

Equalities Update

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This report outlines how the Board will be addressing equalities issues in its policy work. It also provides members with potential future policy areas within which officers see potential to broaden the focus on equalities. Members are asked to provide a steer on the areas outlined in the report.

Recommendations

Members are asked to agree the policy areas outlined in section 8 of the report which will provide further potential for addressing the equalities brief.

Actions

- i. Officers will continue to review the impact on equalities across their policy briefs, providing particular focus to the work areas in section 8 of the report.
- ii. Officers will update the Board on any new policy areas which will address equalities issues.

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Equalities Update

Background

1. The Executive Advisory Board have asked each Board to identify a member to be an Equalities Advocate. The aim of this is to raise the profile of any equalities issues within the Board's workstream, to contribute to the cross-cutting work around equalities, and to report into the Executive Advisory Board on equality issues relating to their Board. Cllr Abi Brown is the City Regions Board Equalities Advocate.
2. Members of the Board have encouraged officers to provide further focus on equalities issues which meet with the Boards remit. This report outlines the equalities issues the Board is currently looking at through its work and potential future work areas which may provide additional opportunities for consideration.

Context

3. The purpose of the City Regions Board is to represent the interests of urban areas, including those which are part of Combined Authorities or seeking devolution deals. Its remit includes devolution, economic growth, skills and employment support and wider public service reform
4. The Board deals with a range of cross cutting issues which do not necessarily have a direct read across to the protected characteristics as outlined in the Equality Act 2010 in particular, the Board does not deal with the delivery of any particular service or the discharge of any specific local authority duty. However, the work of the Board addresses policy areas which have a direct impact on equality of opportunity and the life chances of individuals i.e. job opportunities and regional growth. It also plays a key role in shaping and advancing the LGA's policy on devolution which seeks to better connect decision making with local priorities and give local communities a stronger voice on the national stage.
5. In light of the Covid pandemic one of the major strategic focuses of the Board will be the economic recovery of city regions. The way recovery is delivered will have direct impact on issues of equalities, which the Board will need to consider. These issues will vary across different regions.
6. Members of the Board represent councils which are generally familiar with the equalities agenda and have already developed their own action plans.

City Regions Board activity

7. Officers are currently working on the following projects, with implications for EDI:

7.1. A Vision for Urban Growth and Recovery

7.1.1 Externally commissioned project which considers the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on urban areas and develops a vision for urban growth and recovery.

7.1.2 The report will include sections on:

- (i) the economic impact of Covid-19,
- (ii) the ways in which inequalities have increased during the Covid-19 crisis,
- (iii) the current and future challenges and opportunities for urban areas,
- (iv) what the objectives should be for an urban vision for recovery,
- (v) how to bring these objectives together into asks to central government.

7.1.3 Board members have made a number of suggestions about this work, such as the exacerbation of the digital divide as a result of Covid-19, the impact of homeworking both as an equalities issue and as policy issue affecting home design, transport and business decisions in future, the impact of Covid-19 on those with different protected characteristics, and what the best way will be to determine a successful recovery for urban areas.

7.2. Councils' Guide to Supporting Exports

7.2.1 Trade in UK goods and services will continue to play an important part in the Government's ambitions to increase national growth and prosperity as part of its 'levelling up' agenda. Building on previously published guides for councils looking to attract foreign capital investment and drawing on lessons learned from established and emerging sub-national bodies, we have commissioned Value Adage to produce a guide to outline best practice, advice and assistance to councils looking to support local businesses to increase their exports.

7.2.2 Recognising both the gaps in national service provision and the role councils have played in leveraging the knowledge and relationships held by their diverse communities this work will include a focus on diaspora communities and the potential trading they can providing in connecting domestic links and global markets.

7.3. EU and associated match funding

7.3.1 To support our UKSPF and wider growth policy work, we have commissioned work to explore the extent of match funding of the current European Structural

and Investment Funds (ESIF) programme, that will soon be replaced with UKSPF. The intention of the project is to help understand funding sources that have supported ESIF programmes. This will in turn enable local areas to strategically plan how UKSPF and wider growth funding can help create inclusive growth and tackle inequalities, as well as meet the Government's levelling up agenda.

7.4. Employment and Skills projects

7.4.1 *Jobs and skills recovery:* To help facilitate knowledge transfer across the sector, we will deliver two online resources by the end of March. The first is a 'top tips' resource focused on five themes critical to jobs and skills recovery, and the second a case study resource capturing the sector's role to support jobs and skills during the Covid-19 crisis and as they plan for recovery. As the economy begins to open up, those already at a disadvantage will likely find it harder to enter, sustain and progress in work. We envisage some of the project outputs will have read across to what local government can do to help people access the labour market.

7.4.2 *Education to Employment – Supporting Youth Participation:* York Consulting have been commissioned to deliver an action learning project with eleven areas (councils/combined authorities). The project aims to develop a better understanding of the barriers/challenges councils face in fulfilling their statutory duties for young people, for instance, in relation to those not in education, employment or training (NEET) and to explore potential solutions. The final report will include:

- (i) the barriers faced by young people and specific groups, for instance, those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- (ii) evidence and insights from local authorities, including barriers faced in providing support to diverse cohorts
- (iii) Innovative solutions to delivering effective support to different groups
- (iv) a selection of case studies showcasing a range of diverse innovative approaches planned/undertaken by authorities

7.4.3 The current COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated existing challenges for many disadvantaged groups and the report will examine how these could be addressed.

Potential work areas for future consideration

8. The following policy issues may provide further opportunity to develop our work on this agenda:

- 8.1. The Devolution and Recovery White Paper due for publication within the next 12 months.
- 8.2. Exploring how the Skills for Jobs Further Education White Paper will support a more placed based approach to jobs and skills, including more targeted support to people and places.
- 8.3. The Government's broader 'Levelling Up' agenda and its interaction with tackling persistent inequalities in urban areas.

Implications for Wales

9. Officers are regularly working with the Welsh LGA to share best practise across equalities issues.

Financial Implications

10. There are no additional financial implications of any of the work outlined above.

Next steps

11. Members to provide feedback about equalities issues which they think need further focus through the Boards policy work.