

Devolution and Local Governance Reform Update

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

While there continues to be a degree of uncertainty regarding the timing of the Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper the LGA has continued to keep the issue in the national spotlight and maintain a watching brief on the related, but distinct, issue of local government reorganisation. This paper provides a brief update following the launch of the Devolution APPG Inquiry into the role of national government in making a success of devolution in England.

Recommendations

Members of the People and Places Board are asked to

- i. **Note** the publication of the Devolution APPG report – **attached at Appendix 1**.
- ii. **Note** the developments in relation to local government reorganisation.

Action

Officers to take forward work subject to the comments of members.

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Background

1. While there continues to be a degree of uncertainty regarding the timing of the Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper the LGA has continued to keep the issue in the national spotlight, maintain a watching brief on the related, but distinct, issue of local government reorganisation and support areas looking to advance local plans for devolution – as described in a separate agenda item.

Issues

Devolution All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Inquiry

2. On 9 March the LGA supported the launch of the Devolution APPG's [inquiry into the role of national government in making a success of devolution in England](#). This inquiry drew on five oral evidence sessions with academics, politicians and experts and written submissions from 24 organisations. It was chaired by Andrew Lewer MP and steered by a panel including Cllr Morris Bright, Vice Chair of the People and Places Board.
3. The report makes several recommendations in the following areas:
 - 3.1 **Covid-19:** The strength and importance of local government has been amply demonstrated in the response to COVID-19. To successfully deliver economic recovery, levelling-up, improved health outcomes and increased resilience, much greater devolution of powers and funding is needed.
 - 3.2 **The White Paper:** The government's deal-based approach linked to the creation of metro mayors played a clear role in kick-starting the process of English devolution, but it has now run its useful course. Given the scale of the economic and social challenges ahead, the need to make swift progress and to recognise that metro mayors are unlikely to be appropriate for every community, the Government needs to widen its approach and consider new models. The forthcoming White Paper should bring forward a new approach.
 - 3.3 **Barriers in Central Government:** There are cultural barriers towards further devolution in Whitehall that must be addressed. Local Government needs to be given the parity of esteem that its huge achievements in responding to COVID-19 deserve.
4. For reference, a copy of the final report is attached at **Appendix 1**. At the time of writing this report the publication has received good media coverage and has been well received by senior figures in national and local government. In the coming weeks the Devolution APPG will meet to discuss how best to take forward the proposals contained in this report, Board members are welcome to attend and share their priorities.

Local Government Reorganisation

5. We continue to keep an eye on the issue of local government reorganisation. [The open consultation on proposals for locally led reorganisation of local government in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset launched on 22 February and is set to close on 19 April.](#) There are four proposals for Cumbria, two proposals for North Yorkshire and two proposals for Somerset. LGA regional teams are working with local areas to provide support and advice where appropriate and LGA policy colleagues are continuing to work with MHCLG and others to identify any relevant policy issues e.g. the timing of elections.
6. With a view to anticipating any future demand in this area, we are also currently in the process of commissioning a “Plain English Guide to Local Government Reorganisation”. This will set out how reorganisation works in practice, advise on how to get the best local outcomes from this process and explore what the implications are for both existing local authorities and residents. It will aim to support areas that have determined to explore the process of reorganisation locally and will not seek to make the case for any particular form of local governance.

Next steps

7. Members of the People and Places Board are asked to:
 - 7.1 **Note** the publication of the Devolution APPG report.
 - 7.2 **Note** the developments in relation to local government reorganisation.

Implications for Wales

8. The LGA has worked closely with the Welsh Local Government Association and the associations of the other devolved administrations throughout the coronavirus pandemic and will continue to do so through the process of recovery. Councils in Wales are on a different devolution journey to those in England.

Financial Implications

9. Project costs related to the commissioning of any external support will be met from the board’s policy budget.