sort of resolution to the pandemic. However, there is no real timescale to predict when this will be, and the focus of councils will continue to remain on the management of the pandemic.
7. 2021 will immediately reveal the impact of EU exit. There will be a differential impact from this across the country with port authorities potentially facing additional burdens. We await the outcome of the trade talks and are emphasising that new LG responsibilities must be seen in the context of all the winter pressures on councils. The early part of the new year brings potential capacity issues for local government as EU transition plans will be in addition to the work to support communities against the virus. The confluence of issues needs attention, especially the capacity of public services in port towns.
8. March will see the Chancellor presenting the budget. The furlough scheme will be coming to an end and it will provide a clear opportunity to understand what the long-term unemployment situation looks like. The skills landscape will need to change significantly, and we will need investment in long term job creation. It is anticipated that the Chancellor will at this point provide some further indication around the government's approach to the long-term economic recovery of the nation. A Higher Education White Paper has also been suggested which will provide further opportunity to address skills issues.
9. By this point we should have further detail about how both the Levelling Up Fund and the UKSPF pilots will be operating. There could also potentially be further detail around the industrial strategy and post May we anticipate the Economic Recovery and Devolution White Paper being published. This will all be taking place whilst the government plans for the UN Climate Change Conference – COP26, in Glasgow on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2021.
10. The board is asked to take this opportunity to consider the issues it will be facing in 2021 and to flag up any gaps there may be. Moving forward members may want to indicate to officers any key areas of work they would like additional focus on. This could potentially be around:
  - Economic recovery and accessing funding
  - UN Sustainable Development Goals and COP26
  - What is the urban vision of the future?

**Taking into consideration the work of the board in 2020, what issues would members like greater focus upon in 2021?**

**Implications for Wales**

11. Officers from the LGA are in regular contact with the WLGA on shared policy areas. We will continue to consult WLGA colleagues on issues which haven't been devolved to the Welsh Assembly.

**Financial Implications**

12. There are currently no direct financial implications of this report.

**Next steps**

13. Officers will factor in any comments from members into the future development of the board's work programme.