

## **City Regions Board- Report from Sir Richard Leese CBE (Chair)**

### **Devolution**

1. Work has continued on the Devolution APPG Inquiry, with Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe, Vice Chair of the City Regions Board sitting on the APPG Inquiry Panel. The Inquiry's report, looking at how central and local government can work more effectively together, and how reforming Whitehall could strengthen devolution and improve outcomes for communities, was published on 9 March. The report finds that a strong economic recovery, levelling-up, and improved health outcomes will be held back without greater devolution, and recommends that the Government should move towards a localist settlement that allows councils to drive green and inclusive growth, increase fiscal decentralisation, including new tax setting powers for local government, give councils the power to lead on designing and delivering employment and skills offers, and ensure that the reform of ICSs offers genuine health devolution and commissioning powers for local authorities.
2. The report looks ahead to the anticipated Local Economic Recovery and Devolution White Paper, arguing that it should include a clear statement of purpose for the Government's devolution policy, and that powers may be devolved to local government without having to go through structural change. The White Paper should include a National Devolution Baseline for England, and central and local government should collaborate on this to draw up a list of new powers available to every council without the need to negotiate a devolution deal.

### **Urban Issues**

3. In the autumn, the board agreed to commission new work to set out a vision for urban growth and recovery. This work is ongoing, with the final report expected to look at the economic impact of Covid-19, the ways in which inequalities have increased in urban areas during the Covid-19 crisis, the current and future challenges and opportunities for urban areas, what will constitute a successful urban recovery and how this can be reached. This is due to be published in late spring.

### **Employment and Skills**

4. Following on from [analysis](#) commissioned by this Board and the People and Places Board on low carbon job creation by local authority by 2030 and 2050, the LGA gave oral evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee.
5. We continue to use First magazine to focus on the need for local solutions to support young people in education employment and training. This includes an article on how [Kickstart](#) can work to best effect locally plus additional article which on learning from [Derbyshire's 'I-Step re-engagement programme](#) and [Hampshire's employment and skills hub](#).

6. Last year we submitted evidence to the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee: Employment and COVID-19: time for a new deal. It recommended that Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions devolve more programmes and resources to local areas, employers and directly to education and training providers. Earlier this month the Government's published its [response](#) setting out what steps it has taken on jobs in response to the pandemic, and responded to the Committee's recommendations.

### **EU Funding/UKSPF**

7. Through the Growth Programme Board and the Performance and Dispute Resolution National Sub Committee, the LGA continued the work in shaping the Reserve Fund (the remaining ERDF and ESF programme) to support recovery. Having previously raised concerns about DWP not fully utilising the ESF programme before we leave the ESIF programme, there is evidence of significant improvements in the ESF appraisal process which will means it is more likely that the total of the fund will be spent when we leave the programme in 2023.
8. The Government has launched the prospectus for the [UK Community Renewal Fund](#), the pilot programme to inform the design of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. County Councils and Mayoral Combined Authorities will act as the Lead Authorities for the fund, which is a first step to making the domestic replacement for the ESIF programme to be a placed based fund, driven by locally democratic leaders. The Government has committed to work with the LGA EU Exit Taskforce to help inform the design of the UKSPF.

### **Higher Education Funding**

9. The LGA is researching higher education funding within the context of levelling up. The final report will outline the characteristics of local areas that receive higher levels of government funded higher education spend compared with areas that receive relatively lower levels of funding and draw implications from these links. Through these implications, the report will suggest how higher education funding can contribute to place-based growth and the Government's 'levelling-up' agenda.

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